

TRUTH AND STRENGTH IN VULNERABILITY:
USING TOPOANALYSIS TO REVEAL THE NEED FOR EXPANDING
THE MODERNIST LITERARY CANON

by

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ABSTRACT

Truth and Strength in Vulnerability: Using Topoanalysis
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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the public role of women shifted dramatically. Women asserted themselves in politics, education, and work in a way foreign to their Victorian predecessors. Although these “New Women” altered the gender landscape and set in motion a new path for women that would continue even into the twenty-first century, their writing still goes largely unnoticed in the current study of the Modernist literary canon. This project makes a case for expanding the current Modernist literary canon to include more of these women, especially women of disenfranchised racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic groups. Writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Winifred Sanford, Jovita González, Sui Sin Far, E. Pauline Johnson, and Ada DeBlanc Simond add perspectives that reveal a more accurate depiction than their middle-class, Anglo, male contemporaries of what life was like for women and minority groups at the turn of the twentieth century. Using Gaston Bachelard’s concept of topoanalysis— “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives”—this project analyzes one of the most intimate spaces in our lives—the bedroom—to see how Modernist women writers used the space to reflect the anxieties, oppression, redemption, and

hope their characters' experienced in their ever-changing world. This project uses the analysis of vulnerable spaces to illustrate the benefit expanding the current Modernist literary canon can have to twenty-first-century scholars; taking disenfranchised writers from their specialized anthologies and teaching them to scholars in general literature courses will broaden the literary landscape, showing a more collective voice that better represents the diversity indicative of North America at the turn of the twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, it might not seem like a momentous event that Mina Harker remains alive at the end, given that most of the men also live to see Count Dracula's demise, but when comparing Mina's fate to that of the other women in the story, her survival is singular. In fact, Mina Harker is a singular character. Mina's friend, Lucy Westenra, succumbs to the vampire's nefarious deed, turning into a vampire and receiving a second death at the hands of the men who loved her. The so-called "Brides of Dracula" die a painful death alongside their master in the final chapters. Even the Transylvanian villager becomes a meal for the wolves when she confronts the Count demanding he return her stolen baby. But Mina is more than just a survivor. Where Lucy dies, Mina fights the effects of the vampire's bite; where the Brides succumb to the vampire's will, Mina resists the psychic pull; where the villager begs for her baby, Mina hunts the vampire that turned her world upside down. Mina is clever, aiding the men in planning the destruction of the Count. Mina is courageous, willing to risk herself by using her psychic connection to Dracula to guide the men in their pursuit of the vampire. Mina is tenacious, capitalizing on her unique connection to the Count to make herself indispensable in the hunt. Although Dr. Van Helsing and the other men repeatedly insist that she stay safe, hidden away while they brave the danger, Mina shows herself to be a woman of the new century, conducting herself with aplomb, knowing when to assert her involvement and when to allow the men to take the lead (Stoker 7-281). Mina Harker lives because she is a new sort of woman, a woman of the twentieth century.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a dramatic shift in how women performed the feminine role in society. Their predecessors in the Victorian era identified their femininity through their roles as respectable wives and mothers, and they judged themselves and

each other by their domestic success. However, the turn of the century ushered in the “New Woman,” unafraid to challenge the gender norms of the previous generation. These “suffragist[s], Progressive reformer[s] ... college girl[s] ... [and] working-class militant[s] ... assert[ed] a new public presence through work, education, entertainment, and politics,” redefining femininity and shaping a new path for women that “negotiate[d] new social roles ... promot[ing] ideas of equality and freedom that would later become mainstream” (Rabinovitch-Fox). Unfortunately, the common literary canon taught from this period does not adequately reflect these changes.

If “women ‘are the supreme realists of the race,’” as H.L. Mencken, editor of *The American Mercury* stated, then it would be a logical assumption that women writers would be a prominent fixture in North American fiction throughout history (qtd. in Sanford 174). However, with few exceptions, the bulk of women’s writing from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continues to go unnoticed, tucked away in boxes in archives or lying dusty on the back bookshelf. While there has been an increased interest in works written by African-American and women authors, primarily since the Civil Rights and Second Wave Feminist Movements, white male writers still dominate the reading lists in North American public schools and undergraduate classrooms. Between 1890-1945 white men made up less than half of the total population (Lerner 9). However, today’s high school Required Reading lists still consist mainly of books by white male authors—out of the top 577 required texts on Goodreads.com, merely 25% of those works are written by female authors, and many of those writers published their works after WWII, after the end of the Modernist period (“Required Reading”). Zora Neale Hurston, Kate Chopin, and Virginia Woolf’s novels represent Modernist women writers in North American classrooms; however, many of their contemporaries used short fiction formats—short stories,

folktales, poetry, etc.—for most of their writing. Because of the limited exposure to female Modernist works and the focus on novels over short fiction, much of Modernist women’s writing remains in obscurity. And however sympathetic white male writers of the time were to problems affecting disenfranchised populations, their point of view cannot adequately provide nuanced responses to issues such as women’s health, racial autonomy, and immigration. Even Bram Stoker’s novel suffers rampant gender issues and inequality. Twenty-first-century scholars need a more diverse canon that better represents the variety of literature and varied identity of the time. To reduce the limitations of the current canon, we must bring these Modernist works out of obscurity and view disenfranchised experiences through the women’s own pens.

Even though the “New Woman” shifted the public performance, North American women continued dominating the private, domestic sphere. Although female Modernist writers explored settings such as beaches, oil fields, and public markets in their works, it stands to reason that they continued placing the setting in homes because of the author’s intimate knowledge and familiarity with the space. Intimacy and vulnerability entice writers to reveal raw, honest thoughts and feelings, and theorists like Gaston Bachelard recognize the unique perspectives that reveal themselves in intimate spaces. In *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, Bachelard claims that “our house is our corner of the world” (4). These houses are not always the geometric structures the word typically conjures in the mind, but they are, nevertheless, spaces of intimate solitude. Bachelard’s book explores topoanalysis—“the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (8). Houses provide protection, secrecy, concealment, and security to give free reign to imagination and daydreaming (6). These fortresses’ solitude secure imagination and free the writer, and the reader, to face the frightening past and intense violence associated with the outside world (38-73). These intimate spaces

become a fortress within which the writer can scrutinize their world, the security of their space encouraging critique of their relationship to the people and spaces around them.

Bachelard describes memories of past houses much in the same way Freud describes the condensation of dreams: time cannot preserve memories in their original duration, so space takes over and allows us to recall those images in close relationship and distorted proximity (Leitch 819; Bachelard 8-9). The memory is not the physical space, though; it is the emotional intimacy we remember, that we value. We hide these emotions away to protect the memory and ensure the value of the object concealed. Closed off spaces, such as wardrobes, drawers, or chests, encompass the history and memory of the inhabitant. Whether they are boxes, nests, shells, corners, miniature, or immense space, ultimately these spaces represent and value solitude (Bachelard 36). These secret spaces conceal and protect the inhabitant, and the more intimate the secret, memory, or history, the deeper we conceal it.

Nests represent the most intimate solitude because, not only do they hide in the leaves and branches, rarely discovered while still inhabited, they are also the only images absurd and inappropriate enough to endow with human characteristics (Bachelard 90-104). They embody something of the identity of their maker because the inhabitant uses its body to form the nest. These tiny homes guard against the outside world, giving the inhabitant pleasure in refuge the same way a human feels pleasure “withdraw[ing] into his corner ...” (91). The nest conceals the inhabitant, but unlike a drawer or a box, the nest allows the being inside to peek out while remaining safely obscured from the hostile outside when investigating the rest of the world. Nests return us to the primitive, to the hidden. They are the secret spaces that are as alive as the beings inhabiting them. Because they are made with the creature’s own body, they become part of that creature.

Unlike a nest, made from gathered materials such as twigs or grass and pressed into form by the inhabitant's body, shells form from secretions from the body, emerging into existence because of the being within. When discussing shells, Charbonneaux-Lassay says, "Taken as a whole, with both its hard covering and its sentient organism, the shell, for the Ancients, was the symbol of the human being in its entirety, body and soul" (qtd. in Bachelard 116). Combine that idea with the image of "a hare, a bird, a stag, or a dog, come out of a shell, ..." that Jurgis Baltrusaitis describes in *Le moyen âge fantastique*, and Bachelard conjures an intimate space from which beings are not always as they seem, and metamorphoses occur to reveal a creature unlike anything imagined before (qtd. in Bachelard 107). These shells protect the inhabitant while it forms, providing not only a place to live but a place to create. When the creature emerges from its shell it can seem abrupt and violent, but that is only because the observer has not witnessed the changes happening inside the shell. The creature makes the shell from itself, but the outside of the shell conceals what lives within until it is ready to emerge.

While the creature grows and changes, the shell gives form to the being inside. The dialectical opposition between outside and inside automatically imbues the inside with a sense of self, a oneness of being with the space. Outside creates boundaries that contain the "unsettled being" inside (Bachelard 214). In physical terms, "outside" is beyond the space the writer is in, such as the kitchen, the parlor, the yard, while "inside" is the space the writer occupies; in physical terms, outside equates with public and inside equates with private. But the metaphysical inside is less geometrically defined. The metaphysical inside space becomes the self, imbued with being. Metaphysically, the space and the being are one in the same (211-31). This interpretation of metaphysical inside versus physical outside creates opportunities for solitude and vulnerability when examining bedrooms. Physically, the room is a fortress, but

metaphysically the fortress is also the being it is meant to guard. The being is no longer vulnerable to the frightening past and intense violence of the outside world because its very existence protects from the outside that threatens. Bachelard shows us we need to investigate our relationship with the space: how we use it, identify with it, affect it, and are affected by it.

Going beyond the space itself to what lies within it, David Trotter's mess-theory in *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* looks at both the good and the bad—but mostly the overlooked good—inherent in mess. Clutter and mess, two things usually synonymous with disorder, even chaos, inhibit the people it surrounds, creating stress, anxiety, and embarrassment. At the very least, mess is “proof enough that reality has a habit of not conforming to our wishes,” rendering us simultaneously “adequately illusioned and adequately disillusioned ...” (Trotter 1-2). Trotter acknowledges the denotative meaning of ‘mess’ as “a dirty or untidy state of affairs,” but also suggests the idea that “mess can both nurture fantasy and destroy it” (1). Unfortunately, in the eyes of others, mess sits as a stain on the character of whoever is around, regardless of who created the mess. In fact, Trotter believes that “Messes tend to be nobody's fault, ... messes just happen” (2). Although messes happen largely by chance, we consistently view those contending with the mess as having a tarnished reputation. Clutter affects us much the same way.

However, there are subtle differences between mess and clutter— “clutter (piles of clothing, books, old envelopes) is the epitome of illusion-sustaining mess” (Trotter 8). Messes in general, but especially clutter, represent chance. Clutter consists of “an ‘unknown gift’, of limitless possibility” while at the same time “the end not only of all possibility, but of all thinking about possibility” (9). Good messes are obviously good to the mess maker, even when others fail to see the goodness (5). Mess obscures the objects in the pile, hiding them from the

view of the undiscerning. The untidiness can hide the value of things, protecting them from the outside world. While messes, especially clutter, appear detrimental to the outside, for the mess-maker they provide the impetus for chance with unhindered possibilities. To see the possibilities, like Trotter, we must push past the initial symbolic meaning of clutter and mess to find deeper social and cultural ramifications.

Sometimes messes hide in the darkness, giving an additional layer of protection from the outside world. There is a certain beauty to be found in darkness—dim lighting enforces a quiet that combats the cacophony asserted by messes while the inherent coolness, whether real or imagined, elicits a peacefulness that bolsters the inhabitants against the outside world. Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's work, *In Praise of Shadows*, challenges the western perception regaling darkness and shadows to symbols of evil and negativity. This Japanese treatise calls for the reader to see the beauty in shadows and darker places, how an object “grows more subtle with the years, acquir[ing] an inexplicable power to calm and sooth” (Tanizaki 6). For Tanizaki, shadow creates atmosphere. Even everyday objects, such as spoons and teakettles, increase in value and character as they take on a unique patina, losing the luster of a high polish (10). Like messes, the darkness invites possibility and imagination that may not be immediately apparent to the undiscerning eye. Indeed, a “polish that comes of being touched over and over again, a sheen produced by the oils that naturally permeate an object over long years of handling ...” imbue the object with history (11). Even Bachelard concedes that “The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep” by rubbing it, infusing it with human warmth (Bachelard 68). Whether by handling or rubbing, repeated use brings life and history to the object. Each smudge records the event that created it, and for Tanizaki, cleaning off the grime, the mess, strips the object of its past and severs it from the humanity left behind.

Shadows have the benefit of revealing life in the layers of lacquered objects. The muted appearance, instead of seeming “garish” in the brightness of electric lighting, becomes “somber, refined, dignified” in the shadowy light of a single candle (Tanizaki 13-14). Embellishments, such as gilding, peek out while undecorated portions retain their depth and mystery that would otherwise be stripped in brighter lighting (22-23). Shadows encourage imagination and mystery by obscuring elements in the darkness—they suggest rather than define (27). Bright lights expose everything, leaving no mystery to discover. Obscuring shadows, like wardrobes or shells, preserve secrets, protecting the value of the hidden part from the intrusive outside. The darkness encourages vulnerability because it protects secrets that brighter light would throw into public awareness. That protection, knowing the secrets are safe, reinforces the security that darkness and shadows provide. Tanizaki felt there was beauty in shadows and darker places; those spaces invoke calm, peaceful contemplation in the security.

Freud notes in his essay, “Uncanny,” that “comprehensive treatises on aesthetics ... in general prefer to concern themselves with what is beautiful, attractive and sublime—that is, with feelings of a positive nature—and with the circumstances and the objects that call them forth ...” (Leitch 825). While Tanizaki’s essay is surely an example of the beautiful, even in what is not normally seen as such, Freud’s “Uncanny” concerns the opposite, “what is frightening ... what arouses dread and horror ...” (825). Daniel Sanders’ definition of the German word *heimlich*—“belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc.”—is a starting point in understanding Freud’s evaluation of its opposite, *unheimlich* (qtd. in Leitch 826). The German word *unheimlich*, or “uncanny,” translates into English as “unhomely.” It is the opposite of the familiar, it is the unnerving, it is the disclosure of that which should have stayed concealed (824-28). In literary works concerning spaces, the *unheimlich* appears when the security of a

vulnerable space is compromised. It could be due to the invasion of people or their objects, the betrayal of someone trusted, conflicting character perceptions of a space, or the introduction of an idea that challenges a character's, or reader's, perception of reality and morality. Anything that unsettles the character, and especially the reader, can fall under the realm of the uncanny.

The uncanny goes beyond merely what is novel or unfamiliar. It is the strange in what should be familiar, the wild in what should be tame, the revealed in what should be intimate, the public in what should be private, the untrustworthy in what should be confidential. However, the *heimlich*—the homely, friendly, familiar—can also be confidential, or secret, when it should be disclosed. In this second sense, the uncanny is both *unheimlich* and *heimlich*—furtive, secretive, distrusting, subversive. It is “behind someone’s back,” it is “look[ing] on with ... pleasure at someone’s discomfiture,” it is “behav[ing]... as though there was something to conceal ...” (Leitch 827). With this second, secretive form of *heimlich*, the attention falls on the negative prefix “*un*” and its added emphasis of “eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear” (827). The uncanniness of a space draws the readers’ attention, casting doubt and uncertainty when things are not as they should be.

The literary uncanny does not always manifest the same as in real life. The storyteller controls the disturbances in the fictional “reality” as well as how intensely the reader experiences the uncanny (Leitch 836-41). The uncanniness of a space varies in degree or severity depending on not only the character’s and/or reader’s perceptions but also on the purpose of the space. The uncanny perverts the reader’s expectation, sometimes concealing what should be made public and other times exposing what should be kept private. The uncanny pulls the proverbial rug out, leaving the reader bereft of security and surety. The uncanny threatens Bachelard’s purpose of intimate spaces, leaving the reader somewhere between unnerved and terrified.

Unlike kitchens, parlors, and yards that compel characters to self-censure behavior “performed” for others—i.e. the public—bedrooms compel characters to expose their true feelings and act within the secrecy this private space provides. By exploring women’s interpretations of everyday lives of oppressed people, especially in physical settings where they’ve lowered their emotional defenses normally erected against the outside world, twenty-first-century scholars can see a more collective voice that better represents the diversity characteristic of North America. Although many of the themes in Modernist women’s short fiction are not dissimilar to themes in works by their male contemporaries, these women, by allowing themselves to be unprotected and exposed in these stories, make it easier for the reader to identify with the characters. Furthermore, relevant class, gender, and race representation makes the pertinence of the themes apparent to the distinctive twenty-first-century readership. Modernist women writers used bedrooms to reveal how disenfranchised people handled the poverty, oppression, racism, and sexism that affected them during a major historical period of change. Even though they do not focus solely and explicitly on this space, the bedrooms in these stories contain specific actions and perform specific functions that not only move the plot but reveal characterization, create the mood, and comment on society and its values.

PART I- PRISONS

Two major thematic approaches to bedroom spaces emerge in Modernist North American women’s writing: bedroom spaces functioning as prisons, or places that restrict and confine, and bedroom spaces functioning as chrysalises, or places that protect and nurture growth and change.

Writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Winifred Sanford, and Jovita González present bedroom spaces functioning as prisons, showcasing protagonists trapped in the spaces by outside forces. In some stories those outside forces manifest as physical people and objects restricting the protagonist's movement, while in other stories those forces manifest as psychological barriers within the protagonist's own mind, making themselves complicit in their own incarceration. The conscious or unconscious decision to present one of the most intimate spaces as a prison speaks to the shifting perception of women's roles in society at the turn of the century, the shifting class identities as events such as the Texas Oil Boom transformed economic status overnight, and the struggle with multiple cultural identities that immigrants and their descendants faced in an Anglo-centric North America. Regardless of how and why the space imprisons the protagonists, the prison bedroom highlights the need for equality, freedom, and autonomy that still resonates with people in the twenty-first century.

ESCAPING THE NEST

The turn of the century saw the emergence of the "New Woman," developing amidst struggles and outside resistance. Women may have dominated the domestic sphere—managing the household, exercising moral guidance through décor and furnishings, overseeing the health and education of the children—but society still viewed them as weaker willed, untrustworthy, ruled by their emotions rather than reason. In her essay, "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma," Jan Jennings explains the connection between home décor, specifically wallpaper design, and gender. According to Jennings, mothers had moral guardianship of the household, "impart[ing] values indirectly by providing home surroundings through which family members could find transcendent meanings; in choosing objects, colors,

and textures, a woman acted out her role as teacher through her tasteful arrangements ...” (243). The home’s aesthetic became synonymous with the woman’s identity and ability to exercise self-control and reason in guiding her family. However, domestic reformers were harsh critics, fretting about the effect the “sensuous character of the material itself, the abundance of design in the marketplace, and the ploys of the salesman” would have on women’s abilities to make sound, respectable choices for their homes (252). Even though they were entrusted with the domestic sphere, the outside world worried that these emotional, weak-willed women were not up to the task of moral guidance.

One short story about the effects wallpaper can have on the home’s inhabitants is “The Yellow Wallpaper,” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Gilman, born in 1860, led an unstable early life due to her father’s abandonment of the family. She married in her early twenties and gave birth to a daughter a year later. Unfortunately, Gilman began suffering bouts of depression that nearly led to a mental breakdown. For the “feminist, author, critic, and theorist,” the treatment for the depression was worse than the illness itself (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* i). In her article, “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper (An Article by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1913),” Gilman explains that, after suffering for about three years, she sought the advice of a noted physician who prescribed bed rest and “the solemn advice to ‘live as domestic a life as far as possible,’ to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,’ and ‘never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again’ as long as [she] lived” (Gilman *Collected Works*). It took very little time for her to shuck off the physician’s advice since it “nearly drove [her] mad” (*Collected Works*). Gilman then created a scandal by moving to California, obtaining a divorce, and leaving her husband behind with sole custody of their young daughter (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* i). Instead of abiding by societal norms, this example of a “New Woman” recognized what was causing her harm—the

expectations of domesticity exasperated by medical advice that restricted the few activities that helped her keep her sanity—and took steps to make her life healthier, regardless of the social consequences. This momentous event in her life also became the impetus for her short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is an epistolary story chronicling the unnamed protagonist’s descent into madness. The narrator and her husband, along with their baby, John’s sister, and Mary—hired to care for the baby—take a house in the country for the summer to facilitate the narrator’s recovery from her “temporary nervous depression” (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 2). John, the narrator’s husband, decides that he and his wife will sleep in the upstairs nursery, despite her protestations about the lurid yellow wallpaper. As the narrator wastes her days and nights lying in bed with little but the hideous paper for company, she secretly chronicles in her diary the activities of the “woman” she believes is trapped behind the wallpaper pattern. As time progresses, the movements of the trapped woman become more frantic, more frenetic, sucking the narrator, and by proxy the reader, into the panicked need to escape (1-28). By projecting her identity and feelings of imprisonment as a woman incarcerated behind the wallpaper, the narrator facilitates her own freedom by aiding the ensnared woman’s escape.

Most of the scholarly writing concerning this story focuses on the representation of mental illness as a platform for discussing women’s health, gender equality, and female agency, regularly citing Gilman’s article, “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper,” as evidence for these analyses. While these essays are not wrong—there is overwhelming evidence for this short story as commentary on gender relations and women’s rights—few, if any, discuss the transformative nature of the space as a resolution to the narrator’s imprisonment and desire for freedom. Fewer use topoanalysis to examine the relationship between the narrator and the space. By considering

this short story as a form of shelter writing, Gilman's nursery transforms from an uncanny prison cell into an intimate, solitary nest, freeing the protagonist from the confines of society.

Bachelard explains that we are a part of our house as it is a part of us (Bachelard 56). This supports Jennings' research that nineteenth and twentieth-century expectations tied a woman's moral identity as wife/mother/woman into the aesthetics of her home. Manufacturers and economists of the time "counseled women to take action: if the wallpaper was 'very bad in color or pattern ... take it off and repaper the walls'" (qtd. in Jennings 247; ellipses in original). By refusing the narrator's request to repaper the nursery with something pleasant, to decorate as she sees appropriate for her and her family's needs, John denies his wife's basic right to "express [her] moral guardianship of [her] family's character through tasteful decoration" (243). The narrator first requests they sleep in the downstairs bedroom "that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window ... but John would not hear of it" (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 3). Because he is a physician, John restricts and regulates the narrator's food and activities to facilitate her recovery; by coupling these restrictions with the dismissal of her moral guardianship, John systematically strips his wife of her identity as a wife, mother, writer, and adult, regaling her to little better than a child imprisoned in the upstairs nursery.

John's restrictions strip the narrator of her agency, but the summerhouse, especially the nursery, becomes an uncanny prison when Gilman's storytelling strip the narrator of her reliability. Readers are vulnerable with stories, relying on the writer to establish a world with clearly-defined parameters within which the story unfolds. However, challenging those parameters once the writer establishes them forces the reader into an uncanny vulnerability. In her essay, "If These Walls Could Talk: Female Agency and Structural Inhabitants in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and the Paintings of Remedios Varo," Beth Brunk-

Chavez begins by asserting that “walls, if they do not actually ‘talk,’ at least come alive to reveal something once hidden ...” (71). Gilman’s narrator recognizes this form of uncanniness—disclosing that which should have remained hidden—when she first arrives at the summerhouse. The protagonist accuses the house of feeling “queer”, going so far as to entertain briefly the idea of it being haunted (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 1, 3). The idea of haunting goes beyond the dead disclosing themselves to the living; it is the inability to grasp the concept of mortality, to know for certain “whether death is the inevitable fate of every living being or whether it is only a regular but yet perhaps avoidable event in life” (Leitch 834). It is the uncertainty in the house that the narrator describes as “queer” and “haunting,” and the narrator’s unease establishes the doubtful mood that strips the reader of confidence in the story’s parameters.

Since the reader adjusts to the universe the author imposes, the uncanny affect comes from disturbing that fictional “reality.” The storyteller can control when and to what severity the reader experiences it (Leitch 839-40). Gilman manipulates this affect by creating a setting that, essentially, is identical to nineteenth-century historical reality. The reader can rule out the supernatural or paranormal as “normal” expected occurrences and can expect characters to act like rational beings. The description of the gardens and the downstairs bedroom with the rose-covered window show the reader that this is, indeed, a normal estate home situated quietly away from town activities (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 2-3). Therefore, it is not difficult for Gilman to unnerve the reader, to create an uncanny effect, by introducing a “strange[ness] about the house” that affects the reader the same as the narrator (3). The reader knows that the narrator is not insane, merely suffering from a “temporary nervous depression,” and that she is not actually sick. Since her physician-husband, John, and her physician-brother both vouch for her sanity, the reader has little choice but to take the narrator at her word. So, when she says it feels “queer,”

that “there is something strange about the house,” the reader must accept that as truth, no matter how much it goes against established parameters (3).

By placing the narrator in a stranger’s home, Gilman increases the force of the uncanny effect. The uncanniness manifests in this situation because the characters perceive the house differently. Since John—who is “practical in the extreme, ... has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and ... scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures”—does not see anything strange, supernatural, or unsafe about the house, it is logical for the reader to assume there is no need to be concerned with the supernatural (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 1). Thus, when the narrator expresses a contrary feeling, doubt stemming from the difference between what the reader *thought* to be true and what *seems* to be true now creates an uncomfortable, unnerving effect until the reader sorts out what *is* true, if that ever happens. Whether it be a side effect of the narrator’s “temporary nervous depression” or a reality of the house, the *unheimlich*, uncanny, feeling sets the narrator at odds with her husband, and the reader’s impression of the “reality,” thus aggravating her “nervous depression” and unnerving the reader. In his essay, Freud describes the uncanny effect arising because we do not *completely* believe that events, such as a severed limb moving on its own or the return of the dead, cannot happen. He continues that when we experience something that seemingly creates doubt in our modern beliefs, that the experience makes familiar something that has been repressed, i.e. our ancient belief in animism, and we will experience the uncanny (Leitch 833-34, 837). John’s pragmatism puts the reader at ease about the house and then the narrator’s concerns cast doubt on that ease, intensifying the uncanny effect.

Gilman creates further doubt, pushing the uncanniness from unease to something closer to fear, by challenging the collective belief that the narrator is, in fact, sane. The reader is

expected to recognize the uncanniness of the house *precisely* because it is the narrator that sees it as such. By using the first-person narrative, Gilman forces the reader to identify and unite with the narrator. The reader must start the story believing in the narrator's credibility—a sanity expressed by the narrator as well as the other characters that know her (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 1-2). However, as she delves deeper into the belief that there is a woman trapped behind the wallpaper pattern, the reader must decide either to believe, too, that such a woman exists or else abandon the idea that the narrator is still sane. The narrator's obsession with the wallpaper seems understandable, given her confined quarters and restricted activity, but her imprisonment in the nursery does not make her obsession logical. Moreover, the reader must start questioning the narrator's sanity when she claims the images move and the trapped woman creeps by day along the roadside (15-16).

By the end, when the narrator embodies the trapped woman, “becoming” her, the reader must feel anxiety, even fear, while tenuously holding to the initial belief that the narrator is sane, even though Gilman presents insurmountable evidence to the contrary (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 19-20). Following Freud's theory of the uncanny, either the narrator is insane, and that information should have stayed undisclosed, there truly is something happening with the wallpaper—i.e. there is a ghost in the room that only the narrator has seen—and now the reader must face the supernatural in a “reality” that does not allow for such, or the reader cannot trust the judgement of characters meant to embody the same pragmatism the reader is meant to follow. Any way the reader interprets the situation, Gilman intensifies the uncanny feeling, mirrored by John's overwhelming fear of what he witnesses, leaving the reader feeling unsure of what the “reality” truly is (20). The bedroom, which should normally be a haven in which

characters can be vulnerable, is nothing more than an uncanny prison cell, forcing the narrator to take drastic measures if she is ever to ensure her freedom.

According to Bachelard, “we know perfectly well that we feel calmer and more confident when in the [our] old home ... than we do in the houses ... where we have only lived as transients” (43). At first, the narrator tries to make the best of the “queer,” possibly “haunted,” house by writing in her diary to keep up her spirits, but the pattern on the nursery room wallpaper, especially the places that look like eyes, permeates her every thought (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 8). In her research into wallpaper, Jennings relates that “In 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). Gilman’s narrator describes a “recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at [her] upside down,” juxtaposing the bulbous eyes to the “kindly wink the knobs of [her] big, old bureau used to have” when she was a child, and the comparison only heightens her agitation (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 6-7). Often the memories of childhood homes are distorted, disjointed, and have a vague sense of unreality, and the wallpaper’s monstrous eyes are not actually the intimate friends she recalls from her memories (Bachelard 58). The unreality makes the childhood furniture’s eyes familiar, intimate, but the reality of the summerhouse turns the same image into something grotesque. Furthermore, since the narrator is transient in this new house, she cannot yet rely on it to protect her the same way her old homes have done in her memories. The masculine wallpaper becomes her warden in John’s absence, watching her every move. Her imagination runs free in the house, but she cannot control the way the two interact, leaving her vulnerable and without protection.

Gilman's narrator does not succumb to her uncanny prison, however; she changes it, using the only things left to her—her imagination and her physical body—to design an escape by transforming it into a nest. It is appropriate that Gilman's setting is in the house's nursery, the "nest" of the house where the children grow into adulthood. It is in this nest that the narrator grows from the "child" her husband creates into the "woman behind the wallpaper" she creates. The pattern conceals the "woman," hiding her from view of all except the most discerning people, like those that can spot a bird's nest hiding in the branches and leaves. The protagonist obsessively watches the pattern, and little by little, day by day, the dim shape of a woman, "stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern" emerges like a hatchling emerging from its egg (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 10). The image frightens the narrator, but only because she sees herself in that woman, although she cannot bring herself to articulate that connection. In the woman, the narrator finds intimate companionship and hope for escape (14). The narrator takes on similar behaviors—creeping secretly by daylight—ultimately uniting with the trapped woman, becoming the same entity (16, 19). By fusing with the "trapped woman," she finds the once-maddening room now pleasant—so pleasant that she does not ever want to leave it again. Although still vulnerable, the narrator is safe in this room now that she is no longer trapped behind the wallpaper pattern. "A tree becomes a nest the moment a great dreamer hides in it," and the narrator is such a dreamer (Bachelard 97). Instead of staying imprisoned, she decides to hide in the space, transforming it into her nest that protects her from the hostile outside.

Gilman's narrator is like Jules Michelet's female bird that Bachelard describes in that she uses her body to form the space into an intimate, solitary haven (Bachelard 100-102). Using only her body, the female bird smooths the rough twigs and bits gathered from the male to blend the individual pieces into a woven nest, creating "a felt-like padding" (101). Michelet goes on to say,

“The house is a bird’s very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort... its suffering” (qtd. in Bachelard 101). In a similar physical movement, Gilman’s narrator takes the rough pattern that plagues her, imposed on her by her husband, and smooths it with her body to make it more comfortable. When alone during the day, the narrator “creeps” along the floor, shoulder pressed firmly against the “smooch” along the wall, blurring the lines and the color of the pattern with the pressure of her body. This softens the image of the “bars” the pattern creates, “felting” it, making it easier to escape (Gilman *Yellow Wallpaper* 19-20). The narrator is now the bird chick, hatched from its egg prison, free to grow in the intimate solitude of the nest. Just as a nursery and a nest are both places to house the unborn and young until they are strong enough to survive on their own, the newly born/newly freed narrator escapes into the safety of her nest where few things can harm her.

In a shifting society, the emergence of the “New Woman” did not negate the belief that “Applying restraint, holding emotions in check, and curbing desire constituted a virtuous life” (Jennings 261). Gilman’s story illustrates the struggle for women’s identity in the turn of the century—women risked madness when they were denied or denied themselves creative outlets and intellectual stimulation, repressed emotions and desires, and restrained themselves and their interests; those that asserted themselves risked being labeled unvirtuous. Although the “New Woman” may have pushed for a new role in the public, she still held her domestic identity at her core. To women like Gilman, those that embraced that domestic core, “women who engaged in domestic housework to make their homes presentable perpetuated their subservient status and, in effect, transformed themselves into ‘house slaves’ ...” (qtd. in Jennings 260). It was not easy navigating the Scylla and Charybdis of gender identity. The sinister, masculine wallpaper of Gilman’s story would have resonated with readers of the time because of the social implications

of domestic design. Women's, societal, and design magazines as well as housekeeping manuals all threw in their writers' ideas of what women should do and how their domestic sphere should look. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was one voice in the conversation, offering a warning about what could happen if restraint, repressed desire, and stunted emotional expression dictated behavior.

The social pressure to conform to a specific home aesthetic and public personae has not changed in the 120-plus years since Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper." Magazines such as *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Men's Health*, and *GQ* tout how to get "beach body ready" or "six-pack abs! in just 6 days," which colors are "in" to decorate with this season, and the "top rated" brands in everything from makeup to countertops for the home makeover. And for the reader that skips paper newsprint and magazines, all these advertisements and articles are available online. Twenty-first-century readers experience the uncanny when scrolling through social media, seeing post after post, selfie after selfie, of the private details of friends' and family's lives—details that should have stayed disclosed. Like Gilman's narrator, twenty-first-century readers feel the pressure to conform their behavior to match the desires of the collective outside culture. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" this collective outside culture manifests as John, altering the narrator's behaviors until she conforms to the social norm. In the twenty-first century, the collective outside culture manifests as friends, family, and industry experts, like John, replete with experience and advice thrown at the reader to ensure health and happiness. However, like John's prescription to ensure the narrator's health and recovery, this well-meaning advice often has the opposite effect. Twenty-first-century readers can identify with the narrator's struggle between doing what is right for her and doing what the collective outside culture thinks is right for her. And like Gilman's narrator, these readers can find that freedom of self when they take back control of their lives.

WILLFUL DOMESTIC SLAVERY

Unlike Gilman, who threw off her doctor's advice and started a new life away from her family, not all women were able to drastically change their circumstances to live a more fulfilling life. Some, like Gilman accused, embraced their domestic role to the point of domestic slavery. In his book, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in the Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*, David Trotter describes what he terms "litter" in the paintings of Turner. This litter occurs in several paintings in the form of tools, such as spades and wheelbarrows, abandoned by the unseen user in some paintings and lying abandoned at the feet of workers in others, cluttering up the image the viewer has of the pastoral scene. In these paintings, "The very implements which make it possible to impose order ... contribute to disorder. They become in their redundancy part of the problem rather than the solution" (Trotter 50). For some women, domestic responsibilities become like the spade and wheelbarrow in Turner's paintings. Domestic responsibilities—cooking, washing and hanging the laundry, sweeping the floors, etc.—become excuses the woman hides behind to avoid living her life outside of the home. While the woman may take pride in her domestic accomplishments, seeing these actions as the embodiment of her womanly identity, they engulf and imprison her when she desires to do something else, but, because she fears that desire, uses domestic chores as an excuse for inaction. In the short story, "Windfall," Winifred M. Sanford reveals just how easy it is to become entrenched in domesticity to the point of imprisonment.

Although born in Duluth, Minnesota in 1890, Winifred M. Sanford moved to North Texas with her husband and infant daughter in 1921 amidst the oil boom, using the boomtowns as key settings and digging for oil as a key activity in her stories. Sanford's writing is unique

because, as Betty Wiesepepe put in in her essay, “The Manuscript Club of Wichita Falls: A Noteworthy Texas Literary Club”:

Sanford’s depictions of life in the early days of the Burkburnett and East Texas oil booms provide rare fictional portraits of Texans at the moment in history when the values of the state’s agrarian society were threatened by the technology of a rapidly developing oil industry. The realistic style of Sanford’s portrayals, based on current events and present-day human dramas, is a departure from the romantic style favored by most Southwestern writers of the period. (645)

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Sanford published 13 short stories in journals such as *The American Mercury* and *Women’s Home Companion*, although, like many works by female writers of the time, they fell into obscurity as the decades progressed. In 1980 Sanford’s family compiled all her published stories along with two others, previously unpublished, into her collection, *Windfall and Other Stories*, making her works widely accessible for the first time (Sanford, Forward). Many of Sanford’s characters exude the isolation and ambiguity concerning this time of economic and social transition felt during the Texas oil boom. For characters like Cora in “Windfall,” that isolation and social transition manifests as fear of the outside world. Cora uses her domestic life as an excuse to avoid interacting with the outside world, allowing her fear to turn her into, as Gilman termed it, a “house slave.”

“Windfall” follows Cora Ponder as she muses over her family’s new oil well and the implications their change in economic and social status will have on her family. Her fear and uncertainty come through her every action, putting off going outside to look at the well in favor of cooking dinner, then washing the dishes, then cleaning herself up. Finally, she runs out of tasks to occupy her time, so she ventures into the field to see the well and face the people that

have come from far and wide to do the same. Even in these encounters she hides, covering her mouth when she speaks, avoiding disrupting her dancing children and the talking men, falling quiet when the conversation with the women becomes too much for her to handle. There is not a happy resolution for Cora in this story: her daughters' dancing embarrasses her, yet she does nothing to stop them, she avoids confirming or denying neighbors' conjectures about how her family will spend their windfall with little more response than "perhaps" and "we might," and the story leaves off with her fearful wondering about what the scandalous, wayward neighbor boy is saying to her son (Sanford 99-107). Throughout the whole story, Cora hides behind her domesticity, allowing her fear of the outside world and the drastic changes it may bring to her life to stifle her behavior and imprison her in her own home.

Nowhere in her house does Cora's domestic imprisonment become clearer than in her bedroom that her daughters and their mess have taken over. According to Susan Fraiman's essay, "Shelter Writing: Desperate Housekeeping from 'Crusoe' to 'Queer Eye,'" the good homemaker:

enforces familial ... as well as class codes, not only buying the right stuff but controlling children, disciplining servants, and stamping out dirt. Her purifying regime may do the additional symbolic work of preserving the "domestic" from contamination by

"foreignness," ... domesticity is still tied to notions of privacy and individualism.... (350)

After three weeks of drilling on her land, Cora finds her house overrun with oilmen in need of boarding. While her husband and sons sleep on pallets on the kitchen floor, her three daughters join her in her bedroom, invading her space of privacy and rest (Sanford 100). Although the narrator never indicates that Cora consciously resents her daughters' invasion, nor does she seem to be consciously aware they have invaded her private space, Sanford's diction when detailing Cora's actions reveal the character's emotional state-of-mind in the absence of explication.

Sanford describes how “Cora *had* to hang their pink nightgowns ... *and* stuff their stockings in the dresser drawers, *and* empty the slop jar, ... *and* wipe out the bowl and the soap dish *before* she could bathe herself” (100; emphasis added). Cora enters her private space to rest and rejuvenate herself; instead, she finds her daughters’ detritus that she must clear away before she can take care of herself. While she may *choose* to hide behind domestic duties in the public rooms of her house—i.e. the kitchen, etc.—her daughters’ takeover over her bedroom *forces* her to perform a series of domestic duties once again before she can do anything to relieve herself. The daughters’ invasion of Cora’s bedroom adds to Cora’s imprisonment in her home.

The atmosphere of the bedroom also illuminates, and adds to, Cora’s domestic imprisonment by severing the barrier between the public spaces in the house and the private space of the bedroom. In *In Praise of Shadows*, Jun’ichirō Tanizaki mourns the loss of cool peace from a darkened room whenever bright lights illuminate every nook and cranny. Worse than the “waste” of the shadows “is the heat” coming off electric bulbs (36). To Tanizaki, a room should be darkened, cool, especially in the summertime. Rooms that are illuminated before sunset are too hot as well as an affront to the sense. When a room is as hot as the temperature outside it loses its ability to rejuvenate the people within it. Upon entering the bedroom, “fully as hot as the kitchen,” Cora is unable to immediately rest (Sanford 99). She must put in additional effort just to make herself physically comfortable enough to be able to rest in the heat. Instead of lying down she must take off her slippers and dry her sweating feet on a towel. Even then, she is only able to lie for a few minutes before getting up again, foregoing her rest to tidy the room and bathe herself in preparation to face the world outside (100). Because the room is the same temperature as the kitchen it loses its rejuvenating properties—even resting requires work. The heat ruins the darkened room, just like Cora’s attempt to rest in that space.

In addition to losing its rejuvenating abilities, the room loses its privacy because of the excessive heat. Because the kitchen is a public space in the home, it is unremarkable to see Cora completing domestic tasks that benefit her family as well as the boarding oilmen and drillers. Her domestic behavior becomes significant when she continues performing tasks for interlopers in her private space. Although Cora retreats to her bedroom to rest before going outside to the oil well, she only rests a few minutes before rising to pick up her daughters' mislaid clothing and clean the slop jar and wash basin, all just so she can clean herself. In her private space her actions should concern only her; instead, her behavior concerns those that normally exist outside of that space—her daughters. By linking the outside/public space—the kitchen—with the inside/private space—the bedroom—through the hot temperature, Sanford allows for the outside to flow into the inside through Cora's actions. She serves her family by cleaning up after them in the hot bedroom the same way she serves her family by cleaning up after them in the hot kitchen.

Just as the consistent hot temperature removes the differentiation between the bedroom and the kitchen, the physical description of the daughters removes any differentiation between the girls and the people outside, thus bringing the outside world into Cora's bedroom via their mess. The daughters are shiny and eye-catching, "with their curly heads and their bright dresses and their silk stockings and their fancy kid slippers," a direct contrast to drab Cora in her "black shoes and stockings and her gray gingham dress" (Sanford 102, 100). The girls' appearance is shiny and new, like the neighbors' cars, the "shiny-backed beetles" parked everywhere (101). By fusing the daughters and the neighbors through their "bright" and "shiny" appearances, the daughters' presence in Cora's bedroom becomes the neighbors' presence, the invasion of the outside. Because the daughters, and by proxy the neighbors, are interlopers in Cora's bedroom, albeit out of necessity, the girls' mess serves to destroy not only Cora's privacy in the bedroom

space but also any chance she would have of using it as a shelter, a haven, to protect her from that outside world. In effect, their presence, persisted through their mess, solidifies Cora's home as a prison for her by removing the one retreat she had against the outside world.

Since "mess can both nurture fantasy and destroy it," in "Windfall," the daughters' invasion destroys the fantasy of privacy, making the room uncanny, removing, as Daniel Sanders expresses in his definition of *heimlich*, the "enjoyment of quiet content," destroying the "sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house" (qtd. in Leitch 826). The *unheimlichkeit*—unhomeliness—intensifies because not only is this Cora's house, where she can expect to encounter others, but this is her bedroom where she should be *protected from* others, where she is most vulnerable. The oil men have invaded the public spaces of her home, but her bedroom is still private. However, by connecting the daughters to the neighbors as outsiders, the daughters' presence in the bedroom brings the outsiders into the private space, leaving Cora without a retreat. The daughters' mess brings the oil men, the neighbors, and everyone outside into the bedroom. The bedroom has become *unheimlich* through the regular reminders, their mess, that her space is no longer her own. The private space is now public.

Because the daughters' mess threatens the privacy of the bedroom, Cora's actions to clean up her daughters' clutter becomes a way of purifying the space, an attempt to take back the space and make it hers again. Cora's actions are a "purifying regime [that] may do the additional symbolic work of preserving the 'domestic' from contamination by 'foreignness....'" Since "domesticity is still tied to the notions of privacy and individualism," Cora's tidying goes beyond simply clearing the space so she can refresh herself; by picking up the nightgowns and stockings from the floor, Cora removes the evidence of the interlopers. Since the mess is an extension of the daughters, removing the mess symbolically removes the girls from the space. Furthermore,

by clearing the dirty water—assumed dirty because of the daughters—and cleaning the soap dish and bowl, Cora removes biological evidence of her daughters’ manifestation. In readying the space to cleanse herself, Cora symbolically cleanses the space of all outsiders.

“Messses tend to be nobody’s fault,” but because the bedroom, by Fraiman’s estimation, is a symbol of Cora’s individualism, the daughters’ mess threatens to taint Cora, sitting as a stain on her character. Cora’s behavior outside with the neighbors indicates she is concerned with others’ perception of her: she covers her mouth when talking to hide her missing teeth, she frets about the impropriety of her daughters dancing on a Sunday, she hesitates approaching the oil well where the men stand talking, and she worries that her son may be negatively influenced to act scandalously, following in the footsteps of the young man he chats with (Sanford 101-07). It is logical to assume she would feel equally, if not more, self-conscience about the state of her house and how that would affect others’ perception of her. After all, “the domestic space [is] ‘the topography of our intimate being’” (Fraiman 345). Although Cora did not create the mess in her bedroom, her topographic identity and physical proximity to the mess threaten to taint her despite her innocence in its creation. Cora’s solution is to fall back into domesticity, to distance herself from the mess and its tarnishing effects. Instead of being a peaceful haven to protect Cora from the outside world, the invasion of the daughters’ mess traps Cora in a prison of domesticity.

Although cleaning the bedroom helps to remove evidence of Cora’s daughters and reduce the possibility of others perceiving Cora’s character as tarnished because of the mess, her behavior still serves to further isolate her from others and facilitate Cora’s “domestic slavery.” Cora fears interacting with the outside world, so she busies herself with domestic duties to delay facing that fear. This willful “domestic slavery” isolates Cora from her family as well as the outside world. This feeling of isolation was common for “the country folk on whose land

derricks now stood, and the townspeople whose lives also had been changed, for better or worse, by the discovery of oil” (Sanford, Back Cover). Unlike Gilman’s narrator in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Cora, like most of Sanford’s characters, does not live an affluent life. The discovery of oil on their land will change that economic and social status, but Cora’s anxiety about that change speaks of a plain woman who, because of her new affluence, will be isolated from the world she knows now more than ever. The Texas oil boom brought wealth to some and devastation to others, and Sanford’s stories, like “Windfall,” explore the complex fears, anxieties, parasitic loneliness, and hopes of those affected. More importantly, Sanford’s stories give readers a glimpse into what people did to emotionally survive the turbulent time.

In addition to giving readers a better understanding of the emotional mindset and actions of Texans in the early twentieth century, Sanford’s stories cue into the complex mix of emotions that today’s readers still experience in their lives. With roughly 1/3 of Americans experiencing an anxiety disorder each year, disturbances that “can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships,” literature that accurately portrays what that anxiety feels like can be comforting to those with anxiety disorders and informative for those that do not (“Any Anxiety Disorder”). This may not seem like a major reason for twenty-first-century readers to pick up these stories, but when students say they would be more likely to complete reading assignments if the instructor “ma[d]e the assigned readings interesting,” any connection the reader makes with the text can be beneficial (Stanney). Since Sanford’s stories are not highly romanticized like other Southwestern writers of her time, *Windfall and Other Stories* reveal a vulnerability uncharacteristic of many romantic characters and more realistic to the twenty-first-century reader. Writers like Sanford used their fiction to explore nuances of

everyday life, and the “supreme realism” establishes a fictional world that engages and invites the reader to connect through action, setting, and emotion.

TRUE FOLKLORE

Sometimes connecting with a different cultural and/or ethnic group requires a delicate presentation of cultural characteristics, paying careful attention to words and actions to appeal to the audience while avoiding ostracizing the associated community. In his essay, “Folklore, Gendered Repression, and Cultural Critique: The Case of Jovita González,” José Limón describes Mexican-American author Jovita González in terms of Michel Foucault’s “specific intellectual” or Frantz Fanon’s “native intellectual,” “contend[ing] with social domination in her capacity as intellectual and in the specific sites and circuits where dominating power is articulated” (453-54). As a member of the border Mexican-American community in Texas, González was uniquely situated to study her community as both an outsider and a member. This position was not unique to González—María Cotera describes similar situations with Ella Deloria and Zora Neale Hurston in her book *Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture*. However, Like Deloria and Hurston, González struggled with notoriety in her field because of her status as a woman of color. According to Cotera, although Deloria and González “gathered reams of ethnographic and folkloric material about their native communities and produced several sizable manuscripts,” they were only able to publish “scant materials” in their lifetimes, “occup[ying] at a best a marginal status within [their] institutional frameworks, ... remain[ing] largely unrecognized in the histories documenting the development of American anthropology and regional folklore” (14). But Limón draws attention to the power González had as a community member researching her community.

He acknowledges the “anxiety, doubt, assertion, repression, ambivalence, and contradiction,” a “condition” of her position, but she was able to treat her position as cultural researcher and folklorist delicately, balancing her cultural identity and her Anglo work culture without taking on an air of colonialism that other folklorist of her time fell into with their research (Limón 454).

González straddled the delicate line between her Mexican identity and culture and the Anglo-American culture she lived and worked within by guarding against acculturation through careful retelling of the folklore she researched along the Texas-Mexico border. Born in Roma, Texas in 1904, González spent her early life near the Texas-Mexico border hearing tales of Mexican life and folklore (González xi; Cotera 106). Although minority groups in the 1920s still had limited access to higher education despite their status as American citizens, González studied at Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, TX, earning her bachelor’s degree and teaching certificate in History and Spanish, later earning her Master of Arts from University of Texas at Austin. It was while studying at the University of Texas that González began working with noted folklorist J. Frank Dobie and became a member of the Texas Folk-Lore Society. Even though the Society had an Anglo-male majority membership and women belonging to minority groups were heavily discriminated against, González served as both president and vice-president of the Society, earning her reputation with her research of Mexican folklore in Texas (González xi-xii).

In her recounting of folklore tales, Jovita González did not shy away from elements such as spiritualism and witchcraft that might make some religious, Anglo readers uncomfortable. In Mexican and border Mexican-American culture, witchcraft exists alongside Roman Catholicism without any apparent moral or religious obstruction. Religious syncretism is not unique to the Texas-Mexico border—ancient Hellenists combined “Gnosticism, ... Judaism, Christianity, and Greek religious philosophical concepts,” Sikhism combines Islam and Hinduism, and the

Caribbean religions Santeria and Voodoo combine Roman Catholicism with West African religious beliefs and deities (“Religious Syncretism”; Kimpton). For most Anglo-American Christians, practicing witchcraft goes against what they were taught in their monotheistic religion, “[y]et in a country that is overwhelmingly Catholic, many Mexicans say orthodox religion is not enough ...” (Rowley). According to anthropologist, William Madsen, “a major function of witchcraft belief in South Texas is the enforcement of conformity with the customs of Mexican-American folk culture by castigation of anglicized behavior” (Madsen, “Anxiety” 111). A community member’s anglicized behavior moves the whole community towards acculturation, threatening their identity as Mexican-Americans. Traditional values and folk culture are equally important on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border, and “more conservative Mexican-Americans attempt to shut out these disruptive [Anglo] influences” whenever they arise (112). Heavily anglicized Mexican-Americans are dubbed “Inglesado”—anglicized one—and are seen as traitors to “La Raza”—the race. Continually violating the customs of La Raza could see the Inglesado ostracized or cast out from the community (113). These communities see witchcraft as a tool to bring the Inglesado back into the community, once again part of La Raza.

Witchcraft plays a major role in the folktale, “Without a Soul,” that González originally presented in a 1928 meeting of the Texas Folk-Lore Society (González 141n1). In the tale, while waiting to speak with an old friend, Father José María, the unnamed narrator witnesses the protagonist, a young woman, abandoning her journey down the street, fleeing from the community members’ cries of “*¡La Desalmada!* The woman without a soul!” and “*Matilda, Accursed,*” as she passes them (González 136). Following the woman to her hut, the narrator convinces her to relay her tale. She recounts her spoiled childhood that cultivated an “arrogant and haughty, ... perverse nature, ...” leading her to desire and encourage the attention and

affection of her best friend's betrothed, Julio (138). Although she ultimately gave up her love for Julio and convinced him to cease his advances, her best friend, Rosario, still died of a broken heart because of Julio's courting. As Rosario fell dead at the protagonist's feet, she held a note exclaiming, "You have tortured me on earth, ... my spirit will torture yours in Hell" (139). Madsen describes the repercussions of scandalous behavior: "Violation of folk custom ... invariably invokes paternal wrath and the demand for conformity with Latin tradition. Refusal to obey excludes the disobedient member from the traditional family ..." (Madsen, "Anxiety" 113-14). The protagonist's family and friends disown and shun her because of her disgraceful behavior, abandoning her to wallow in anguish and the knowledge that she is cursed to continue without a soul (González 135-140). Abandoned by her loved ones, the protagonist must find a way to rejoin La Raza—and she finds this opportunity in her curse.

"Without a Soul" differs in the ending from a more well-known telling of this tale, "The Woman Who Lost Her Soul." In both stories the cursed protagonist believes her soul lost and residing in a toad because a gypsy witch told her as much. Even though her priest initially convinces her that, although she had sinned, her "soul is where it should be, in God's keeping," her happiness and hope for peace dissolve when she sees another vision of Rosario in Hell (González 140, 145). In "The Woman Who Lost Her Soul," Father José María convinces her a second time that her soul is safe with God, and because of that she is free to leave and enter the care of Don Francisco and his wife for rehabilitation (150-51). In this version of the tale she walks away from her only opportunity to rejoin her community. However, in "Without a Soul," the woman receives no such final absolution. Instead, after recounting her meeting where the witch told her the soul "was in the liver of a toad. Only through many incantations would it [the soul] be restored to its proper place," she spies a toad in the dark corner of the room, shrieks,

then falls to the floor, “moaning: ‘My soul is gone—my soul is lost!’” (140). In this story, the protagonist’s behavior violates the customs of La Raza, and the ostracization by friends and family cuts her off from La Raza completely. However, her curse is a path she must endure to ensure a semblance of belonging within La Raza, even though her behavior has done irreparable damage to her relationship with her friends and family. At least by performing her role as *La Desalmada*, by accepting her curse, she becomes part of La Raza again, although only marginally. She must accept that her soul is in the liver of a toad and that she must follow through with the witch’s advice to restore the soul to her own body.

Daniel Sanders, in his definition of *heimlich*, details domesticated animals as “tame, companionable to man.... ‘Wild animals ... that are trained to be *heimlich* and accustomed to men’” (qtd. in Leitch 826; 2nd ellipses in original). As an undomesticated animal, the toad in “Without a Soul” becomes *unheimlich* when it is indoors. Amphibians may become accustomed to humans in that, while enclosed in a habitat tank, they associate the human with food. However, they do not become friendly, domesticated, the way a dog or a cat might. Frogs and toads cannot be companionable the way a *heimlich* animal could, making its presence in the hut automatically *unheimlich*. The protagonist has been disowned and shunned by everyone who would be companionable to her, so her hut should be her refuge, her one source of peace and comfort protecting her from the hostile community. She allows the narrator, a stranger, to come into her one-room hut while she opens herself up to tell her tale (González 137). However, when she makes herself the most vulnerable within this safe place, her space is invaded by an *unheimlich* creature that takes her most intimate part of her self—her soul.

Once it contains the woman’s soul, the toad becomes even more *unheimlich* because it deserves to exist inside the protagonist’s hut more than the protagonist or the narrator. In

discussing the house in *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard describes the house in terms of “the dialectical game of the I and the non-I” (4-5). The house, in this case a one-room hut, is the “inhabited space, ... the non-I that protects the I” (5). Normally, this relationship between the non-I/hut and the I/self does not suffer any conflict, assuming the self is the human being, soul intact within the body. However, the separation of soul and body disrupts the regular relationship between the hut and the protagonist. The hut is meant to protect the “I,” and this separation of soul and body shifts the hut’s protection from the protagonist to the toad. To continue protecting the “I”—the soul—the hut must shelter the *unheimlich* creature that normally would not belong in the hut at all. The roles of what is *heimlich* and *unheimlich* reverse between protagonist and toad, morphing the scene from uncomfortable to uncanny, “arous[ing] dread and horror” in both the protagonist and the reader.

In their book, *A Guide to Mexican Witchcraft*, William and Claudia Madsen begin by answering the question “Does it [witchcraft] work?” with yes, unless you are a foreigner (5). In González’ tale, the curse “works wonders [because] it is made in Mexico by Mexicans” (5). For a people “immune to magic,” Anglo-Americans might have difficulty connecting with the tale, dismissing the magic as superstition and fiction (5). However, for the community owning the folktale, the events in the story would be a very real possibility and serve as a warning against perverse behavior. Instead of including the ending with salvation that could foster intimacy and familiarity with the Folk-Lore Society audience but alienate the community the story came from, “Without a Soul” presents a shadowy hut that connects the Anglo audience with the Mexican tale while preserving the ending containing the warning. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard warns that “Over-picturesqueness in a house can conceal its intimacy,” that the house “must retain its shadows” (12, 13). The only details of the hut that González provides is that “The room, if it

could be called that, was dark and damp,” that “A sputtering, tallow candle furnished the only light,” and there was “an empty apple box” to sit on (González 137). This sparse description of a small room cast in shadow draws the audience in, requiring the reader to dream up the rest of the room. Now, the setting is no longer only a product of the storyteller, but a product of the dreamer-reader as well. The shadows allow for the rest of the world to fall away into darkness, leaving the protagonist with the reader and the narrator as companions in the intimate space.

The hut also lends itself to intimacy through its small, singular room where nothing can remain hidden. Baudelaire says, “in a palace, ‘there is no place for intimacy’” (qtd. in Bachelard 29). Because of her class-typical solitude, the protagonist had an easier time concealing her “bad behavior” that “sham[ed]” and “disgraced” her family (González 139). The multiple rooms in her childhood home allowed for each family member to have his or her own space. It was not necessary for her parents to always be in the same room as the protagonist, and unless her conduct became obviously outside the bounds of decency, such as leaving her room to meet and talk with a boy, there was no reason for the protagonist to be closely monitored. Her “admirers were many,” and she was often “serenaded by someone who courted [her] love” (138). She could carry on encouraging Julio because no one observed her behavior close enough to recognize that this particular boy courting her love was already promised to another girl. However, now disgraced in her single-room hut, the narrator and reader see all there is to the protagonist; she has nowhere to hide once she lets the narrator into the hut, and the intimacy of close quarters frees the protagonist to lay bare her shameful tale. The darkness of the room provides a security that strengthens the protagonist to be able to tell her story. There is no retreating to another room to escape the narrator; the intimate space forces the protagonist’s words and behavior on display, revealing her at her most vulnerable and truthful.

Normally shadows obscure truth and preserve secrecy, but in González' tale, the shadow works in tandem with the single "sputtering, tallow candle" to transform the protagonist's shameful behavior into a tale that will preserve and save others from the same fate. The protagonist describes her garish behavior as a child, transforming admirable talents such as playing guitar, singing, and dancing beautifully into something tasteless by allowing others' praise to turn her "arrogant and haughty" (137-38). Her behavior turns her into something others in the community fear and revile. In *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki describes the ability of shadows to reveal life in layers of lacquered objects. When looking into the bowl cast into shadow by a single "flickering point of flame," Tanizaki "realized then that only in dim half-light is the true beauty ... revealed," that there was "a depth and richness like that of a still, dark pond, a beauty [he] had not before see.... suddenly those garish objects turn somber, refined, dignified" (Tanizaki 13-14). Like the lacquered objects in Tanizaki's world, the shadows and muted light from the candle reveal a redemption the protagonist can earn through accepting her curse and sharing her story as a warning for others. The protagonist exacts a promise from the narrator to "tell it [the story] again and again" so that "others may profit by [her] sinful action" (González 137). Her once-garish behavior, bringing shame to her family, told now in the hut with the single tallow candle for light, becomes "somber, refined, dignified;" her disgraceful choices now have a positive use. The somber tale of pain, curses, and remorse brings the protagonist dignity she did not have before.

In the 1920s, two schools of thought prevailed concerning the treatment of folklore: the first advocated the preservation of oral tradition in its original form, the second allowed for a transformation of oral tradition by refining it to make more literary. In González' academic world, the second practice was the accepted and preferred method when presenting research

(González xiii-xv). While this made her research widely appealing to audiences at the time, it complicates current consideration of her folklore because the preference has shifted to a more unadulterated presentation of the oral tradition. In some ways, this shifting preference in the treatment of folk narrative may explain the late twentieth and twenty-first-century scholarship focus on her two posthumous novels, *Caballero* and *Dew on the Thorn*, despite *Dew on the Thorn*'s heavily reliance on folktales; in fact, "The Woman Who Lost Her Soul" appears as a short story worked into *Dew on the Thorn*. However, as Sergio Reyna asserts in his introduction to *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and other stories*, González' research "covers several important periods of colonial Texas history," from Mexican control, to the Republic of Texas, and in to statehood as part of the United States (xv). And while she may have taken literary liberty when recounting the folktales that she gathered, such as the extended details, conversations, and alternate ending to "The Woman Who Lost Her Soul" when compared to "Without A Soul," her presentations still preserved characteristics unique and important to the Mexican culture she portrayed. The men, women, animals, and supernatural elements in her tales cannot be mistaken as part of the Anglo culture she presented them to; they speak of a proud Mexican culture and heritage that persists regardless of threats of acculturation.

The threat of acculturation and the struggles with multiple ethnic and cultural identities did not end with González' work in the 1920s through 1940s; twenty-first-century immigrants and their descendants live in every region from the Mexican border to the Canadian border, and in each community these families must work to develop a balance between their home culture and the dominant, usually Anglo, culture surrounding them. This immersion in a foreign culture can be isolating, even with a strong cultural community, especially for descendants of immigrants that identify with both cultures. Historically, people of mixed ethnicity and cultural

identity struggled to find unconditional acceptance from any ethnic and cultural group they identified with because of their connection to the other group, a struggle that led to a feeling of separation from both communities. Unless twenty-first-century readers have a strong cultural literature base at home and/or in their community, the lack of multi-cultural literature in the classroom exacerbates the struggle to balance bi-cultural identities students still face today. Providing readers with cultural literature, such as González' folklore, gives students an opportunity to learn about their own and their classmates' cultures, bridges cultural gaps, promotes understanding and acceptance of other cultures, and builds a stronger bi-cultural identity through the acceptance and exploration of both cultures.

PART II- CRYSLISES

While Gilman, Sanford, and González presented bedrooms as spaces of confinement, torment, and pain, other writers, such as Sui Sin Far, E. Pauline Johnson, and Ada DeBlanc Simond presented bedrooms places of transformation and growth. While these writers still discussed isolation, racial and cultural identity, and oppression, their protagonists use their vulnerability in these spaces to transform into something different, into someone stronger and better able to face the outside world. Sometimes the change is violent and seemingly sudden, sometimes it's subtle and obviously gradual, but each time the woman emerging from the space is not the same woman that went into it. Like the prison-bedroom spaces, these chrysalis-bedroom spaces highlight the need for equality, freedom, and autonomy, but these spaces use the isolation of the vulnerable space to protect the inhabitants, cocooning them while they transform.

The idea of a “New Woman” implies something different, something novel, something never seen before. Although these “suffragist[s], Progressive reformer[s] ... college girl[s] ... [and] working-class militant[s]” were by and large Anglo-American, “New Women” emerged in other racial groups, challenging the status quo of women within their own culture and the status quo of their culture within the larger cultural landscape of North America. In *Le moyen âge fantastique*, Jurgis Baltrusaitis introduces the image of “the most unexpected animals: a hare, a bird, a stag, or a dog, come out of a shell, as from out of a magician’s hat” (qtd. in Bachelard 107-08). These “New Women” emerge unexpectedly like these mammals from a shell, as if by magic, the truth of their creation baffling to the onlooker because their creation happened in secret. However, writers like Sui Sin Far, in her story “The Wisdom of the New,” give us insight into how these “New Women” form, if we know where to peer inside the shell.

NECESSARY HYBRIDITY

Sometimes the best writer to show us how to embrace a new identity is a writer that claimed no nationality, insisting instead to occupy a middle ground between cultures. Sui Sin Far, born in 1867 as Edith Maud Eaton, grew up primarily in Montreal, Canada with her Chinese mother, English father, and 13 siblings (Sui and White-Parks 34). Recognized now as one of the first Asian-American fiction writers, Sui Sin Far’s works went forgotten from the 1910s until their rediscovery in the late 1970s (Wenxin 122, 121). Sui Sin Far, a childhood name her mother called her that she later used to sign her writing, wrote in the aftermath of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, amidst massacres and deportations of Chinese immigrants, the Philippine-American war, and the United States annexation of Hawaii (Sui and White-Parks 34-35). She looked white enough to “pass” for European instead of Asian, but in her autobiographical essay, “Leaves from

the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” (sic) Sui Sin Far claimed to “have no nationality and [was] not anxious to claim any” (qtd. in Sui and White-Parks 35). Cultural identity, racism, and the immigrant experience occupy major themes in Sui Sin Far’s stories, despite their sometimes seemingly surface-level depiction of Chinese immigrant life. “The Wisdom of the New” is one such story that seems to simply depict the tragedy that can happen when the struggles of adapting to a new way of life becomes too great, but contains an undercurrent rife with cultural clashes, crises of identity, and transformations in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

In the face of clashing cultural identities, to preserve the person caught in the middle, sometimes characteristics of both identities must amalgamate so a stronger, hybrid identity can act. In “Wisdom of the New,” Wou Sankwei, the only son of the town magistrate, leaves for North America to make his fortune, leaving behind his mother, sister, wife, and unborn son in his Chinese home. Seven years later, the Americanized Sankwei sends for his wife, Pau Lin, and son, Yen, to join him in San Francisco. Wou Pau Lin struggles with her new life in California, desperately trying to continue fostering her son’s Chinese identity despite her husband’s attempts to Americanize Yen. To strengthen herself enough to save Yen from becoming Americanized, Pau Lin uses her foundational identity as a woman to combine characteristics of American culture with her Chinese culture. This hybrid cultural identity gives her the strength to poison her son in his bedroom the night before he starts attending an American school—to free him, as she sees it, just at the point when and in the space where he is most vulnerable to Americanization.

Pau Lin and her son are caught between two worlds, one Chinese and one American. As a Chinese woman she is fettered by the “rule laid down for her by her late mother-in-law: to keep a quiet tongue in the presence of her man” (Sui and White-Parks 40). Pau Lin continues the Chinese behaviors, dress, food, and religion she learned in China, not interfering with her

husband's business, studies, or friends (40). However, because of the Chinese teachings, she cannot express herself in a way that would make Sankwei understand her feelings about American culture and her resentment of his relationship with his American female friends. Although Sankwei does not insist that his wife become Americanized, seeming to almost prefer she does not, he does actively work to Americanize his son. He insists that Yen learn and use the English language, that he attends American schools and later universities, and even cuts off Yen's queue—an outward manifestation of Chinese male identity (41-42). All these events and conversations create a rift between the Chinese identity Pau Lin wants for Yen and the American identity Sankwei wants for him. Yen is caught in the middle of the culture clash, vulnerable to both parents' plan for his future, with no firm identity in either culture from which to draw strength in affecting his own life.

Although it is a given that Pau Lin is Chinese, the writer first establishes the character's identity as a wife and a woman, without the racial or cultural distinctions, Pau Lin to later transform her cultural identity from Chinese to Chinese-American. The first time the reader sees Pau Lin in the story, the writer describes her as having "a feminine desire to make herself fair to see in the eyes of her husband ..." (Sui and White-Parks 40). Pau Lin's desires and behavior are not indicative of any one racial or cultural group; instead, they are merely "feminine" and could belong to any woman of any race, class, or culture. Later descriptions identify her as Chinese, but the foundation Sui Sin Far establishes is a neutral, universal identity. Sui Sin Far continues reasserting this universal identity as "woman" through Sankwei's American female friend, Adah Charlton. When Sankwei claims that "a woman does not understand" her son's education options, Adah retorts "A woman, Mr. Wou ... understands such things as well as and sometimes better than a man" (41). Although Sankwei ends the conversation with "An American woman,

maybe ... but not a Chinese,” Adah’s identification with Pau Lin as a woman confirms the earlier-established universal identity (41). Adah solidifies this identification in the conversation with her aunt, explicitly stating “A woman is a woman with intuitions and perceptions, whether Chinese or American, whether educated or uneducated ...” (44). Because Sui Sin Far establishes and reiterates Pau Lin’s identity universally as a woman instead of restricting her to a cultural identity only, she lays the foundation for the character to transform the cultural identity from Chinese to Chinese-American. This hybrid identity will later give Pau Lin the strength to “transform” Yen in his bedroom as a butterfly transforms in its cocoon, saving him “from the Wisdom of the New” (49).

Before she can find a way to save her son from his vulnerability to Americanization, Pau Lin must first find a way to strengthen herself to go against her husband’s will. In his chapter on shells in *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard remarks that “A creature that hides and ‘withdraws into its shell,’ is preparing a ‘way out’” (111). Pau Lin’s method of “withdrawing into her shell” is to obey her late mother-in-law’s rule to “keep a quiet tongue in the presence of her man.” When first arriving in America, seeing her husband for the first time after seven years, the presence and behavior of his female American friends “aroused a suspicion in her [Pau Lin’s] mind—a suspicion natural to one who had come from a land where friendship between a man and a woman is almost unknown” (Sui and White-Parks 40). Pau Lin says nothing of her suspicions to anyone; however, Sankwei does recognize the meaning behind her silent, averted face even though his two friends do not (40). Later, when Sankwei undermines Pau Lin’s punishing Yen for speaking English after she “forbade him to speak the language of the white women,” Pau Lin again says nothing but retrieves a wrap to keep the boy warm while out with his father (41). And again, when Sankwei takes Yen to have his queue cut off, Pau Lin exclaims “I am ashamed of

you; I am ashamed!” to Yen, but says nothing more to Sankwei about her feelings, instead removing to the kitchen “saying within herself: ‘It is for the white woman he has done this; it is for the white woman!’” (42). Like the creature Bachelard describes, Pau Lin withdraws into herself, into her “shell.” Bachelard says “that to inhabit a shell we must be alone,” and how alone Pau Lin feels, losing her husband to American culture before she even arrives in the country, and now risking losing her son in the same way (123). Still obeying the rules of her late mother-in-law, Pau Lin cannot speak of this distance and loneliness to her husband, instead speaking out to her son when something happens to further separate Yen from her. Her shell of silence allows her jealousy and fear to grow and change her, hidden away from Sankwei’s attention.

However, just because she does not usually speak her jealousy and fear to her husband does not mean that it does not affect her, nor does it mean that she is not “preparing a ‘way out’” as Bachelard describes. Pau Lin exudes her resolute silence around her the same way a “‘mollusk exudes its shell’ ... let[ing] the building material ‘seep through,’ ‘distill[ing] its marvelous covering as needed’” (qtd. in Bachelard 106). Pau Lin’s cultural silence, her Chinese rule to “keep a quiet tongue in the presence of her man,” is her strength. She exudes this silence to protect her from the American culture that threatens to break apart her family. As Annette White-Parks explains in her introduction to “The Wisdom of the New,” Pau Lin does not trust “the white women,” even when they are friendly, because “They come from a culture that has taken her husband, has potential for taking her child” (36). Pau Lin foresees losing Yen to American culture the same way she lost her husband—by speaking English, receiving an American education, and cutting off his queue. After her second child dies shortly after birth, she holds Yen and “passionately crie[s]: ‘Sooner would I, O heart of my heart, that the light of thine eyes were also quenched, than thou shouldst be contaminated with the wisdom of the new’” (44).

Sankwei is blind to how his actions appear to his wife and to the pain and jealousy it causes her. Pau Lin must change from the Chinese woman identity her husband and Mrs. Dean see to something strong enough to protect her son as well as herself. Her Chinese identity protects her, but it is not enough to cover her son as well. To avoid losing Yen to the “contaminat[ing] ... wisdom of the new,” Pau Lin must prepare a “way out” for him by incorporating an American identity with her Chinese one.

Bachelard warns that “There is a sign of violence ... [when] an over-excited creature emerges from a lifeless shell” (111). Without being able to see the transformation in Pau Lin’s thinking, her emotional shell must appear lifeless to the outside observer, like Sankwei. Inside her shell of silent resolve, however, Pau Lin transforms from only Chinese to Chinese-American, ready to burst forth with the strength of two cultures, a new being now able to save her son. While Pau Lin’s Chinese culture strengthened her, alone it is not enough to save Yen. By “keep[ing] a quiet tongue in the presence of her man,” Pau Lin cannot go against Sankwei’s will and desire to Americanize their son. The rules she learned in China cannot protect Yen in a country with a different set of cultural rules and practices. But Pau Lin becoming Americanized is not a solution either; Americanization would undermine her desire to keep her son from “the wisdom of the new” and would destroy the protective shell she built for herself through her Chinese culture. Therefore, she must amalgamate characteristics of both cultures to save her son. This is possible only because Sui Sin Far established Pau Lin’s woman identity first and her cultural identity second— “A woman is a woman with intuitions and perceptions, whether Chinese or American....” American women can challenge a man’s decision, questioning the decision openly and acting against the decision when she believes the man is wrong and acting in a way that would harm others. Pau Lin perceives Sankwei’s decisions for their son as

detrimental, so she incorporates this American characteristic with her Chinese cultural identity on top of her universal foundational identity as woman, becoming a Chinese-American woman, giving her the strength to subvert Sankwei's decision to fully Americanize Yen.

Since it is Yen's fate that is in question, his "transformation" and the emergence of his mother's hybrid identity must take place in the space where he is most vulnerable—his bedroom. In the public places of her world, Pau Lin struggles with the clash of American culture and Chinese culture, a clash between how Pau Lin wants to raise Yen and how Sankwei wants to raise him, with American culture consistently winning out. When she strikes Yen's hand for speaking English, Sankwei confronts Pau Lin about it in the kitchen and takes Yen to eat in town. When she exclaims that she is ashamed of Yen's cut queue, the three of them are in the space where Sankwei and Yen eat and Pau Lin retreats to her own meal and thoughts alone in the kitchen. Sankwei discusses Yen's education when out visiting with Adah and he ends the discussion with the decision to not discuss it with his wife because "a woman does not understand such things." Pau Lin discusses how "'tis a mad place in which to bring up a child" when gossiping with her Chinese neighbor, Sein Tau, and "Above all the hubbub of voices was heard the clanging of electric cars and the jarring of heavy wheels over cobblestones," the sounds of American transportation methods (Sui and White-Parks 41-42). Pau Lin must act in private if she is to stop American culture from taking her son the way it took her husband.

In the private space of Yen's bedroom, Sankwei can no longer make unilateral decisions about Yen's life; in the private space of Yen's bedroom Pau Lin is able to make the decisions. Like the reader, Sankwei does not see Pau Lin act in the transitional time "just on the border land of night and day ..." (Sui and White-Parks 48). Sankwei "could just perceive the child's cot and the silent child figure laying motionless in the dim light. How very motionless!" (sic) and is

quickly able to understand what has happened to his child (48-49). Like Gonzalez' protagonist whose behavior becomes "somber, refined, dignified" in the softer, shadowy light of a single candle, the dim light of Yen's bedroom makes his death somber and dignified because the residual shadows and darkness obscure the details of his death. Sankwei and the reader can infer from the "empty cup with tis dark dregs" that Pau Lin poisoned Yen (49). However, the "violence ... in which an over-excited creature [Pau Lin] emerges from [her] lifeless shell" and the violence in which she "transforms" her son remains hidden the darkness of night as it transitions to morning. Pau Lin's hybrid identity gave her the strength to finally thwart her husband's will concerning their son, and Sankwei realizes this when he sees that "The thing he loved the best in all the world... had been taken from him—by her who had given" (49).

For characters like Pau Lin, living in America while trying to keep her vulnerable son Chinese was not possible; although her community commended her fight to "[adjust] to a new, foreign environment [while] maintaining cultural integrity," Sankwei's pressure to Americanize Yen necessitated a change in Pau Lin to save her son (Sui and White-Parks 35). Because of her Chinese cultural identity, Pau Lin could not defy Sankwei's wishes to Americanize Yen. But also because of her Chinese cultural identity she could not sit back and watch her son fall into the clutches of American culture the way Sankwei had. The only solution left for her was to embrace characteristics of an American woman, to change her cultural identity to a hybrid one, allowing the American side—the one that would allow her to defy her husband's wishes—to act where her Chinese side—the one that mandated she consent to Sankwei's desire to Americanize their son—could not. As Annette White-Parks summarizes in her introduction, the "contention between husband and wife (and symbolically between cultures) ... comes to rest in the child" (36). Through infanticide, Pau Lin removes the conflict and unexpectedly saves her husband from

American culture, too. Sankwei's final action in the story is to "put up his shutters," leaving a note for Adah saying, "I have lost my boy through an accident. I am returning to China with my wife whose health requires a change" (49). Yen will not become Americanized, Sankwei will return to China, and American culture can no longer threaten them.

In his preface to *Asian American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology*, Shawn Wong claims that "[Asian-American] literature is not new; rather, it was neglected and forgotten" (xvii). At a time when Asian-American voices were culturally quiet and forcibly silenced by fearful Americans, writers like Sui Sin Far fought to bring a voice to and "[bridge] immigrant Chinese populations of Chinatown with the broader, predominately Anglo society of North America at the turn of the century" (Sui and White-Parks 34). While twenty-first-century writers have regular access to works by authors such as Amy Tan, Asian-American writing before the late 1970s remains obscure, unknown to many twenty-first-century readers. Except for writers and editors like Wong, who actively work to form collections and anthologies giving voice to minority writers long since forgotten, little literature depicts life for immigrants of Asian descent. Sui Sin Far portrays "Chinese American life in a fair and sympathetic manner ... in contrast to Orientalist stereotypes ..." that were dominant at the time (Wenxin 122). As Wenxin Li points out in "Sui Sin Far and the Chinese American Canon: Toward a Post-Gender-Wars Discourse," these stereotypes still persist, "a reductionist practice so deeply rooted in the consciousness of Asian America that its ghost still lurks in Asian American literary production today" (122). Readers deserve a better, fairer representation of Asian-Americans and Asian-American literature. Incorporating writers such as Sin Sui Far into the broader literary canon, not just the Asian-American literary canon, continues breaking down the Asian stereotypes that plague our culture. Sui Sin far worked to bridge the gap between the Asian and Anglo-American

communities by giving insight into the immigrant life and culture. Exposing readers to literature that broadens their cultural understanding will continue bridging the gap that Sui Sin Far worked to reduce at the turn of the twentieth century.

BREAKING THE TROPE

Asian-American characters are not the only ones relegated to racist tropes and stereotypes. In her essay, “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction,” E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk) laments that while “Every race in the world enjoys its own peculiar characteristics, ... The Indian girl we meet in cold type ... is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe ...” (Johnson 1). For Johnson, it is as if the writer:

gives the reader the impression that he has concocted the plot, created his characters, arrange his action, and at the last moment has been seized with the idea that a regulation Indian maiden will make a very harmonious background whereon to paint his pen picture, that, he, never having met this interesting individual, stretches forth his hand to his library shelves, grasps the first Canadian novelist he sees, reads up his subject, and duplicates it in his own work. (2)

Unfortunately, these “regulation Indian maidens” die the same romantic death in each story, killing themselves when their Anglo lovers leave to rejoin their own people, “for she [the Indian maiden] is too unhealthy and too unnatural to live” (2). These maidens have little identity, never having their own surnames, always the daughters of chiefs with great lineages, and always called “Winona” or some appellation thereof (2). Their identities, circumstances, and fates become cliché, erasing the diversity and individuality of the myriad of tribes they are assumed to belong

to and reducing the agency of an entire gender to be less than the little already afforded to the rest of her people. Thankfully, writers like E. Pauline Johnson recognized the damage this cliché and other racial stereotypes did and wrote stories that broke them, transforming the “‘dumb animal’ style of book Indian” to one with agency, intelligence, and strength to remain true to themselves in the face of overwhelming white influence (4).

Emily Pauline Johnson was born to a Mohawk father and an English mother in the Grand River valley near Branford, Ontario. The Canadian government identified E. Pauline Johnson as Mohawk Indian because of her father’s status, “even though five of her eight great-grandparents were Europeans” (Lukens 44). Johnson’s childhood and education were a mix of Indian and European, and she took great “pride in her Native heritage” (44). Although she could “pass” for a white to marry and move easily within her social class, Johnson was *Métis*, or mixed-blood, and she proudly clung to that identity even though it made her a social outcast in her class (44). After her father’s death, Johnson decided to become a poet and performer to support herself. On stage, Johnson forced her audiences to contend with her mixed-blood identity, performing “the first half of her poetry readings in a fanciful ‘Indian’ dress of her own creation and then [changing] into fashionable European-style dress for the second half of the evening” (45). Johnson used her “Mohawk Princess” stage personae and her writing to defy the “ignorant savage” image, presenting a cultured, intelligent, talented Indian that broke the stereotype.

In “As It Was in the Beginning,” Johnson utilizes the popular romantic trope of her time but breaks the “regulation Indian maiden” cliché by killing off the weaker, Anglo male love interest instead of the Indian. In the story, “Father” Paul, a missionary, convinces the protagonist’s parents to allow her to live at the mission. While at the mission, the protagonist, given the name Esther, must discard her Indian dress, her Cree language, and the beliefs and

behaviors of her tribe for the “civility” of the Anglo Christian world. As she matures, Esther longs to return to her family’s tribe. Her love for Laurence, her childhood friend and Paul’s nephew, and his in return is the only thing that convinces her she can have a fulfilling life in their world. The evening that Laurence and Esther profess their mutual love, Esther overhears from her bedroom window Paul’s true feelings about Esther, warning Laurence that “you never can tell what lurks in *a caged animal that has once been wild*,” and although “[his] whole life, has been devoted to bringing them [Indians] to Christ, ... *it is a different thing to marry with one of them*” (Kilcup 234-35; emphasis in original). Laurence breaks Esther’s heart by agreeing with his uncle. Instead of the typical, suicidal romantic trope, Esther strengthen her resolve to return to her father’s tribe. She visits the sleeping Laurence to tell him goodbye but decides to kill him by nicking his hand with an arrow head, leaving behind snake venom poison in two cuts that resemble a snake bite (232-236). Esther breaks the suicide-maiden cliché, showing a woman strong enough to be herself in a world where she is expected to be a weak, background character. Instead of concealing Esther in her bedroom to inspire imagination and daydreaming, revealing Paul’s true feelings through the open window destroys the illusion of love and acceptance, freeing Esther to later transform in to the “snake” Paul fears her to be.

Esther’s bedroom is a space of exposure, not only revealing Paul’s true feelings through the open window, but also revealing, through Esther’s rediscovery of her forgotten childhood buckskin dress, Esther’s persistent Indian identity despite Paul’s work to remove it. The bundled Indian dress, lying at the bottom of her bedroom closet, sustains the illusion that Esther has turned away from her Indian life and embraced her future with the mission. Readers that have had some form of the phrase, “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” chided at them for messes in their youth will understand that the Victorian ideas of cleanliness and neatness as signs of

morality persisted beyond the turn of the century (“New Hidden Killers”). With the connection between morality and neatness, Esther’s buckskin dress from her life before the mission would need to lie bundled in the bottom of her closet, hiding her “Indian immorality” beneath the dresses she wore at the mission (Kilcup 235). These “Christian” clothes would mirror the moral, “civilized” behavior expected of her at the mission while her Indian dress, like her Indian behaviors, would stay hidden. The mess of clothes sustains the illusion that, while she is not yet “civilized”—the bundle still exists—she is making progress because she does not give care and attention—neatness—to the bundle (Trotter 8). While it lies hidden in her bedroom closet the bundle sustains Paul’s and Laurence’s illusion that Esther is becoming “civilized” and will want to stay on that path. In bringing the dress from its hiding spot in the closet to the openness of her bedroom, Esther exposes the truth, that her Indian identity always has and always will exist.

While the bundled dress sustains Paul’s and Laurence’s illusion of Esther’s future in the mission, the bundle also becomes an illusion-destroying mess, proving that Esther cannot ever fully discard her Indian identity, no matter how much Paul may want that. In *Cooking with Mud*, Trotter equates mess with the chance of limitless possibilities in some ways and in others “the end not only of all possibility, but of all thinking about possibility.” In taking in Esther, Paul saw the chance for her to become “civilized,” to teach her “to be a noble woman ... return[ing] perhaps to bring her people to the Christ” (Kilcup 232). There was the chance that she would take to his teachings and avoid “degenerate[ing], slip[ping] back to paganism, as other girls had done ...” (233). And, during her childhood while her bundled dress lay forgotten in the bottom of her bedroom closet, it looked like Paul’s chance would pay off. The image of her “stiff calico dress and ... leather shoes” she wears at the mission sustains the illusion that she has thrown off her “Indianness” and fit into the mold they formed for her (233). Esther’s “mess,” the bundled

Indian dress, lies below her “Christian” calico dresses in the closet the same way her Indian identity lies within her, despite the surface appearance of her Anglo dress, speech, and behavior. Bringing her bundle from the closet to the bedroom destroys the illusion that her Indian life was forever behind her.

For Esther, the rediscovery of her bundled dress, forgotten in the bottom of her bedroom closet, symbolizes chance, in that it both represented “limitless possibility” and at the same time “the end not only of all possibility, but of all thinking about possibility.” As a child, Esther “was fond of this child [Laurence], just as [she] was fond of his mother and of his uncle, [her] ‘Father Paul’ ...” (Kilcup 233). Tucking her bundled buckskin dress in the bottom of the closet to be forgotten gave Esther the “chance of limitless possibility” that Trotter describes, allowing her during her childhood to sustain the illusion that her life at the mission could be one of love and happiness. While the “mess” remained hidden this chance remained. However, truth emerges in Esther’s bedroom—Paul’s lecture to Laurence shatters Esther’s illusion of happiness, and when that chance for happiness no longer exists, Esther’s “mess” makes an appearance from its hiding place in the closet. By taking the bundle out of the darkness and into the light of her bedroom, Esther signals “the end not only of all possibility” of a life at the mission, but also “of all thinking about possibility.” She no longer *wants* to try for the chance at happiness and love at the mission, only of a future back with her family and tribe. The movement of the buckskin dress from its hiding place signals the disillusionment with her childhood fantasy and the truth that her future lies with her tribe.

Esther’s bundled dress in the bedroom is unique, not only because it is a visual representation of her Indian identity in an otherwise Anglo, Christian space, but because it is the only visual representation of her identity in that space. In *Cooking with Mud*, Trotter analyzes

Whistler's two versions of the painting *The Rag Gatherers*, identifying the crumpled bedclothes in the first version as "speak[ing] of human presence" in the room, but not of "human meaning, or human value" (295). Johnson does not explicitly identify anything in Esther's mission room besides her bundled dress in the closet. The lack of identifying symbols leaves Esther's "human meaning" vulnerable; with nothing to speak to her human value she is unprotected against those, like Paul, that refuse to see or acknowledge her humanity. This bundle, like the crumpled bedclothes, speaks of her presence in a building representing those that have stripped as much of Esther's identity as an Indian as they can. The bundled buckskin dress shows Esther's presence in that space even if her value still goes unacknowledged. When she removes the dress from the closet, Esther removes all traces of her presence from the mission. In the solitude of her bedroom, thanks to the revelation of Paul's true feelings, Esther changes her future and severs ties with her mission past. She leaves the mission bedroom, and the mission, as she entered it—blank. Nothing, not even love for the people there, remains when she leaves. She severs all ties with mission life and removes any physical evidence of her existence in that space.

Like Trotter's assessment that "the crumpled bedclothes speak of human presence, rather than human meaning, or human value," the presence of only Esther's bundled Indian dress mirrors Paul's refusal to see Esther's human value. The dress at the bottom of the closet is a representation of her presence, but not her value as a human. Further, because it is an Indian dress, Esther's presence is explicitly tied to her race. Paul does not see Esther-the-person, only Esther-the-Indian (Kilcup 234). The years at the mission seem full of love, kindness, and salvation, but "Father" Paul's words reveal Esther's childhood impressions to be hollow. She, in the eyes of Paul, is just another Indian to convert; she is not fully human and he does not value her the way he values Anglo people (234-35). He can imagine her as "*a caged animal that has*

once been wild,” seeing only “her silent ways, her noiseless steps... glid[ing] about like an apparition; her quick fingers, her wild longings ... remind[ing him] sometimes of a strange – *snake*” (234-35; emphasis in original). Paul allows his fears to blind him to her humanity, allowing him to form her being in his mind into anything he wants. He does not see her, only what he imagines her to be. By only seeing her presence and not her humanity or value, Paul creates the possibility for Esther to symbolically become the snake he fears her to be.

Although Esther changes her mind about her future while in her bedroom, she does not transform from one being to another until she enters the study-cum-bedroom where Laurence is asleep. Paul’s metaphorical comparison of Esther to a snake is nothing until Esther gives life to it in the image of a snake bite on Laurence’s hand. Bachelard remarks that “a metaphor should be no more than an accident of expression.... A metaphor is a false image ...” (76-77). Esther is not a snake when she decides to leave the mission, when she decides to “look into the study and speak good-bye to Laurence ...” (Kilcup 235). It is when she sees Laurence most vulnerable, when he is asleep, that the pain of her own vulnerability and his weakness in the face of racism comes back to her. In “‘A Being of a New World:’ The Ambiguity of Mixed Blood in Pauline Johnson’s ‘My Mother,’” Margo Lukens notes that mixed-blood natives challenged the idea of English-speaking, Anglo dominance and control in North America because the *Métis* were simultaneously Indian and European, both the conquered and the conquer, “and therefore had to be characterized as weak or evil, worthy of eradication” to restore power to English-speaking Anglos (47). Laurence’s inability to stand up to his uncle’s racism, compounded by his complete acquiescence to Paul’s perception of Esther as a dangerous animal, a snake, proves him the weak one, “cast[ing] doubt upon the socially empowered white perspective ...” (47). If the “weak and

evil” must be “eradicated,” then Laurence is the one that must be eradicated. His end comes in the image of a “snake bite,” two small nicks made with a poisoned arrow head.

Although she may not have had “human meaning, human value” while in her bedroom, in this second bedroom-like space, the image of the “snake bite” “confers being upon [her]” (Bachelard 75). Throughout her life, Esther has done what others wanted her to do. She went to the mission because her father acquiesces to Paul, she wore calico dresses, leather shoes, and spoke English because Paul and his sister demanded it, and she returned to the mission each evening because Laurence wanted her to (Kilcup 232-233). Until she enters the study-cum-bedroom where Laurence is sleeping, she acts as “background” character, looking for all intents and purposes like the “regulation Indian maiden” Johnson lamented in “A Strong Race Opinion.” However, instead of falling into the romantic cliché and killing herself when faced with the truth of her situation, Esther changes the trope. She takes control of herself, of her identity as an Indian woman, and her future, deliberately poisoning Laurence to inflict in her oppressors the pain and betrayal she felt (Kilcup 235-36). Instead of being acted upon, a passive player in her life, she acts for herself, taking the metaphor Paul used for her and creates a being with agency and power to control her own life.

In “A Strong Race Opinion,” Johnson describes individual personality as “one of the most charming things to be met with, either in a flesh and blood existence, or upon the pages of fiction, and it mattered little to what race an author’s heroine belongs, if he makes her character distinct, unique and natural” (1). Compared to the lack of “distinct, unique and natural” women in Canadian literature, Johnson’s heroines are singular. Esther’s initial passivity in her own life reflects both the expected character trope of the time and the literary world’s passivity in accepting that trope. Thankfully, just as Esther took control of her identity and future, writers

like Johnson took control of the Indian woman in literature and gave her a legitimate identity and future. Characters like Esther face adversity and betrayal and come out on the other side of it stronger. Just as Johnson refused to take the easy paths in life, choosing instead to embrace her mixed-blood identity and force her audiences to contend with it, she refused to take the easy way with her writing, choosing to create characters that forced readers to face the racism and sexism that was the status quo.

The twenty-first-century American cultural climate is less than ideal—women, especially women of color, are often perceived as weaker, less capable of the same achievements as their male contemporaries. Because of this cultural climate women still struggle gaining and maintaining their independence in society. Although women have achieved more independence and equality than their counterparts in Johnson’s time, societal and cultural norms still restrict agency. Stories like “As It Was in the Beginning” and writers like E. Pauline Johnson force readers to contend with the outside forces controlling women. Reading stories about women who wrest back agency gives readers the opportunity to evaluate where control and power imbalances exist in their own lives and how they can affect a change. Even though there are late twentieth and twenty-first-century American-Indian writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Joy Harjo that “have received high praise from critics for their powerful portrayals of the impact of the dominant society on Native Americans and their incisive analysis of women’s roles in Indian and non-Indian society,” they are still discussing the same issues that plagued women in Johnson’s time (Ruoff 249). By recognizing which issues still plague our culture, readers in the twenty-first century can target “solutions” that are still not working and change the approach to the problem, hopefully finally resolving it.

UNASSAILABLE PRIVACY

Transformations in bedroom spaces do not always have to be violent and sudden. Especially for younger characters, bedroom spaces are often havens into which they can escape while working through the “growing pains” of adolescence. In her essay, “Why Study Children’s Literature?”, Barbara Harrison explains that children’s literature, often dismissed, “at least partially, [due] to the curious myth of childhood as an idyllic state free from burdens, to be prolonged and to be patronized,” tackles issues of adolescence, “the use and abuse of power, the nature of good and of evil, the burden of the good, and the vulnerability of evil,” just using vocabulary and grammar better suited to the language development of that age group (244, 252). She reminds her reader that “Children’s literature, like all literature, is concerned with human experience, with heroic possibilities fulfilled and unfulfilled, with longings which are gratified and longings brought down by circumstance” (243). In short, children’s literature does what all literature should—explore the realities and fantasies of life and how to contend with them—but in a way that is accessible to children. Young readers see changes happening in the characters and the characters’ lives, and they can use that surrogate experience to make sense of and act in their own lives.

Ada DeBlanc Simond is one children’s author that used her stories to educate readers on what life was like around Austin, TX in the early twentieth century and how that life affected the transformation from childhood to adulthood. Born Ada DeBlanc in Lake Charles, LA in 1903, Simond spent her early years learning to farm and take care of the household, and learning “just enough English to read a prayer book and catechism” (sic) (Ada, finding aid). At age 11, Simond and her family moved to Austin, TX, first living in the African-American community of Wheatville, but later establishing themselves in the growing African-American community east

of the city. Ada, like her siblings, learned English at the public schools and was the first in her family to complete a formal education. Simond earned degrees from Samuel Huston College in 1921 and Iowa State University in 1936, using her knowledge and experience to head the Home and Family Life program at Tillotsen College, work for the Texas Tuberculosis Association as a public health representative and educator, and worked in a similar capacity for the State Department of Public Health until her second mandatory retirement in 1972. Although active in civic and volunteer work, it wasn't until her work with the Black Heritage Exhibit, a project of the Austin chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta (DST) Sorority, Inc, that she began her career as a children's writer (Ada, finding aid). Unfortunately, although her six-book series *Let's Pretend* received several awards and honors in the late 1970s and early 1980s for the historically accurate portrayal of life for a young black girl and her family in early twentieth-century Austin, Simond's stories remain largely unknown outside of the Austin area.

Simond's *Let's Pretend* series takes the reader through the childhood of Mae Dee and her family, showcasing important events in her life, such as a rare trip into town, a Juneteenth celebration, Christmas, and a wedding. Mae Dee and her family, like most of the African-American families in the stories, live in a small home in rural Austin, Texas. Like other children her age, Mae Dee helps cook, clean the house, and whatever else is needed to ensure the household keeps running. However, it is not all work for Mae Dee and her siblings. Simond showcases games, visits with friends, church activities, school programs, and holiday festivities that were common in the early twentieth century. Mae Dee tells her reader about the books they read, the people they meet and gossip with in town, and above all, Mae Dee's changing feelings about herself, her family, and the outside world as she grows from a child into a young woman. One key element featured in Mae Dee's and her brother, Charley's, transition to adulthood is the

bedroom—the symbol of solitude, privacy, and independence. In *Mae Dee and Her Family Join the Juneteenth Celebration* and *Mae Dee and Her Family in the Merry, Merry Season*, Simond moves Charley, and later Mae Dee, into private bedrooms, guiding the reader through the feelings and emotions of transitioning and watching those around transition from child to adult.

Even though Mae Dee is the narrator in all six books in the *Let's Pretend* series, her older brother, Charley, is the first one to show the transition into adulthood. Although Mae Dee does not yet understand, for Charley the bedroom symbolizes privacy and solitude. In *Mae Dee and Her Family Join the Juneteenth Celebration*, instead of spending time with his family, Simond shows Charley “excus[ing] himself to go to his room to read” (Ada, box 1, folder 3). Mae Dee laments that “He spends all of his spare time reading adventure stories.... He does not even answer when you knock on his door” (box 1, folder 3). Mama and Papa recognize this solitary time as opportunity for Charley to improve himself, to grow into an adult; providing that Charley has “taken care of [his] responsibilities, [his] time belongs to [him]” as long as he is “doing something worthwhile to improve or entertain [himself]” (box 1, folder 3). Bachelard reminds his reader that “Man’s being is confronted with the world’s being,” and Charley’s solitary study of that world, even if it through fictional works like Jack London’s *Call of the Wild*, gives him the time and space to come to terms with the world’s being and how he relates to it (Bachelard 212; Ada, box 1, folder 3). Mae Dee does not understand at the beginning of the story the integral part solitude plays in the transition from child to adult, but she recognizes that Charley’s behavior is unusual. His change is already noticeable through nothing more than his quizzical behaviors that confuse his younger, less mature sibling.

It’s sometimes difficult to convey how a character grows over time, especially when the changes are subtle, but *Mae Dee and Her Family Join the Juneteenth Celebration*, introduces

Mae Dee's as well as Charley's transition from childhood to adulthood. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard states that "Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being," adding Jean Hyppolite's idea that "'you feel the full significance ... in alienation ...'" (212). Mae Dee does not immediately realize this alienation, but her thoughts and actions the night before and the night after the Juneteenth Celebration reveal her emerging understanding that she is separating from the outside, from others she is normally close to, and finds herself wishing for private space that reflects that distancing. In their shared bedroom the night before the Celebration, Mae Dee and her sisters chat about "what fun [they] would have" the next day, and Mae Dee concerns herself with "what [she] would wear and what friends [she] would see" (Ada, box 1, folder 3). Although her Papa recognizes that "[His] family especially [his] girls, are very private people," Mae Dee is still a social creature with her sisters (box 1, folder 3). Mae Dee shares her thoughts the same way she shares the space with Marguerite and Emmaressa. However, once at the Juneteenth Celebration, Mae Dee "just watched" while "mostly everyone else just milled around trying to see everybody" (box 1, folder 3). Mae Dee distances herself from the "outside," content to be apart with the "inside," with herself.

This distancing, this alienation, continues when they get home that night. Mae Dee participates in a familial social activity with her mother and sisters—brushing each other's hair—but she already recognizes the alienation from this closer "outside," her sisters. Mae Dee notes that "Tonight for the first time, [she] got a feeling [she'd] like to sleep alone," that she is "old and big enough to have [her] own bed now" (box 1, folder 3). Even though she does not yet know how to express this feeling of alienation, that she is too big, too old to share a bed with others, she recognizes the distancing inherent in growing up. She is not quite separate, not quite her own being yet, because she cannot express these thoughts and feelings to others. Her desire

to sleep alone signifies the struggle between the “outside”—sharing hopes and desires and bonding activities with her sisters—and the “inside”—her feelings of being “old and big enough” for her own space. She is not enough like her sisters anymore to share the space and sleeping alone will best show that she is now a separate being apart from them.

In this early story in the series, Mae Dee moves from using her bedroom as a space to socialize with her sisters to a space for introspection and thinking about her future. Mae Dee’s “inside,” her inner thoughts, resembles Trotter’s mess at this point in her transition to adulthood. Instead of going right to sleep, Mae Dee continues thinking about the church revival meeting she attended earlier that evening with her Papa, “thinking [about] what made all those people come out and spend their time in what seemed to [her] to be so uncomfortable [an activity]” (Ada, box 1, folder 3). Then, in the paragraph immediately following, she muses on what she will do when she grows older. Mae Dee toys with the idea of teaching, ponders her mother’s value as a homemaker even though she decides she would rather “go out and work, mak[e] money,” but never settles any one idea (box 1, folder 3). Her “mess” of thoughts at this point in her life shows the inherent chance and infinite possibilities in her future. Nothing is or must be decided yet, so she is able to lie next to her sister, daydreaming about the future until morning (box 1 folder 3). These thoughts shape and form Mae Dee into the being she will become, and it is only when she has the solitude of a private bedroom that she is able to begin solidifying her individual being.

Sometimes, though, the solitude is not enough to adequately foster the transition to adulthood, and the being inhabiting the space must bring others into it for advice. Mae Dee notes when “Charley asked Papa to come to his room ...” that “Papa and Charley have been talking privately a lot lately” (Ada, box 1, folder 3). Again, Charley’s behavior strikes Mae Dee as strange because Charley and Papa are leaving the rest of the family to go talk. Just as Mae Dee’s

thoughts about who she is and what she wants out of life formulate best when she has solitude at night, Charley can best receive and process the advice on his private thoughts and plans within the solitude of his room. Mae Dee does not understand why the two men talk so much in private now, showing that she would not understand what they are talking about. Transitioning from childhood to adulthood is confusing and vulnerable, so Charley needs the safety of his bedroom to bolster him during conversations that expose that vulnerability to his father. He does not let just anyone into his bedroom, though. In *Mae Dee and Her Family in the Merry, Merry Season*, Charley puts a sign on his door that says on one side, “Please don’t knock. Genius is dreaming,” and on the other side, “Don’t knock, just come in. Genius is waiting” (box 1, folder 5). Even though Mae Dee does not understand yet the importance of respecting the privacy of Charley’s personal bedroom, their parents understand— “ever since Papa’s and Charley’s private talks started ... Mama had obeyed the sign. When ‘Genius is dreaming,’ she just calls out goodnight” (box 1, folder 5). An understanding of the importance of solitude to maturation is obvious to the adults, and it only starts to make sense for Mae Dee once she receives her own, private bedroom.

As Mae Dee transitions into her own bedroom, mirroring her transition from childhood to adulthood, she starts noting confusion with her younger sister’s behavior the same way she noted confusion with Charley’s. Emmaressa is still the “baby” of the family, and her actions epitomize childhood. The further Mae Dee develops into her own being, the more her alienation grows, and the more Emmaressa’s behavior annoys her. Emmaressa crawling up into Papa’s lap begins to annoy Mae Dee, riding back from the country reminds her of the previous year when Emmaressa sobbed uncontrollably instead of voicing her concern that they would kill her pet pig, Rosemary, for food, and Emmaressa running back downstairs to give Papa a hug makes Mae Dee think that Emmaressa is spoiled (Ada, box 1, folder 5). Mae Dee’s categorization of this behavior as

“babyish” illustrates the separation she sees between herself and her sisters. The more mature Mae Dee becomes the more babyish Emmaressa’s behavior seems to her. Simond sets the clingy behavior against the reserved solitude and introspection to highlight Mae Dee’s growth.

Mama protects Mae Dee’s private space the same way she protects Charley, by keeping others out. Mama has another room built onto the house because “She [Mae Dee] is old enough and big enough to have her own room” (Ada, box 1, folder 5). Emmaressa asks to sleep with Mae Dee in her room, instead of in her own shared space with Marguerite, but when Mama discovers Emmaressa she “gave her a smack on her bottom and said, ‘You know better than this. This is the last time I want to catch you in Mae Dee’s bed unless I have given you special permission” (box 1, folder 5). Mae Dee gave her permission for Emmaressa to sleep there, but Mama sees the benefit of solitude even when Mae Dee doesn’t fully understand it, so she acts on Mae Dee’s behalf to protect it. If Mae Dee allows her sister to share her bed, the way they did when Mae Dee was younger, she risks stalling or reversing the growth toward adulthood she has made. And when Emmaressa is gone, Mae Dee realizes that although it “felt good and happy that [they] all have each other” it is good “that sometimes, when [she] want[s] to, [she] can be alone with [her] thoughts and dreams” (box 1, folder 5). Even though she may miss her younger sister, she is vulnerable during this time of transition, and being alone with her thoughts and dreams is what will ultimately benefit her and help her grow the most.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard notes that “there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box. To verify images kills them, and it is always more enriching to *imagine* than to *experience*” (88; emphasis in original). In Mae Dee’s new room, she has a chest that Charley made her to keep her linens in, but Charley’s teasing name of “Hope Chest” speaks better to what all it really contains. Mae Dee admits to “keeping a diary now and [keeping] it in

the chest” (Ada, box 1, folder 5). What better place to keep secrets, hopes, and dreams than a diary, and by locking it in the bottom of her chest Mae Dee limits the outside world to imagining what is in it. Dreams of the future are vulnerable, easy to break under the scrutiny of the outside world. By hiding these away in her chest, Mae Dee ensures that no one will “verify [the] images,” protecting others from “killing” her dreams.

The story in which she gets her own room and Hope Chest, *Mae Dee and Her Family in the Merry, Merry Season*, is full of end-of-year endings and future-year hopes and possibilities. Even the story ends with the New Year’s Eve last diary entry in the “Diary Marie” book and a promise to begin “the life of [its] successor, Diary Elaine” the next day (Ada, box 1, folder 5). Mae Dee’s childhood, spent sharing a bed and a room with her two younger sisters, formally ends when she moves into her own room, and once she has her private space, Mae Dee begins acting more like she observed Charley acting—keeping her thoughts and feelings to herself and her diary, spending time in solitude in her room, carefully choosing, and having her parents guard, who could and could not enter her space. Mae Dee writes in her diary, “within these four walls I seem alone, but I’m only physically so, for in my mind, in my heart, and in what I see and hear out of this window, I have a private little world filled with beautiful things and beautiful people, and what’s more, it all belongs to me” (box 2, folder 3). Although she did not understand solitude and its benefits as a child, as she grows up, Mae Dee sees and respects the necessity of privacy and solitude to transition into adulthood, and Simond gives her characters their own space for that transition to happen.

Although Mae Dee was not a “New Woman” in the historical sense of the term, Simond’s stories give the reader the opportunity to see a young girl become a new woman, observing all the daily life events that transition the character from a child to an adult. Simond’s purpose for

the *Let's Pretend* series was to teach children what life was like for a young black girl growing up in pre-WWI Austin, but “like all literature, [it] is concerned with human experience, with heroic possibilities fulfill and unfulfilled, with longings which are gratified and longings brought down by circumstances.” The unique focus on Mae Dee and Charley having their own bedrooms allows young readers to see a character transitioning just like they are, or at least will be, and it allows those readers to discover the benefit of having a space to call one’s own. Mae Dee’s transition is not painless, and Simond truthfully portrays the milder side of that pain through the annoyances and confusions Mae Dee faces, but unlike other transformative bedrooms, the transitions happening in them are not violent. Simond presents a space that is comforting, nurturing, and positive for her characters, leaving her young readers with hope instead of fear.

Childhood is the ideal time to introduce readers to other cultures and ways of life if there is a hope to have twenty-first-century readers willing to approach literature from all walks of life with an open and empathetic mind. Stories like Simond’s feed the needs of young readers on multiple levels, fulfilling the need not only for historical facts and entertaining plot, but more importantly for emotional connections. Literary fiction, or fiction that “focuses more on the psychology of characters and their relationships,” forces the reader to “fill in the gaps to understand their [characters’] intentions and motivations” when they are not “internally consistent and predictable” (Chiaet). Literary fiction, like the *Let's Pretend* series, strengthens the reader’s ability to empathize with characters, a skill that translates beyond literature and into their lives. By “disrupt[ing] reader expectations,” these stories “[undermine] prejudices and stereotypes” they believed about the characters (Chiaet). If the realistic characters do not fall into the stereotype, then perhaps real-world people do not either. This thinking leads to society members understanding that people are complicated with complex inner lives and are thus

willing to challenge prejudices and stereotypes in real life. As a socializing tool, literary fiction is invaluable to building emotional skills, like empathy, and young readers who develop the ability to empathize and challenge prejudices and stereotypes become adults who empathize with others and challenge prejudices and stereotypes that plague our society.

SILENCES

Vulnerability, in the twenty-first century, usually equates to weakness. The fear of appearing vulnerable drives some to go to extraordinary lengths to prove their power and control, often by exerting their dominance over someone else. However, women writers in the Modernist period recognized the strength in vulnerability, its power to entice honesty and truth about situations, forcing fears to the forefront to be confronted. Disenfranchised populations, such as women and minority groups, recognized that aspects of their nature and culture appeared weak to the dominant population, usually men of European descent, and thus used intimate spaces, like bedrooms, to show the truth and honesty of their lives, showing strength through their vulnerability to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes that limited them. Unfortunately, the easiest way to ensure dominance over someone is to silence their attempts at speaking out, silence their attempts to make their truth known to the rest of the world, and while writers like Gilman, Sanford, González, Sui Sin Far, Johnson, and Simond made their voices and observations heard, many of their contemporaries could not.

The most grievous oppression of women's voices is when they are kept silent to further benefit the men around them. In gendered spaces like the Berachah Home—alternatively known as the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls—established in Arlington,

TX by Rev. J.T. Upchurch and his wife, Maggie Mae, one would expect, almost demand, to hear from the “erring girls” that lived there as part of the narrative history of the house (“Historical Sketch”). However, one common theme resounds among the pages of the Upchurch’s publications, *The Purity Journal* and *The Purity Crusader*: the girls are silent. Upchurch and the other writers, who are mostly male, discuss the goings on at the House, such as the level of production, number of births, and status of the House’s debt to the community that donate money to keep it operational. Of course, Upchurch and other writers include stories detailing the “erring ways” of these “poor lost souls,” often revealing their salvation from death and destruction, both on earth and in heaven, as evidence of the good work the house does (Berachah). However, none of these stories include the voice of the girl they supposedly represent. *The Purity Journal* and *The Purity Crusader* never printed first-hand accounts from the girls showing their thoughts and feeling about living at the Berachah House and what life was like from their perspective. Instead, Upchurch steals their voices, forcing the girls into the shadows while he profits from their hardship and journey to fund his project. The girls, like the items they manufacture to help pay for the upkeep of the House, were a commodity for Upchurch and his staff. *The Purity Journal* and *The Purity Crusader* shift the focus from the girls the program served to the political and religious agenda Upchurch promoted.

Even when it appears that women are speaking for themselves, telling their own stories, sometimes their voices are stolen by editors or translators who “know better” than the speaker what to say and how to present it to the reader audience. In *A Narrative Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, the European American editor, Dr. James E. Seaver, includes in the work the “Author’s Preface” and “Author’s Introduction,” both written by him instead of Jemison, the Native American author, framing the story as a captive narrative, a popular genre of the time (Kilcup

31-36). Mary Jemison (Seneca) focuses “on matters most relevant to Seneca women’s lives, including marriage, children, and family; the cultivation of the land; and ... the deleterious consequences of contact with whites, ... Reversing the stereotype of Indian women as beasts of burden” (31). However, Seaver’s preface and introduction would have the reader believe this to be a story of “fortitude in time of danger, patience in suffering, hope in distress, invention in necessity, and resignation to unavoidable evils” (33). Seaver doesn’t stop with framing Jemison’s narrative in the way he sees as most appropriate; he even goes so far as to change information and inject his fictions into her story. Seaver used “information” given by a man he erroneously claims is George Jemison, Mary’s cousin, to fabricate the life of her last husband and inserted that fiction into chapter 11 of her narrative (36n2). In this way Seaver, like Upchurch, profited from Jemison’s story, changing her narrative to suit what he thought fit the literary demand of the time, even when it was a false representation.

Even in the academic world, “intellectual contributions” disappear when their works “challenge the disciplinary, aesthetic, and ideological norms of both dominant and counterhegemonic canons” (Cotera 15). In her book, *Native Speakers*, Cotera recounts the career of Ella Deloria, D/L/Nakota ethnographer and Dakota native, and her struggle to assert herself as a legitimate voice in Native American ethnography. Because of her “authority as a ‘native speaker,’” her Dakota identity, Deloria challenged the industry-accepted “colonizer authority” and shifted agency in the research to the D/L/Nakota subjects (64). Deloria’s work shifted the historical and cultural voice back to the native speakers and away from the Anglo researchers, giving tribal identity an individualistic, diverse image that better represented the people instead of distilling her research into an abstract identity anthropologist of the time preferred. Deloria did not let one person’s story speak for the whole; she gathered a multitude of stories and histories

and endeavored to present them in a way that reflected the diversity of the people she spoke with. Her identity as an “insider” opened her up to people and stories usually kept hidden from anthropologists, but her insistence on letting her subjects speak for themselves garnered her criticism from her field. In a time when the researcher was the superior and had the power to present ethnographic and anthropologic findings however they deemed best, women like Deloria, who shifted the power back to the native speaker, suffered pressure to conform or lose funding and publication. Even when Deloria gave her subjects the power to speak with their own voices, the dominant culture silenced them again.

Through expanding the current literary canon, twenty-first-century scholars will get a better representation of the diversity that characterized turn-of-the-century North America. That is not to say that Anglo, male writers depict an inauthentic United States and Canada, but as writer Christopher Paul Curtis explained in an interview with Peter E. Morgan:

our story has been defined by other people for so long that it’s very confusing to have it told by other people. If everything were equal, it would be fine, but everything is not equal, and authentic stories by African American writers, by Native American writers, by Hispanic writers need to be told by those groups. (211)

The efforts to recover and renew the voices of women and minority writers since the 1960s and 1970s have already diversified the literature available to scholars. Chicano literature scholar Tey Diana Rebolledo points out that “as more and more texts are saved from anonymity, we gain a better understanding of the impact of women on the political and social structure of the country throughout history” (González xxvii). That’s not to say, though, that these texts are readily available to a wide readership. Most show up on syllabi for courses specializing in ethnic literature but are absent from high school and undergraduate survey literature courses. The six

writers featured previously are by no means the only Modernist writers that have be recovered, nor are they the only ones that should be included. Each writer added to the canon adds a new perspective, a new lens through which to view the world. And each writer added to the canon gives voice to those who writing did not survive, those who were silenced, those who are still forgotten and ignored.

CONCLUSION

In history and in literature, men from the dominant cultural, racial, or ethnic group are the voices scholars usually hear. Their words are frequently the only ones recorded, so their perspectives shape researchers' understanding of that time. Unfortunately, those dominant male perspectives are not all encompassing, nor are they always accurate. By relying solely on voices from only a fraction of the population, twenty-first-century scholars learn a distorted image of historical periods instead of the broader picture. To present a better, more accurate depiction of what North America and the people living there were like at the turn of the twentieth century, the literary canon needs to change—expand—to include a variety of voices previously silenced, forgotten, and ignored. Affluent Anglo men carry the burden of representing a diverse population, but regardless of how faithfully they attempted that representation, their writing cannot replace the experiences of those diverse people. Furthermore, since so many people could not or did not leave behind their own written record, it is doubly important to encourage those that did, since their writing may be some of the only representation of that experience available.

Disenfranchised people must be allowed to speak for themselves; only women fully understand what it's like to be a woman, and only the “doubly disenfranchised” fully understand

what it's like to be a woman of a racial or ethnic minority group. Centuries of systemic oppression and limitations shape not only outside societal perceptions of these people but also how they perceive themselves, and even that self-perception differs based on class, economic status, and racial or ethnic identity. Anglo-American men may gain a “good idea” of what life is like for other parts of the population, but nuances will always escape them because of their inexperience with that life. It is those nuances that writers like Gilman, Sanford, González, Sui Sin Far, Johnson, and Simond show readers, filling in gaps and correcting misrepresentations existing in the canon. Perhaps it's the emotional edge that writers miss when depicting experiences that they've never, and can never, have, but further diversity in the canon will fulfill the needs that Anglo, male writers could not. Writing formed through acute observation can be skilled, useful, entertaining, and meaningful, but it will always be just shy of the mark when compared to writing formed through experience.

Analyzing vulnerable spaces, like bedrooms, is a powerful way to see the nuances that writers expose in their stories. These spaces reveal characters in their rawest form, freed from the masks they wear in public. In bedroom spaces characters reveal secret desires, characteristics, and beliefs that would otherwise draw censure and criticism from the outside world. In these spaces characters can grow and change, discovering hidden strengths and talents—as well as weaknesses—that transform and stifle, free and imprison. The realistic humanity of these characters in these spaces draws readers in, building empathy and a broader understanding of the multifaceted twenty-first-century world. Exciting storylines are entertaining, but it is only through connecting with characters that are complex and varied just like real-life people that readers grow and become better people.

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