

**Traveling Toward Empathy:
An Analysis of Mothers and Nannies
in U.S. Literature Post 1985**

BY

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THESIS

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This dissertation is dedicated to my father. I did not have enough time with you, but as with everything you did, you made that time count. Your hard work, fierce compassion, and steadfast love made you a man above many. For that, and much, much more, I thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Using frameworks of class, race, and gender, this dissertation contends that the mother-employer/nanny dyad is unique in the ways in which it brings together women who often differ by virtue of class and race, which thereby offers an opportunity to both women to become invested in one another in ways that may be absent in other female-female partnerships. As a result of shared vulnerability, bilateral concern for the child(ren) involved, and mutual benefit gained from establishing a positive work environment, this relationship, may prove to be a model for alliance building. I argue that a key component to establishing this type of relationship is the development of empathy and the conversion of empathy into prosocial behavior. Via the explication of seven novels (i.e., *Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon and *A Gate at the Stairs* by Lorrie Moore in chapter one; *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid, *The Love Wife* by Gish Jen, and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett in chapter two; and *My Hollywood* by Mona Simpson and *All the Finest Girls* by Alexandra Styron in chapter three), which have all been written by U.S. women after 1985, this dissertation troubles the ways that empathy is created by authors, produced in readers, and may be the basis of prosocial behavior. I contend that novels may provide safe terrain for the exploration of ambivalence that may be present in both mother-employer and nanny and that, by applying the skills acquired in this exercise, more beneficial relationships may result. Motifs of class, race, false empathy, outsider-within status, power, liminality, female identity development, and ways of mothering are all examined at length.

Mothering Empathy: Feminist Authors, Radical Readers, and Prosocial Reform

I. Introduction

In the global North, good mothers are often assumed to be empathic caregivers who can predict their child's needs, interpret unspoken desires, and offer what is required even when the child may not know what is needed. Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* posits that good mothers are reflexively empathic, with this trait burgeoning from a successful mother-daughter bond in which there is less autonomy than in the mother-son relationship. Good nannies, regardless of gender, are not expected to intuit an employer's child's needs in the same way, but a similar, albeit less radical, bar of care giving is set nonetheless. Nannies are also according to Cameron L. MacDonald in *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*, "mother-extension[s]" whose job often requires that they intuit what the mother herself would do and completes these "responsibilities in ways that provide no threat to her employer's image as the primary attachment" (14). In a separate but related point, mainstream news outlets have recently jumped on the already well-built bandwagon of theory that suggests that reading novels increases an individual's development of empathy. The fly in the proverbial ointment, according to Suzanne Keen in *Empathy and the Novel*, is that even if (and she retains strict allegiance to the 'if') reading novels leads to an increased development of empathy, this increased sense of empathy does not necessarily transfer into prosocial behavior. In this work I attempt to showcase ways that novelists who focus on the mother-employer¹/nanny² bond depict empathy while examining the ways that these presentations are

¹ Credit for this term goes to Cameron MacDonald who accurately points out that many nannies are mothers and both employer and employee work for their salary. I will refrain from using the term mother-caregiver due to the fact that the majority of caregivers in the novels presented are not mothers and even when caregivers are mothers their children play inconsequential roles in all but one novel.

² The definition of nanny can also be rather loose with some mother-employers feeling compelled to use or refuse this term as a result of the class connotations implied therein. There is little clarity in what sets a babysitter apart from a nanny, but for most, a nanny works full-time and has a broader set of responsibilities than a babysitter, with the latter seldom having responsibility for a

shaded when issues of class, race, and kinship bonds are introduced. I also examine how these presentations may affect readers during the reading experience and in their non-literary/real-life pursuits. Keen's theories, and others, will be interrogated throughout this work, but I contend that if one accepts that novels can promote the development of empathy in readers, then it would also seem reasonable to assert that reading novels about the mother-employer/nanny relationship may help both mother-employers and nannies become more effective compatriots in the realm of mothering and carework, which, significantly, I would define as being prosocial behavior. While issues related to child development and the child/caregiver bond are important, the primary goal of this work will be to examine the relationship between adult females. These relationships will take many forms, including the mother-employer/nanny relationship, the mother-reader/author relationship, and the female author/female fictional character relationship. Mother-employers' and nannies' individual relationships with the child(ren) in their care will be considered only tangentially and as it relates to their relationship with other adult women. Since many of the novelists and scholars herein highlight the power dynamics in the employer/employee relationship, I posit that analyzing these structures may help illuminate ways in which these power hierarchies could be diminished while simultaneously providing a framework for more beneficial female alliance building.

While the tide of responsibilities for mothers of material means has waxed and waned over the past one hundred years or so, particularly in the global North, currently, for reasons that will be explored later, many middle- and upper-middle-class women now delegate the physical labor of cleaning and the messy maintenance of young children to women who often differ from themselves in terms of race, class, and citizenship status. The precise figures are difficult to

child's doctor visits, laundry, daily transportation, etc. In this work the term nanny does not imply that the woman lives with her employer(s) or even that she is full time. It does, however, suggest a more meaningful role in the lives of her employing family than an occasional babysitter would.

ascertain due to the fact that domestic work is frequently part of the informal labor market. There has been a fair amount of debate amongst feminists regarding the outsourcing of domestic labor with discussions focusing primarily on the social equality of having another woman, often one who has few other opportunities for waged labor, perform low-status work for little pay. The underlying claim bolsters the notion that reproductive labor is undesirable work, although some women do find satisfaction in performing this work, particularly for those they love. Child carework can warrant its own subset of research within the broader scope of domestic work in light of the fact that there is more nuance to the work and the emotional labor that is inherent in the relationships that form can be both challenging and rewarding.³ While feminists like Joan Tronto argue against the social and economic injustices that are inherent in domestic labor as a whole, it is typically the outsourcing of childcare rather than housecleaning that excites the national consciousness. A primary reason that hiring a nanny is perceived differently than housecleaning is that when childcare is outsourced it is not only the physical work of motherhood that is delegated but, to varying degrees, the emotional labor as well, which in itself can foster further acrimony between mother-employer and nanny.

While it is understood by most that emotional support must be offered to the child(ren) in one's care when fulfilling the role of nanny, many mother-employers expect the caregiver hired to be a substitute that works tirelessly for little pay (thus mimicking her own uncompensated position) as well as provide her, as the employer, with on-demand emotional support. Mother-

³The more general label of domestic worker will be used when referring to an individual who completes a broad spectrum of services, which can but does not always include childcare. When a nanny also assumes responsibility for other aspects of reproductive labor, I will make note of that; however, while caregiving can be associated with a variety of people in need, I will use this term interchangeably with nanny since the context of this work eliminates other groups who may need care (e.g., the elderly or individuals with special needs). It is also important to recognize that housecleaning and carework entail rather different demands on the employee when done exclusively, with the former being arguably more physically taxing and mundane and the latter requiring more intense emotional labor and interpersonal skills. Women who are able to distinguish themselves from less desirable candidates by virtue of their nationality, citizenship, language skills, education level, and overall access to social capital often parse out the less desirable work as a matter of privilege and status.

employers themselves are often not aware of the ways in which they are expected to exert profound emotional labor for their family and often fail to recognize that the carework involved with tending a family is and should be considered labor.⁴ Moreover, many mother-employers, while recognizing the difficulty of their situation, have also subscribed to neoliberal beliefs that privilege independence and self-sufficiency and do not challenge the ways in which government reform could alleviate some of the challenges they face. As a result of the far-reaching responsibilities foisted upon mothers, the ambivalence many women experience when they outsource the care of their child(ren), and the unclear inventory of duties expected of the childcare provider, it is not unexpected that the relationship that exists between these women can be difficult. The strain felt by both mother-employers and nannies in these individual relationships is caused by myriad factors outside of their own personal spheres, which is a separate point that will be addressed shortly, but cumulatively they have broad implications. This cultural framework informs not only the authors and the novels they produce but their readers' experience with these novels as well.

Feminist scholars have also explored the ways in which power is allocated and maintained in these relationships, how globalization has affected the availability of domestic workers, the impact of women migrating and becoming breadwinners in relationships with male partners, and the consequences of children being raised without the hands-on care of biological mothers (Duffy; Parreñas, 2001; Rollins; and Tronto). Much of this research contends that women of material means carry the brunt of responsibility for perpetuating the injustices in labor relationships with other women. Tronto, for instance, specifically challenges white, middle-class feminists to examine the ways in which their own goals for succeeding at endeavors outside the home have occurred at the expense of women with fewer advantages. The moral issue, according

⁴See *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* by Arlie Hochschild for a more robust analysis of this topic.

to Tronto, is that "greater social and economic inequality and greater demands for child care have rearranged responsibilities" in such a way that women with greater material means are profiting from the labor of working-class women (35). This, she argues, "undercuts basic feminist notions of justice" and is "unjust for individuals and for society as a whole" (35). Moreover, Tronto believes that the "use of nannies allows upper-middle-class women and men to benefit from feminist changes without having to surrender the privilege of the traditional patriarchal family" (47). Her points are certainly compelling, as is her call for government-level reform; however, it is also fair to posit that this type of reform will not likely occur without substantial support from the very women who are benefitting from the system as it is currently constructed. While challenging, it seems that the mother-employer/nanny relationship can be one in which both women's needs are met, at least to a fair extent and therefore the personal relationships that exist between mother-employer and nanny, nanny and child, and mother and child should not be ignored. Nor, for that matter, should the ways that novels encourage female readers to view these relationships be overlooked. The ways in which motherhood is constructed, perceived, and experienced is critical to examine as one approaches literary fiction concerning mother-employers and nannies since both the authors who have written the texts and the readers who consume them often function within the confines of predetermined notions of mothering. As sociologist Marjorie DeVault argues: "Readers of at least some kinds of novels seem to use fictional accounts in making sense of the world, or, at least [...] feel entitled to use fictional portrayals as a basis for their own assertions about society" (888). These novels directly address issues that current mothers often confront and provide a format in which the conversation regarding women's labor, mothering, and feminist justice can be rooted.

Mother-employer/nanny relationships are one of the few places in our race- and class-conscious society in which women from different racial-ethnic and socioeconomic statuses meet with shared interest and investment. Typically both women want the labor agreement to be maintained, and frequently both women are invested in the mother-employer's children.⁵ While significant in their economic, political, and cultural weight, these relationships are often important in very personal ways to the individual women who participate in them and provide unique opportunities for women across differing races and classes to witness one another intimately and in an environment of shared compassion for the children with whom they have bonded. This is not to say that all nannies feel deep affection or love for the children they tend; some women enter the work out of economic necessity and lack of other options. However, for many nannies, these relationships can become quite important and the mutual affection can be a benefit of carework.

I contend that the reading of novels, which are informed by and inform these relationships, permits women to become more skilled at forming empathetic alliances. More specifically, I argue that reading literary fiction empathically may help foster personal understanding, improve interpersonal and labor dynamics between mother-employers and nannies, and promote political alliance building by exposing women to 'worlds' that may be foreign to them, particularly within the context of mother-employer/nanny relationships. By examining how these fictional relationships both mirror our women's angst and shape the ways women perceive the 'other,' we can more clearly understand entrenched ideologies and move toward a place of deeper knowledge and action-oriented empathy, which can ultimately be applied to the framework of daily life. Oppression, the ways in which love can be

⁵ MacDonald highlights in her work that some mother-employers purposely (and perpetually) limit the length of her nanny's employment in the belief that this will cause her child(ren) to be more emotionally reliant on her rather than develop deep attachments to then nanny (*Shadow Mothers* 76-78).

misappropriated, and the ways in which ignorance can disguise multiple ethical gaps are concepts that require continued critical attention; they are also the issues that lie at the heart of the relationship between mother-employers and the nannies they hire. When oppression is better articulated, love is sincere, and ignorance is unveiled, all of which can be achieved to varying degrees when one 'world'-travels in the sense that María Lugones recommends, mother-employer/nanny relationships may become more consistently beneficial to both sets of women.

II. Overview of Current Culture of Mothering in the United States

Before moving forward it is important to briefly examine the existing state of motherhood and employment in the United States. Culturally speaking, motherhood is seldom regarded as a high-status position in modern first-world nations despite the fact that the role is often romanticized, marketed, commodified, and manufactured. Despite earlier work on mothering by Adrienne Rich, Betty Friedan, and Dorothy Dinnerstein, amongst many others who have tried to underscore the patriarchal influences upon the structure of this role, Mary Romero still found truth in asserting the following in 2002: "Since fulfilling mother and wife roles are not considered labor, many household tasks involving the maintenance of the family are simply not counted as work" (*Maid in the USA* 51). The fallout of this statement is far-reaching and highlights the notion that many mothers in the global North feel unrewarded by carework that is culturally prescribed as tremendously enriching, experience their carework as being co-opted and formed into the institution that it is currently by patriarchal forces that undermine women's own ways of mothering, and feel that their work as caregivers is not regarded as emotionally and physically taxing labor. There is merit in arguing that these issues pertain more directly to women who are white, heterosexual, and financially secure, but some women who do not

identify with these markers likely experience similar difficulties. Prominent sociologist Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, for instance, alludes to each of these points when she outlines the challenges she faced as a result of the constant and unpredictable demands of being a mother while completing *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Despite hiring a Salvadoran cleaning woman, Hondagneu-Sotelo confesses that the "ironic rub" of her situation is that "I argue that cleaning houses and taking care of children is 'real work,' yet in the ways I live my life, I still define my real work as my teaching, research, and writing, not the varied activities involved in taking care of my children and home" (xxi). Friedan and Rich would likely commiserate with Hondagneu-Sotelo, as would the plethora of mothers who maintain blogs on motherhood, publish mommy memoirs, join mother advocacy groups, and tolerate their grievances silently or grouse only to close friends. Scores of books, journal articles, and mainstream magazine essays have attempted to define good mothering; isolate what qualities of mothering most help children succeed emotionally, physically, academically, and financially, and assuage some of the guilt that seems, at times, intrinsic to motherhood.

Whether describing oppression, subjugation, or dissatisfaction, it remains useful to contextualize these works within the broader framework of oppression in order to better understand the ways in which materially secure mothers as well nannies who have all, few, or none of the same social entitlements experience. Like Rich, Marilyn Frye sees all women existing within a culture of patriarchal-based oppression and like Tronto she examines the nature of oppression using a gestalt approach. However, unlike these two theorists Frye includes other subgroups in her analysis (e.g., African American men, homosexual men, etc.). She suggests that readers ask the following questions to help define oppression: "Who constructs and maintains it? Whose interests are served by its existence? Is it part of a structure which tends to confine,

reduce and immobilize some group?" (14). Frye later enters the terrain of empathy when she asserts, "Efficient exploitation of 'human resources' requires that the structures that refer the others' actions to the exploiter's ends must extend beneath the victim's skin" (60). In other words, while a group may reap the benefits of exploiting or oppressing another group, the nature of oppression means that the individuals in the group being oppressed come to see themselves as their oppressor does. This of course is not entirely different than Franz Fanon's analysis of oppression in *The Wretched of the Earth*, but Frye's primary subjects (i.e., women) are not part of a colonized culture and therefore dovetails with Keen's point that empathy is not always sanguine. Indeed, in the global North and the United States specifically, the oppressed are personally involved with the oppressor via marriage, co-parenting, and love, which Frye devotes an entire chapter to analyzing.

According to many mainstream press articles, modern, white, middle-class women in the global North do not see themselves as oppressed -- at least not to the degree that they were fifty or more years ago and Tronto's and Linda Hirshman's references regarding the disintegration of the glass ceiling suggest the same. Many women from other socio-economic classes and ethnicities may be less willing to state the same. Moreover, as even a precursory look at recent feminist publications will show, there are still many areas of reform that women of varying backgrounds would claim are unresolved. My goal is not to argue the veracity of Frye's claim, which she supports with passion, but to highlight the ways in which this same argument can be applied to many middle-class, white mother-employers who realize the same ends as the male oppressors in Frye's exposition. This exploitation is not entirely unexpected in part because, as Frye highlights, white women have historically aligned themselves with their (often) racially and economically similar husbands rather than with women of color. She explains:

But because we are both female *and white*, we belong to that group of women from which the men of that racially dominant group choose their mates. Because of that we are given some access to the benefits they have as members of the racially dominant male group -- access to material and educational benefits and the specious benefits of enjoying secondhand feelings of superiority and supremacy. We also have the specious benefit of a certain *hope* (a false hope, as it turns out) which women of subordinated races do not have, namely the hope of becoming actually dominant *with* the white men, as their 'equals'. This last pseudo-benefit binds us most closely to them in racial solidarity. (124-25)

This has been a point of contention for quite some time among many feminists, particularly feminists of color who believe that the agenda of white, middle-class feminism has been allowed to take center stage at the expense of their own goals.

Linda Bosniak and Bridget Anderson both specifically ground the financial success some women have achieved in domestic service and highlight the ways in which women in the global North are nearing the attainment of many of the goals set by second wave feminists in part by outsourcing time-consuming domestic work. The reproductive labor abdicated by women in the global North is often assumed by women from the global South. In the process, these middle- and upper-middle-class women position themselves as similarly placed men had heretofore, relying on cheap (or free) reproductive labor from less privileged individuals in order to have the temporal availability to secure achievements that are publicly valued. In "A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalism," Hester Eisenstein claims the concept that women must be incorporated into the market economy in order to achieve effective economic development has now become part of the "conventional wisdom of globalization" (511). With that said, Eisenstein

troubles the ways in which feminism, capitalism, and individual success are interwoven and packaged to sell in the global South. In "The 'Nanny' Question in Feminism," Tronto approaches the issue of middle- and upper-middle-class working women from a different angle, asking: "under what circumstances should social movements be responsible for the unjust, unintended consequences of their actions?" (36). Eisenstein and Tronto challenge feminists to consider the fallout white, middle-class feminism has had on women with fewer advantages. Despite Tronto's claim that she wants to avoid casting blame, both women, whether intentional or not, succeed in doing so.

Although the number of women employed has shifted over the past century, there was a marked and steady rise between the 1960s and 1990s that has more or less leveled off during the past two decades (<http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org>). While data can differ, particularly when mothers are counted collectively rather than examined in groups that are differentiated by the age of the children (since mothers of very young children stay home in greater numbers), the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics claims that the percentage of working mothers peaked in 2000 at just over seventy per cent.⁶ (The recent recession has also affected these numbers.) At this same time, much attention was given to the "opt-out" revolution, which was spurred on partly by Lisa Belkin's oft-cited 2003 article "The Opt-Out Revolution," which many argued was fallacious (see Heather Boushey's "Are Women Opting Out: Debunking the Myth"). What Belkin's article did accurately touch on (and likely why it became a lightning rod text) are issues similar to those raised by Friedan, Rich, and Hondagneu-Sotelo, specifically that combining motherhood with a career remains difficult. Moreover, at stake are traditional notions of what defines femininity and masculinity as well as what it is to be a feminist.

⁶ Other sources claim that the percentage peaked in the early 1990s.

In Belkin's assessment the reason women with expensive educations and ample bank accounts have decided to stay at home with their children rather than compete in the demanding 'rat race' of employment outside the home is that the majority of U.S. companies have overt policies as well as unspoken requirements that remain tailored to men who are either single or have a stay-at-home wife. Most of the women in Belkin's article have Ivy-league pedigrees, have married affluent men, and had maintained careers in competitive and lucrative fields before having children. Advice to secure financial independence via a fulfilling job did not prove to be a viable option when these women realized that they would not be able to truly succeed by current cultural prescriptions as either a worker or as a mother when doing both simultaneously. While Tronto claims "One of the great accomplishments of second-wave feminism was to end the gender caste barrier that had kept women out of professions," Belkin's women *elected* not to pursue a career, at least while their children were young and claimed feminism should be just as accommodating to women who chose stay-at-home motherhood as to women who sought to combine family life with a career (34).

In response to this, a flurry of articles and books were published regarding the importance of women staying in the workforce including *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job In the World is Still the Least Valuable* by Ann Crittenden, *Get to Work: ... And Get a Life, Before It's Too Late* by Hirshman, and the *New York Times* article "Back from the Mommy Track" by Deborah Jacobs. Hirshman specifically claims in "Homeward BOUND" that the women who contend that they have chosen to 'opt out' are participating in the "regime effect," which means that their choice to stay at home removes them from directly interacting with the elites that "supply the labor for the decision-making classes" (www.prospect.org). She contends that feminism "changed the workplace but didn't change men, and, more importantly, it

didn't fundamentally change how women related to men" (ibid). Hirshman holds liberal feminists responsible for this because they "abandoned the judgmental starting point of the movement in favor of offering women 'choices'"⁷ (ibid). She concludes that the corporate glass ceiling has already been deeply cracked, but women need to break the glass ceiling that covers their own homes and scrutinize the cultural influences that encourage them to remain homemakers if they are going to take advantage of it.

In 2012, Mary-Anne Slaughter stirred the pot again with her *Atlantic Monthly* article, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All." Countering Hirshman, Slaughter, who held a position as a professor and dean in Princeton's school of public and international affairs in addition to a foreign-policy job in government, claims that her "desire to be with [her] family" led her to conclude that "juggling high-level government work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible" (www.theatlantic.com). Despite being the woman with a "faintly superior smile" who was busy "congratulating herself on her unswerving commitment to the feminist cause, chatting smugly with her dwindling number of college or law-school friends who had reached and maintained their place on the highest rungs of their profession," she was now coming to realize that "glibly repeating 'you can have it all' is simply airbrushing reality" (ibid). With typical readers now hooked into smart phones, Facebook, and email, her article went viral almost immediately and the blogosphere blazed. To date, there has been more than two hundred and twenty thousand recommendations via Facebook alone, thus showing that this issue is far from resolved. Most recently, Judith Warner published "The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In"

⁷In both cases the core of the issue centers on socioeconomic class since working-class women seldom have a choice about whether to work and, historically, have not allowed that decision to impact their relationships with other women. Romero highlights this specifically when she addresses that many nannies of color do not experience the same sense of guilt that white working mothers are portrayed as having. Romero writes: "Unlike the characterizations in the literature that portray working mothers in conflict between worlds of work and family, the Chicana working mothers [in my study] described their employment as an extension of their homemaking activities" (62). It is oft-noted that this was also the case for African-American women after slavery but before the exodus from domestic service as well by many undocumented women in the global North who currently maintain waged work outside the home.

(www.nytimes.com). Warner argues that both the national recession and traditional-minded husbands persuade women to stay out of the workforce. Several of the women to whom Warner spoke, who are primarily middle- and upper-middle-class and well-educated, explained that their husbands wanted them to stay out of the workforce so that they would have someone to rely on after their own intense work days and who could manage the affairs at home. After taking the "off-ramp" at their husbands' requests and putting the needs of their children ahead of their own, these women often found re-entering the workforce at the level they had left it difficult at best.

With the constant back and forth on this topic, it is not surprising that all the heated talk has been dubbed the 'mommy wars' and texts such as *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* by Miriam Peskowitz and *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* by Leslie Morgan Steiner found their way to mainstream bookstores. The term 'mommy wars' is still alive and well, even used in academic journal articles. While a false and fluffy misnomer, at the heart of it lies a very real socio-political issue that encompasses competitive mothering, empathy, globalization, neoliberalism, and corporate labor policies. The term 'mommy wars' sells copy, but it is not the reality in most women's lives. According to Steiner the

tension between working and at-home moms IS real. But the worst mommy war is the one that rages inside each mom's head as she struggles to feel good about being a mom -- no matter what her choices about work. The inner battle plays out on an external stage -- through judgments about other moms. (www.lesliemorgansteiner.com)

What Steiner misses in this identity-based assessment is an examination of the reasons for *why* women feel that it is a struggle to feel good about their parenting choices as well as the consequences of unempathetic interactions. She also neglects the strong influence of neoliberal

ideologies that encourages women to feel that the 'choice' to raise their children in the way that they do is an independent one unrelated to privatized child care, labor models, and increasing austerity measures.

Despite a complete lack of monetary payment for their labor, mothers in the United States who subscribe to the model of intensive mothering take on the work they do for their families presumably as an extension of their love, their feminine need to care for those who are vulnerable, and a pure motivation to shape and raise one's child(ren). Intensive mothering is a term often credited to Sharon Hays and later summarized by Andrea O' Reilly as a means of mothering in which: 1. children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother; 2. mothering must be provided 24/7; 3. the mother must always put the children's needs before her own; 4. mothers must turn to the experts for instruction; 5. the mother is fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood; and 6. mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children (*Rocking the Cradle* 43). According to Julia Grant, historian Laurel Ulrich contrasts this term against "extensive mothering," which was the model used by necessity when women had numerous children and required help from kin, neighbors, and older siblings (15). Throughout the twentieth century, Grant explains, birthrates dropped overall and this permitted parents, specifically often mothers who also were likely to have increased literacy skills, to have more time to consult the plethora of books child development experts had been producing. Tronto asserts that for the "upper middle-class, 'good mothering' is inevitably tied to children's success in the context of a highly competitive capitalist environment" (41). She also posits that the post-WWII emphasis on a "child's intellectual development" has created a child-centered model that results in a "disavowal of maternal

authority" (41).⁸ In the introduction to the anthology *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering, and the Academy*, editor Sekile Nzinga-Johnson aligns herself with maternal theorists who "argue that the contemporary unbound expectation of intensive mothering operates as both a function of racial and class privilege and is an oppressive force against which all mothers should actively resist" despite its acceptance as the "measuring stick" of good parenting (13). There has already been some backlash against this, but this backlash has done little to assuage the guilt many mothers experience or the influx of mainstream media articles and internet sources that encourage participation in this form of childrearing. In the context of this work, it is important to consider how cultural influences shape readers' reactions to novels. The contours of intensive mothering presented in varying levels in each of the novels (particularly novels that were published in the very last part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century) highlight the escalating ambivalence women feel toward mothering and the guilt they experience for leaving their child(ren) in another woman's care. The depiction of this ambivalence, however, is limited almost exclusively to the mother-employers' experiences rather than including the nannies who also have children.⁹

Despite the constraints of intensive mothering, many women continue to see mothering as rewarding work that affirms their femininity, included therein are experiences and performances of carework, empathy, and love). In *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* Frye troubles the idea that love is a "willing and unconditional servitude" that "has been promoted as something ecstatic, noble, fulfilling and even redemptive" in "In and Out of Harm's Way: Arrogance and Love" (72). She posits that it is easy to be "taken in by this equation of servitude with love because we make two mistakes at once: we think, of both servitude and love,

⁸ As pointed out in the previous footnote, this overview is narrowly defined by aspects of class, race, and sexuality and should not be presumed to apply broadly to the experience of all women.

⁹ It is more common in novels about nannies that the nanny feels remiss for leaving the employer's children than her own.

that they are selfless or unselfish" and because "[w]e tend to think of them as attachments in which the person is not engaged because of self-interest and does not pursue self-interest" (73). As a result, she argues, this well-worn theory permits the woman who marries for money or the mercenary who enters combat for pay to be disparaged for not acting out of love. In the context of this work, the flawed premise of a mother serving her family out of boundless, selfless love is subverted when childcare is delegated to another woman. The mother of material means who has 'abandoned' her child(ren) is often scorned, particularly when her motivation is for 'selfish' ones rather than economic necessity.¹⁰ It seems this is moral ground women on either side of the mommy wars can stand on together. She, unlike the mother who claims fulfillment from full-time mothering or the working class mother who wants to provide materially for her children, garners little empathy. "Comparing and contrasting differing strategies of maternal work goes on among mothers all the time," according to Sara Ruddick in *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (23). However, she adds: "When it is generous and thoughtful, this collective, self-reflective activity is a source of critical and creative maternal thinking" (23). Empathy may be required to appreciate the choices others make particularly when those choices seem unintuitive or harmful.

Journalists Rachel Abramowitz and Kim Masters highlight this public scolding in their article "It's Mommy Dearest Versus Mary Poppins" when they write "in a world in which it's considered politically incorrect to mock almost any group, there is one exception: the middle- to upper-class mother [...] who dares to hire child care" (www.latimes.com). Citing the "blond, powerfully aerobicized, utterly fat-free Westside [of Los Angeles] mommy" in the movie

¹⁰ Men, on the other hand, escape judgment on this front almost entirely. While more men are stepping into the role of primary caregiver, culturally speaking it is still presumed that men would only do so out of duress (e.g., they have become widowed, unemployed, or are 'helping out' temporarily). They are seldom chastised to the same degree for abdicating responsibilities or for seeking childcare from outside the family.

Spanglish, Abramowitz and Masters claim that this "de-feminized" supporting character is "not just ridiculed, she is punished in an almost Dantesque fashion: by being shown in extremely unflattering contrast to her nanny, who is depicted as a more loving, far more functional human being" (www.latimes.com). Their argument posits that the "mom-with-help has become a caricature that reflects women's anxiety about relying on other women for child-care help and society's profound ambivalence about the whole arrangement" (ibid). They add: "Not only is there fear that these professional-class mothers are abdicating their family responsibility -- whether they work or not -- the suggestion is that they are actually becoming incompetent to be parents at all" (ibid). This assessment is not just asserted by journalists looking to sell copy. MacDonald substantiates this point when she claims that the American public "remains ambivalent toward mothers who leave their children in the care of others," adding, reactions to "women who could ostensibly afford to stay at home but do not, are especially intense" (1). Importantly, all the mothers who employ a nanny in the novels selected for this research do so by choice and when they participate in waged labor have seemingly opted to do so for personal rather than financial reasons.

III. Approach

Mother-employer/nanny relationships, which often straddle the small shared space between labor and love and traverse racial- and class-based boundaries, will be the subject of this research with a specific focus upon the ways in which empathy is developed in mother-employer/nanny relationships and how novelists depict characters in these relationships in order to maximize or minimize readers' empathy for either the mother-employer or nanny or, in some cases neither or both women. Ongoing analysis will be provided addressing what these

depictions reveal about contemporary mothering and feminism in the United States. While the initial goal of this research was to focus on the relationships that develop between mother-employers from the global North and nannies who originate from the global South, the dearth of literature that addresses this particular permutation prevented the development of a fully articulated argument. It proved difficult to define parameters narrow enough to complete meaningful comparison but broad enough that there would be enough literature to analyze. I determined that a suitable breadth would be permitted by focusing research on novels published after 1985 in the United States by female authors.¹¹ The slim selection of novels that met these criteria was further whittled down based on a rather loose definition of literary merit as well as the ways in which they specifically trouble class and race. Ultimately, I chose to work with seven novels (i.e., *Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon, *The Love Wife* by Gish Jen, *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid, *A Gate at the Stairs* by Lorrie Moore, *My Hollywood* by Mona Simpson, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, and *All the Finest Girls* by Alexandra Styron). Most of these novels are books that readers would consider 'pleasure reading' in that they are not overly taxing by virtue of sentence structure, vocabulary, plot development, utilization of formal literary devices, or overall length; however, the development of characters, distinctive story lines, attention to language, and more nuanced and/or complex themes allow these novels to resist being classified as 'chick lit.'

The decision to focus on these novels should not be construed as a disparagement to novels that are classified as chick lit since these novels, like their more erudite sisters on the

¹¹ While the focus of this dissertation will be exclusively on female U.S. authors, other countries, like Great Britain, have a much longer history of paid childcare with many canonical novels as well as modern novels reflecting this tradition. Interestingly, these novels seldom reflect the relationship between the mother-employer and the nanny, presumably in part due to class politics. The mother-employer is typically depicted as self-absorbed, punitive, unloving, absent, or deceased (e.g., *The Secret Garden* by Frances Burnett, *Nurse Matilda* by Christianna Brand [later adapted into the *Nanny McPhee* movies], *Agnes Grey* by Anne Brontë, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray, and the *Mary Poppins* series by Dr. P.L. Travers). In all of these novels the employers and nannies are presumed white. Only when one looks outside the global North does this pattern change. Moreover, like the trend in the U.S., most recent British novels on this topic are classified as 'chick lit' or 'romance' for reasons of writing style, unsubstantial character development, and the incorporation of formulaic storylines.

bookshelves can incorporate social commentary and satire. It is important to note, however, that some research regarding how empathy is constructed and interpreted in novels is steeped in a discussion regarding the literariness of the novel. David Miall, for instance, has produced a rather deep portfolio of work within this domain and in *Empathy and the Novel* Keen presents a thoughtful interrogation of the role empathy plays in contemporary literature, honing in on the issue of a novel's literariness. The gender of a novel's author and the gender of the presumed audience also play a role. According to Keen, the modern/postmodern period, which roughly coincided with the beginning of the twentieth century, has included a dismissal of novels that openly pander to emotionality by featuring sympathetic (perhaps even pathetic or sappy) characters, as was often the case in the Victorian and Romantic eras. She posits that as literature became less driven by readers' easy identification with characters and the shaping of moral conduct, novel genres that held these novels were quarantined from more challenging texts that did not provide effortless submersion and escapism that the former frequently encouraged, or at least permitted. Novels that did permit easy identification and escapism were and are often designated as 'middlebrow' literature and cast them into a category that is seldom studied academically. Keen, however, offers specific attention to 'women's fiction,' which she contends relies on sympathetic characters, relatable conflicts, and traditional story development and the two terms seem to be used interchangeably by her (19). These novels can serve as components to a much larger conversation on the power and privilege associated with changing gender roles and motherhood, and I will argue may open the door to developing informed empathy, and perhaps greater equity, between mother-employers and nannies.

IV. Empathy, Gender, and the Reader Experience

Before continuing it is important to commit to a usage of empathy since there is often disagreement about what the term means and how it should be used. In her article, "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," Amy Coplan opens by claiming that there is "still little consensus among scholars regarding how to best characterize the relationship between readers of fictional narratives and the characters in those narratives" (141). She draws on research by a handful of cognitive psychologists who have completed work on this topic. For instance, Mike Rinck and Gordon Bower found that "readers tend to adopt a position within the spatiotemporal framework of narratives that is based on the position of the protagonist," which, according to Coplan means that "readers were mentally moving through the building with the protagonist" (141). John Black, Terence Turner, and Bower found that readers process sentences that mesh with the protagonist's point of view more seamlessly than those expressed by other characters (142). She directly cites Paul Harris, who contends that subjects "kept the point of view of the protagonists in mind as they read the narratives, even if that point of view ignored or ran counter to what they knew about the emotional implications of the objective situation" (Coplan 143). Last but not least, Morton Gernbacher, H. Hill Goldsmith, and Rachel Robertson found that "readers often process the emotional implications of narrative events from the standpoint of one of the protagonists" (142). The grounding of her argument with the work described above privileges positivist research and the complications therein, but the scientific work does provide interesting input to consider in terms of how readers interact with specific fictional texts.

The slipperiness of empathy may be partially rooted in how identity relates to it. After Coplan offers her definition of empathy as a "complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion," she adds that when empathizing with another "It is not enough for me to

experience emotions related to or triggered by the target individual's emotions. I must experience emotions that are qualitatively the same as those of the target, though I may experience them *less intensely* than the target does" (144, italics added). She stresses, however, that throughout this process she "maintain[s] a clear sense of [her] own separate identity" (143). Diana Tietjens Meyers both refutes and extends this point when she posits that empathy "by no means entails sharing the other's point of view or endorsing the other's state of mind" but importantly adds: "like sympathy and unlike sizing people up, empathy is premised on concern for the other" (115). This contradicts the argument by some scholars who argue that empathy can be used intentionally for nefarious purposes, which is a point I will discuss more thoroughly momentarily. According to Coplan, empathy stands in contrast to "emotional contagion" and "sympathy," which, she claims, are often conflated with empathy even though neither is a direct synonym. Sympathy, Coplan contends, "involves [...] feeling *for* another" and does not "involve sharing the other's experience" (145).¹² This seems closer to Meyers' definition. These points of friction often occur when the terms sympathy and empathy are employed regardless of the discipline applying it. Ultimately, I will rely on Coplan's following point: "In order to successfully empathize, I must not confuse what *I* would experience with what *the target* experiences so I must be careful not to let aspects of my own characterization influence the central imaginative task" (146). This puts the conversation back into the terrain of semantics, but, while subtle, these differences are critical and have an important bearing on the work ahead.

Navigating the terrain of identity and empathy is difficult, but navigating narrative empathy can be even more challenging. No longer is the discussion about empathy between two people that experience empathy, but it is instead about empathy between a person and a fictional character developed by a third person. Moreover, empathy can only be unidirectional between

¹² This is the same definition of sympathy that I will be using in this work as well.

the reader and the character and the author and the character she develops, even when the author is trying to develop empathy in his/her reader. This does not discourage speculation regarding reader empathy. Coplan, for instance, argues that self-other differentiation between reader and character remains critical because this split allows readers to: 1. not act as if they are the protagonist, 2. permit the understanding of one's own experience of reading while also experiencing the conflict that the protagonist experiences, and 3. maintain boundaries between the character and the reader (144). However, this self-other split does not limit personal change for some theorists. Harrison, for instance, posits that narrative empathy may "operate by encouraging readers to identify resemblances that they might not otherwise observe in characters from other cultural groups" (270). This is a contentious point, particularly when one considers Judith Kegan Gardiner's essay "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," in which she applies theoretical work by Erik Erikson and Nancy Chodorow in order to outline the ways in which female identity can be fluid. Gardiner claims that empathy is an important aspect of "typical narrative strategies of women writers," particularly when one considers the "manipulation of identifications between narrator, author, and reader" (349). Gardiner further posits that readers "frequently judge characters and texts in terms of how their values and goals fit the readers' own, and readers can and do project themselves into the emotions and situations of fictional characters" ("Empathetic" 92). This projection, I argue, may change not only a reader's personal outlook but her actions and perhaps even cultural perceptions.

Also important to the framing of the analysis I provide, empathy is often attributed to women; Chodorow's work also supports this claim even as she resists essentialism. In many ways, Lugones, too, suggests feminists cultivate empathy, namely by traveling to places in which one experiences a situation as the other would experience it and remaining open to the challenges

that exist therein. Gardiner also focuses on women's development of empathy when she writes in the introduction her text *Rhys, Steed, Lessing, and the Politics of Empathy*: "Empathy in the twentieth-century Western culture has become a specially marked female trait, cognitive as well as affective, and potentially either good or ill, compassionate or manipulative and intrusive" (2). I am not particularly concerned with which gender may be more predisposed to experiencing or acting upon empathy. Rather, I care more about the *effects* of empathy. Suzanne Keen focuses her analysis here, too, and I will spend considerable time examining *Empathy and the Novel*, her recent work that probes how empathy forms via reading and whether empathy translates into prosocial behavior.

Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* presents a similar overview of the type of work Coplan presents, albeit more skeptically. She is clear in her argument that evidence supports the existence of empathy, which may develop from reading, but she stops short of claiming that the development and expression of empathy is directly correlated to prosocial behavior. Keen acknowledges that studies like the ones Coplan highlights suggest a deep interaction between reader and text and even permits that a sense of empathy often develops, but her argument that the reading experience inconclusively promotes prosocial behavior nevertheless remains clear throughout her text. While pulling from many academic terrains including the humanities, social science, and cognitive psychology, Keen makes a clear attempt to stymie the cultural flow by remaining dubious of the connection reading literature has long held with prosocial behavior. She does graze the surface, arguing, "Empathic anger and an empathic sense of injustice can each lead to personal, social, and ideological responses based on understandings of unfairness or evocation of righteous indignation on behalf of victims" (Keen 19). This is an important parsing of meaning, particularly in the full-throttle drive toward connecting the reading experience with

broader prosocial behavior. Keen finds the majority of the studies on the effects of readers' empathy inconclusive, at least in regard to the evidence that prosocial behavior results from reading empathetically. She resists the notion that the empathetic feelings readers generate after reading a novel correspond to prosocial behavior, although she acknowledges that this is a commonly espoused concept propagated by, amongst other people, authors themselves.

Interestingly, Keen posits that novels *can* inspire prosocial behavior; however, in order for this to happen there must be discussion regarding these texts. This method of discussion, which she references concisely (but repeatedly), can occur in a classroom or between a parent and child. They are troublingly hierarchical. I will return to this aspect of her argument in the conclusion. Reading in isolation is a different act with distinct consequences, Keen suggests. She is less inclined to agree that readers develop empathy specifically *from* the reading experience and instead hypothesizes that readers may come primed via myriad other factors including a psychological predisposition to empathy. She concedes that there are tantalizing data to support the inclination to conjoin reading and empathy with prosocial behavior and active, beneficial civic participation, including some that rely on the most current biofeedback technology; however, she resolutely challenges if novels are the impetus of these acts or if it is the people reading them who bring an inherent skill set that is expressed in their communities regardless of the material they read.

Published six years earlier than *Empathy and the Novel*, Hilde Lindeman Nelson's *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (2001) presents claims that contradict Keen's argument. (Keen never directly addresses Nelson's work.) Nelson proposes that because identities are narratively constituted and narratively damaged, they can be narratively repaired" (Nelson xii). For her, the novels and stories themselves are what inflict damage and can offer an opportunity

for restitution. This is done via counterstories,¹³ which Nelson posits, "redefine a past that has been, until now, characterized incorrectly" (18). Briefly, Nelson claims that narrative repair can occur if readers "identify the fragments of master narratives that have gone into the construction of an oppressive identity, noting how these fragments misrepresent persons [...] and situations" and then "retell the story about the person or the group to which the person belongs in such a way as to make visible the morally relevant details that the master narrative revealed as respectable moral agents" (7). Some of the novels that comprise the research herein embark upon a similar approach, including *Lucy* and *The Help*. Nelson posits that even though a counterstory may illuminate the life of a specific individual, it can be "generalized to revise a moral understanding about the group to which the individual belongs" (19). This is possible, she claims, because "oppressive identities are imposed on individuals precisely because of their membership in despised groups" (Nelson 19). While Keen puts nearly all onus on the reader to develop meaning and put meaning into action, Nelson places considerably more power in the hands of the story itself. These boundaries between text, author, and reader, as well as between experience and action, are critical and will be sharply interrogated throughout the work ahead.

It is worth noting that at no point does Keen undermine the importance of literature, rather she focuses specifically on whether fiction can spur prosocial action. Keen highlights the important role of fiction as fantasy when she argues at least four different times in *Empathy and the Novel* that reading may prove beneficial primarily because "readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion" (Keen 88). She posits that stories and storytelling seem to alert readers or listeners to a "text or performance's fictionality" and thereby "permits identification to occur regardless of factuality or verisimilitude" (Keen 69).

¹³ I will use this term interchangeably with the term counternarratives.

Moreover, she asserts: "Fiction may evoke empathy in part because it *cannot* make direct demands for action" (Keen 106). I disagree and will argue that these points are critical components in the effort to bridge differences between mother-employers and nannies. Not only do mother-employers and nannies often feel beholden to one another, but this relationship can also be intense by virtue of the emotional labor one invests with one's children or charges.

Witnessing a similar, albeit not identical, situation via literature may offer clarity that cannot be otherwise attained. It may also permit a 'lowering of the guard,' so to speak, and consequently initiate new avenues of reflection that may ultimately take shape in behavior that both parties find beneficial. Furthermore, I argue that it is this liminal 'sweet spot' that exists by virtue of both lived and fictional experiences that can coalesce into action for social change. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity and is where 'world'-travel becomes essential, even if it is not always successful.

Keen also writes: "No one text evokes the same responses in all of its readers, and not all texts succeed in stimulating readers to feel and act as their authors apparently wish" (4).

Certainly, some novels make more of an impact on specific readers than others, and novelists cannot control how readers interpret their work. Post-structuralism emphatically separates the text from the person who created it and much of literary criticism continues to maintain this divide. However, Keen states, "Empathic anger and an empathic sense of injustice can each lead to personal, social, and ideological responses based on understandings of unfairness or evocation of righteous indignation on behalf of victims" (19). It is these emotional experiences that I believe can (and do) elicit action despite Keen's unwillingness to contend the same. While researching *The Help*, I found a blog by Amy Sondova, who appears to be a white, twenty-something woman who is a self-identified Christian. In a review of *The Help* she claims the

novel goes "straight into 'life-changing, best books I've ever read," adding, "This book taught me that the barriers (or 'prisons') we make between 'us' and 'them' are truly ours to tear down. And I'm not talking about just racial barriers, but any barrier that keeps 'us' in the way of loving 'them'" (Sondova, <http://backseatwriter.wordpress.com/2011/08/15>). Sondova's post refers rather directly to developing an increased sense of empathy for people she would have previously considered different from herself, yet it still works within the parameters of Keen's argument in that Sondova does not list specific ways the book has affected her *actual* behavior and only refers to a change in mindset. According to Keen, internal change is not enough to warrant being considered prosocial change. I have a difficult time accepting this premise, and part of the difficulty I have with Keen's argument is that it seems farfetched to believe that if Sondova's mindset has changed to the degree she claims it has that there would not be prosocial changes, perhaps small and impermanent, that occur as a result. Moreover, it is worth asking if there should be a sharp division between personal change and prosocial change, which Keen seems to maintain.

The previous excerpt from Sondova's blog embodies a reaction that Frye explains is important. Frye writes:

The fullest participation of the novel in feminist change derives from the reader, especially the woman reader, who might find through the reading of novels the growing edge of her own humanity, extending beyond available roles and categories and into a renewed future. As she learns from female characters new ways to interpret her own and other women's experiences, she helps to reshape the culture's understanding of women and participates in the feminist alteration of human experience. (191)

Similarly, in "Novel Readings: The Social Organization of Interpretation," DeVault explains, "'novel readings' can develop from the shared experiences and perspectives of social groups located differently from those who have previously monopolized interpretive authority" (918). This, among other changes, can help support Frye's assertion that novels "take an active role in the broader patterns of cultural change" (199). Like DeVault, Frye, Gardiner and Nelson suggest it is not the act of reading a single novel that affects measurable changes in behavior. Instead, they suggest that a broader context regarding ethics, cultural norms, and definitions of optimal behavior is informed by the literature that is produced and consumed. DeVault further claims that the context formed by literature is unique. She posits that the "richness of the observation underlying a realistic novel means that it includes information not readily available in other public forms and gives us a sense of seeing into a different world" (917). It would be interesting to ascertain if Lugones would include this as a form of 'world'-travel, but either way, this broadening of perspective may be valuable.

Lugones, in her oft-anthologized essay "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling and Loving Perception," applies Frye's analysis of race, arrogance, and love to her life as a woman of privilege in Argentina and proposes that women should 'world'-travel as a means of better understanding one another. In this essay, Lugones explains not only the ignorance that was involved in not knowing her mother fully enough to love her but also in her relationship with servants. The intersecting points that connect mothering and servitude are critical to examine, particularly in light of the ways in which mothers are considered beings only in regard to the ways in which they serve others and are expressed through another's personality [i.e., her child(ren)'s], but it is equally fruitful to examine the ways in which this concept connects to feelings of dependency and the ways in which power is enacted in the relationship between

mother-employers and the nannies who tend their children. Similarly, it is important to explore, as two of the novels do, how the children in these relationships experience the addition of a nanny to their cadre of caregivers. In novels (and life), these interactions have myriad implications for the way domestic work is perceived, how the workers who perform the work are constructed, as well as how mother-employers view the women who fill this role in their stead. Many domestic workers, including nannies, claim they are taken for granted in similar ways.

Lugones espouses cultivating an openness to other people and cultures by becoming more familiar with the 'worlds' in which unfamiliar people live. It is important to note that for Lugones, a "'world' need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people" (10). As she defines it, a "'world' may be an incomplete visionary non-utopian construction of life or it may be a traditional construction of life" (10). Lugones encourages women to visit each other's 'worlds' -- 'worlds' that often inform who they are as individuals -- and posits that the "practice" of 'world'-travelling can be "skillful, creative, rich, enriching" and loving (3). Lugones explains that she finds this approach essential because "by travelling to their 'world' we can understand what it is to be them and *what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (17). Contending that white, middle-class women are not required to travel in the same way that women of color are regularly expected to, Lugones argues that these women remain inept 'world'-travelers, whose skills would improve if required, or if they were given the opportunity to develop these skills more regularly. This approach gestated in Lugones as she attempted to make meaning of her relationship with her mother, a woman she loved but whom she did not seek to imitate. She later tries to make sense of how her own willingness to be demanding of her mother in "far reaching" ways both curtailed

her interest in emulating her mother while mirroring the ways in which domestic servants must make themselves available to their employers. Lugones claims this is important because it is through this mother/daughter relationship that she was able to learn how her "failure" to love her mother connects with "White/Anglo women's failure to love women across racial and cultural boundaries" (5). She also stresses that the relationships between her and her mother is dissimilar to the relationship she maintained with domestic servants in that she "could both abuse and love my mother" yet knew that she was "not supposed to love servants" because "in the case of servants one is and is supposed to be clear about their servitude and the 'equation of servitude with love' is never to be thought clearly in those terms" (5, 6). Locating 'world'-travel as she does, it is surprising that Lugones does not reference empathy specifically. In many ways, it seems that these concepts closely resemble one another. As a result, while these terms will not be used interchangeably, the overlap will permit movement between the two.

As explained, Lugones' definition of 'world'-travel is based on travel in a metaphorical sense; in fact, she does not specifically cite physical travel. Similarly, Rachel Lee, in her review of Jen's *The Love Wife*, highlights the inherent class-bias that exists if one limits 'world'-travel to physical travel. She posits:

unless we also take into account dwelling and placement, and the way in which mobility has far-reaching effects even for those who've never been outside their hometowns, we unwittingly sustain a focus on privileged forms of travel, the kind undertaken most often by white men, at the risk of missing how a gendered and Third World lens reformulates the kinds of questions and narratives we find appropriate to our very discussion of displacement, immigration and our modes of engagement with other cultures. (14)

With this in the mind, I argue that reading novels is another way to 'world'-travel and may expand one's understanding and empathy for others. Readers and critics often talk about 'traveling' with a narrator or protagonist. An engrossing novel can certainly inspire these sensations, but it is important to analyze the ways in which these novels both encourage and restrict readers' empathy in the process. The reading of novels and ensuing 'world'-travel *can* (but does not always) strip readers of what Lugones calls "arrogance," which she believes is at the center of women's inability to understand each other more fully. Of course, it would not be challenging to argue that reading novels, which could be considered classist by virtue of the demands of time, education, and sometimes money, becomes further exclusionary when one considers the predominance of white, middle-class, female authors who address the topic of mother-employers and nannies and the similar demographics of the readers who consume these novels. This work will move toward examining the ways that authors both discourage and encourage the development of empathy within their novels and in their readers. When possible I will probe the (lack of) differences that occur when authors and/or characters vary by class, race, or other markers.

Furthermore, as feminist philosopher Alison Bailey argues: "In the process of traveling, our identities fall apart, our privilege-evasive scripts no longer work, and the luxury of retreating to a safe space is temporarily removed" (296). Reading, I theorize, permits readers to enter an environment that would be perceived as threatening in life outside the pages of a book more fully and with less dramatic real-life consequences. Novels can become imaginary landscapes to explore moral options and observe possible consequences. Keen posits a similar point arguing "narrative fiction may in fact enhance the potential for subjects to respond feelingly to situations and characters, disarming them of their customary suspicions and learned caution" (13).

Harrison, too, agrees, stating: "our relationships with fictional characters can help overcome psychological and sociological obstacles that define and restrict our relationships with other people," adding that the "deliberate treatment of cultural difference [...] can be especially useful for subverting similarity bias" (258, 259). Harrison also contends that psychological research continues to indicate that despite the "powerful constraint of similarity bias on interpersonal empathy, empathizing with fictional characters who are different from ourselves does not face the same impediment" (260). In other words, the novels that will be explicated permit readers, specifically mother-employers and nannies, to travel to places that may be unavailable other than via an imagined landscape due to emotional safeguards and other personal agendas. This approach, which should not be adopted solely by mother-employers but by nannies as well, is one that will be applied to the forthcoming novels with specific attention given to the ways in which characters permeate one another's 'worlds.' Significantly, Lugones sees this process as symbiotic and mutually beneficial. As the novels show, there are numerous instances in which the power in the mother-employer/nanny relationship is not solely top-down. However, there are also moments in the novels (and in sociological research) in which mother-employers make full use of their position of dominance. Recognizing the ways that each individual is not only an important contributor to the relationship but is also subject to complex motivations can be an avenue toward more productive alliance building.

By taking an initial foray into these fictional worlds, I hypothesize that opportunities for 'world'-travel in one's life may become more possible. This does not mean that novels can be or are an all-purpose salve particularly when one factors in the centuries of exploitation that women as a whole have experienced and more specifically women of color and workers have experienced at the hands of male and female oppressors. Additionally, some hazards are more

difficult to recognize than others. As mentioned briefly a bit ago, Keen challenges the ubiquitously sanguine image that empathy receives culturally. She claims that despite "scanty" evidence, "the faith in the relationship between reading narrative and moral or social benefits is so strong and pervasive that it remains a bedrock assumption of many scholars, philosophers, critics, and cultural commentators" (Keen 99). She counters this belief in a number of ways. First, as just noted, she pushes for closer inspection of scientific studies that connect reading with altruistic behavior. Second, she references some of the instances in which novels have been credited by the perpetrators of violence. (Although she does not mention censorship or the banning of books, these actions, which are often taken at the school level, speak to the cultural belief that books can influence behavior in negative ways.) Third, and more related to the work here, Keen draws on the ways that empathy, particularly as it relates to the reading experience, can be construed as ethnocentric. Her allegiance to the idea, which has been promulgated by other theorists, particularly feminist and postcolonial critics, is unclear. Offering an overview, she contends that these theorists consider empathy to be "yet another example of the Western imagination's imposition of its own values on cultures and peoples that it scarcely knows, but presumes to 'feel with,' in a cultural imperialism of the emotions" (147-48). Keen asks if our feelings of empathy are really "only egoism, recognition of the self, painted over the other's true experience?" (130).

In "Empathic Ways of Reading: Narcissism, Cultural Politics, and Russ's 'Female Man'," Gardiner addresses Keen's last two points. First, while Gardiner, too, recognizes that a reader might empathize with a character who perpetuates antisocial behavior, she argues "empathetic reading is nevertheless likely to be politically progressive in that it fosters an understanding of the emotional stakes" (108). Second, rather than see egoism as a detriment, Gardiner asserts that

the "relations people establish with books and literary characters are primarily 'narcissistic,'" and frames this in a way that suggests that they relate to the "goals, values, and self-images that readers project into the lives and emotions of fictional characters" (92). This form of egoism or narcissism sidesteps the negative connotation that it often carries culturally in the U.S. in the twenty-first century. Gardiner further claims that an empathetic reading strategy "fosters healthy narcissism with its heightened sense of subjectivity" thereby fostering in the reader the sense that there is a "need for social change" and "believing they have the agency to fight for it" (108). In other words, if social change is something that happens via the contributions of individuals, it would be those individuals who must recognize the ways that they need to change as well as be persuaded to advocate for legal and cultural shifts that would permit social change to become accepted.

Similar to my own argument, Victorian scholar Mary-Catherine Harrison claims "empathy for fictional characters can prompt ethical behavior in the extra-fictional world" (257). She sees this as a three-part process:

First, we imagine ourselves in the spatiotemporal and emotional place of a fictional character; second, that character is interpreted as part of a larger social category (for example, a poor character is interpreted more broadly as part of "the poor"); third, empathy for the fictional individual prompts -- at least potentially -- helping behavior for the social group. (257)

Her work, which provides a strong starting point and integrates research by C. Daniel Batson bolsters my own research, but I would like to refine this concept in two ways. First, I would like to see readers use Harrison's second point, which highlights inductive knowledge production and apply it to the micro-level relationships that occur between mother-employers and nannies.

Second, Harrison's work seems one-directional in the sense that it is, like many theories on empathy and altruism, geared at changing power differentials from the top-down. According to Richard Delgado *In The Coming Race War?*, "empathy reproduces power relations" (15). He argues that empathy often benefits the power elite in that it allows them to "make beneficial trades. If one has the ability to perceive what others want, one can offer them that and get what one wants in return" (16). This approach, which is based on manipulation rather than alliances, bestows "an evolutionary advantage" (16). In the format described by Delgado empathy is used as a tool to maintain power hierarchies, not dismantle them. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, semantics prove critical in a conversation regarding empathy, which Meyers supports in her essay "Moral Reflection: Beyond Impartial Reason," when she claims that the action Delgado describes is not truly empathy. According to Meyers, empathy is not a matter of "shrewdly sizing someone up" in order to gain the upper hand and argues that the term "presupposes some degree of concern for that person" (114). She argues that in order

To empathize well, it is often necessary to hold one's bounteous emotions in check and to mobilize one's emotions of attentive receptivity and analytic discernment. Particularly when the other's background or circumstances are very different from one's own, empathy may require protracted observation and painstaking imaginative reconstruction of the minutiae of the other's viewpoint. (115)

There are other forms of usury that may be inherent in empathy according to Mariana Ortega in "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color."

In this essay, Ortega explains that the current trend for white feminists is not to *exclude* women of color, but to *use* their voices to "legitimat[e] her own status as a Third Wave feminist" (62). According to Ortega, this type of feminist "sees herself as someone who really understands

women of color, who is putting the voices of these women on the map, who is 'giving' them a voice," but in the process "constructs a reality that is in fact closer to what she wants it to be rather than what it is" (62). (This argument will be revisited by highlighting the novelists' ethnicity in subsequent chapters as well as via a brief examination of the ways in which my own race and class may influence the production of this work.) Ortega correctly describes the "terrain white feminists traverse when they claim to be concerned about women of color" as "dangerous," particularly when they simultaneously become "fully engaged in production of ignorance about the lives of these women" (58). She asserts "ignorance goes hand in hand with the production of knowledge about the experience of women of color," which leads to a situation in which

women of color continue to be misunderstood, underrepresented, homogenized, disrespected, or subsumed under the experience of "universal sisterhood" while "knowledge" about them is being encouraged and disseminated and while feminism claims to be more concerned and more enlightened about the relations between white women and women of color. (62)

This will prove significant in the examination of the novels at hand. Only two novels in this body of research are written by women of color and none of the mother-employers depicted in these novels are women of color. This lacuna will be analyzed, but it is also important to examine the ways in which white authors speak for nannies of color, as in the novels by Stockett, Simpson, and Styron as well as the ways in which readers experience these characters. It is equally important to analyze the converse (i.e., women of color speaking for white women), which occurs in the novels by Jen and Kincaid. According to Lugones, however, the risk of error is less in these instances because many women of color find 'world'-travel to be compulsory in daily life and therefore are quite skilled at this technique.

With that said, Ortega concedes that not all "white feminists working on issues about women of color will always fall into the trap of loving, knowing ignorance" (65). The primary way for this to be achieved, she argues, is to "build relationships among white feminists and women of color" in which white feminists can "learn about the experiences of women who are not like them" (68). In other words, she recommends 'world'-travel. While women of color are a primary focal point of the following work, I am of western European heritage as are the majority of the authors of the novels that will be analyzed. Several (but by no means all) of the theorists that will be referenced are women of color, but, of course, their work is still read and interpreted through the framework of my experience and comprehension. Linda Alcoff, in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," posits that there is a "strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (6). There is some truth to these charges; however, it also seems that 'world'-travel can begin with the act of asserting what we know and what we believe in an attempt to initiate collaborative conversations. The discussion of literature can help provide contexts and create 'worlds' that facilitate the exchange between reform-minded individuals, regardless of their race and class identification. In order to nourish this type of conversation, this material will examine the ways in which novelists who construct characters of ethnicities that they themselves do not identify with may be speaking for others. I will argue that novelists who write in this way are not always "arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate," even when they construct stories that may be incomplete or include characters who fail to 'world'-travel. While incomplete, as all novels are, these novels can still stimulate a symbiotic exchange amongst readers. Errors in knowledge production, gaps in life experience, and inadequate belief systems can be confronted and

reassembled via the self-awareness and 'world'-travel that transpires via the act of writing, reading, contemplating, and discussing.

To be clear, this does not suggest that women of color should bear the responsibility for educating white women but instead asserts that a dialogic experience should be cultivated.

Lugones' argument that women of color are well-seasoned 'world'-travelers is often accurate, but there are certainly still misconceptions about cultural groups that would benefit from interrogation. She states, when "we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them -- fail to love them -- in this particularly deep way" (4). Lugones addresses the employer/domestic servant relationship directly when she explains: "It is clear to me that I was not supposed to love servants. I could abuse them without identifying with them, without seeing myself in them. When I came to the U.S. I learned that part of racism is the internalization of the propriety of abuse without identification" (5). This is one root of the hostility that can permeate the relationship between mother-employers and nannies. While Lugones' relationship with her servants exists in a 'world' that is considerably different than many North Americans inhabit, race- and class-based preconceptions still infuse nearly any mother-employer/nanny and perhaps employer's child/nanny relationship. Although a high level of intimacy, even if incomplete, may not be desired by either the mother-employer or the nanny or even both, traveling -- and the empathy for each other's life story, difficulties, and choices -- may help the relationship evolve into something that is more mutually advantageous and one in which communication fosters empathy.

The analysis herein is far from the first to suggest that women of significantly different backgrounds can align with one another over a shared distaste for reproductive labor but from

there theorists can strongly differ. Some recommend the eradication of outsourced reproductive labor, others advocate for more robust participation in reproductive labor by men, and still others petition for an acceptance of an imperfect system. Anderson, for instance, claims: "Feminists have tended to regard domestic work as the great leveler, a common burden imposed on women by patriarchy and lazy husbands," but she points out that when one group of women can outsource this work to another resentment can occur (1). Barbara Ehrenreich and Hochschild posit that the childcare market brings "ambitious and independent women of the world together," but not "in the way that second-wave feminists in affluent countries once liked to imagine – as sister and allies struggling to achieve common goals" (11). Romero warns that middle- and upper-middle-class feminists who hire women to clean or care for their children run the risk of claiming rights to sisterhood based on the "brute fact that all women share the burden of housework" but fail to recognize that they simultaneously continue to "enjoy class privilege in their ability to shift that burden to another woman" (*Maid* 195). Hondagneu-Sotelo, on the other hand, dismisses "abolitionist" stances on domestic work that staunchly claim "we cannot have a just society until everyone cleans up [...] after themselves, regardless of race, sex, or immigration or class status" (xxii). Even if this approach is ideal, it remains "utopian" and unfeasible (xxii). She suggests we try to improve the system rather than eradicate it, and the primary way to create improvements is to galvanize for greater recognition of reproductive labor and the domestic workers who complete the labor.

Like Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pei-Chia Lan looks for ways to make improvements to a broken system. In *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*, Lan contends that the "opposition between maid and madam wrecks the feminist romance of a global sisterhood" and therefore requires a "new conceptual lens to identify the commonalities and

differences across women" (241). She prefers to reference a "'continuity of domestic labor' to describe how women face similar oppression under the patriarchal division of domestic labor, subject to various constraints given their class, ethnic, and national positioning" (241). Anderson highlights an analogous continuity when she asserts that many women view reproductive labor that is physical in nature as different than emotional labor. Some mother-employers, for instance, retain aspects of parenting that involves emotional labor and creativity for themselves. Last but not least, it is important to recognize that some women do not see reproductive labor as particularly burdensome. Some mother-employer envy the time the nanny spends with her child(ren), particularly when her work outside the home may not be optional and/or gratifying. Moreover, in 1983, Bonnie Thornton Dill addresses how (un)desirable reproductive labor is perceived differently according to class and race when she highlights that many black feminists have felt estranged from goals established by white feminists in the global North particularly with the "emphasis on participation in the paid labor force and escape from the confines of the home" in light of the fact that they "would have readily accepted what they saw as the 'luxury' of being a housewife" (133). Thirty years later, several of these same divisions still exist.

Still, I see opportunities for reform in the mother-employer/nanny relationship in light of the emotional investment put forth by both women, even if that investment is based nearly exclusively on their respective relationships with the child(ren) of the mother-employer and not each other. Moreover, in many cases, both women feel they need the other in order to achieve personal or financial goals. These goals may include retaining employment, maintaining good standards of mothering, and fostering healthy emotional bonds with children. Despite the inherent barriers, I see the mother-employer/nanny relationship as rife with potential primarily because women who may be of vastly different backgrounds come together regularly with common

goals and a shared vulnerability. It is important to clarify that like Dill I do not endorse sisterhood, per se, at least not in its conventional sense; rather, I borrow her notion of alliance building and believe empathy may be a critical component. With that in mind, I disagree with Romero, who states, "Recognizing the opposing class positions of the women involved [in the mistress/maid dyad] transforms sisterhood either into another means for employers to extract emotional and physical labor, or, conversely, into the means for employees to improve working conditions and increase pay and benefits" (*Maid* 74). These arguments, like several brought forward regarding this relationship, presumes a zero-sum game. Anderson references power dynamics too but questionably places them only in the context of the employer. She writes: "The worker wants to earn as much money as she can with reasonable conditions, but the employer's wants are rather more complicated" (114). This, too, may hold more veracity for domestic cleaners than nannies, whose emotional connections with the child(ren) for whom they care and the families with whom they work can be substantial aspects of job (dis)satisfaction.

Interviews with childcare workers corroborate this point. After interviewing more than twenty childcare providers, Deborah Rutman claims caregivers often develop a sense of "powerfulness derived from the joy and satisfaction they receiv[e] from the work itself, that is, from caring for children and promoting their healthy development" (643). This, I would argue, is not entirely different from what most mother-employers want for their employees as well as for their children and highlights the ways in which this relationship is the antithesis of a zero-sum game. I argue that both mother-employer and nanny can benefit concurrently from developing empathy through 'world'-travel and the production of empathy. This empathy, which can improve labor conditions for the nanny, increase the nanny's level of commitment for the mother-employer and enhance the feelings of good will that the nanny exhibits toward both her

employer and her charge(s), may also serve as a model for other complex problems in feminism that could benefit from alliance building between women of differing backgrounds. The permutations of how these goals look, how they are enacted, and how they are enforced can deviate in profound ways, sometimes in ways that are irreconcilable. Other times, however, conversations ensue that are designed to keep these goals salient and are used for purposes of understanding, mediation, and achieving commonality. Rutman's participants also expressed interest in engaging in conversations that promote "mutual respect and recognition" (645). These feelings, I argue, are rooted in empathy. Furthermore, these conversations -- which bridge personal and professional goals -- involve personal investment, rest on a sense of symbiotic dependence, and can be the basis for much broader reform and alliance building. Last but not least, I hypothesize that reading literature is one means of encouraging this form of empathy development.

V. Current Fiction and Barriers to Alliance Building between Mother-Employers and Nannies

Part of conceptualizing what assists in the creation of empathy is understanding the obstacles to 'world' travel. There are five primary barriers that challenge the application of the theoretical work described heretofore to feminist alliance building. First, as Judith Rollins highlights in *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers*, power differentials are inherent in the relationship between domestic workers and the women who hire them. Anderson, too, concisely highlights that there "very real conflicts of interest between women as household managers and household workers, as the manager seeks to extract maximum hours and minimum wage" (20). Even in cases where race, class, social capital and other factors may be similar to the

mother-employer's, the inherent power differential that is intrinsic in the relationship cannot be erased, according to Rollins, who writes:

While any employer-employee relationship is by definition unequal, the mistress-servant relationship -- with its centuries of conventions of behavior, its historical association with slavery throughout the world, its unusual retention of feudal characteristics, and the tradition of the servant being not only of a lower class but also female, rural, and of a despised ethnic group -- provides an extreme and 'pure' example of a relationship of domination in close quarters. (7-8)

Rollins aptly argues here that even though power differentials are present in most labor relationships, domestic service remains atypical. She further emphasizes that in the United States the "lack of the feudal tradition and the democratic undercurrent in American thought continue to distinguish servitude [...] from that of Europe and continues the philosophical tension that had always existed" (53). In this regard, the U.S. remains separate (although not entirely so) from analysis that focuses on domestic service in Britain, such as *The Servant Problem: Domestic Employment in a Global Economy* by Rosie Cox and *Servicing the Middle Classes* by Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe.

The power differentials that exist in the labor relationship between the nannies who work in domestic service, including child care, and the women who are responsible for hiring them is distinctive from other labor-based relationships in three primary ways. First, it is one of the few examples of labor relations in which both the employer and employee are nearly always women. On this point, Rollins stresses that the "importance of the employer's being female in affecting the position, tone, and dynamics of the relationship cannot be overestimated" (179). Second, the relationship takes place within the auspices of bringing the capitalist marketplace into the

'sanctity' of the private home. And, third, the relationship is often significantly more personal and therefore emotionally charged than with nearly any other hired worker due to the jealousy, competition, and the level of trust that is required when one outsources the care of one's child(ren) to another individual. Anderson contends that a domestic worker is "not just a person who does a job; like the 'mother' and the 'wife' she is performing a role within the family" (21). The novels presented in the following chapters certainly attest to this, showing the emotional attachment, jealousy, and anger that both women experience.

Rollins posits that these factors restrict equality and that the mistress/domestic servant relationship cannot be reinvented because these power dynamics, which are intrinsic to its structure, negatively affect the tenor of the interactions between these women. Certainly, the fact that one woman holds the power to fire the other and pays her salary cannot be underestimated, particularly since that same woman often holds more power and privilege in society as a result of her race, material means, and social capital; however, it seems worthwhile to explore the argument that the same aspects Rollins highlights as making this relationship distinctive are the very factors that can help facilitate authentic 'world'-travel. Race and class collude in the United States in ways that make it difficult for women who come from contrasting 'worlds' to interact in meaningful ways, but the mother-employer/nanny relationship is a significant exception. With the joint interest in maintaining a healthy labor relationship, the opportunity to regularly witness one another in an intimate environment, as well as the invested interest both women likely share for one or more child(ren), mother-employers and nannies have an opportunity to 'world'-travel in a way that few other women are granted.

Every novel that will be analyzed in this dissertation deals with issues of power and the struggles that lie therein as well as the ways in which power is situated specifically in female-

female domestic care relationships. The issue at hand then becomes determining the ways in which class and race become further implicated in this pre-existing dynamic. It is critical to examine the ways in which authors depict mother-employers who exercise their power as well as the ways in which this power is interpreted and interrupted by the nannies in these novels. The mother-employers in these novels are not ubiquitously villainous by any means, and some even attempt to diffuse elements of the inherent power differentials for reasons pertaining to guilt for white privilege, a desire to perform multiculturalism, or ideologies regarding social justice. It will prove fruitful to mark the ways in which mother-employers' attitudes surrounding their perceived and actual power in the novels correspond to the time that the novel was originally published. Nannies certainly exert their own agency and challenge the power differentials that are in play. Whether extreme or understated, each nanny navigates this terrain differently.

Second, the level of emotional involvement intrinsic in the mother-employer/nanny relationship is often quite different than the typical labor relationship. Rollins posits that the relationship between a female employer and the domestic worker she hires is "extraordinarily complex" and contains elements of "[l]ove, economic exploitation, respect and disrespect, mutual dependency, intense self-interest, intimacy without genuine communication, [and] mutual protection" (178). Many women would argue that these aspects are only heightened in the mother-employer/ nanny relationship due to the level of trust that is involved in delegating the care of one's child(ren) to another woman. The complex emotions that result from the intensity of love that one typically has for one's child(ren) and the necessary interaction that exists between the women for the child's benefit can be difficult to manage. Lynet Uttal argues "[w]hen children spend many hours in nonparental care, mothers also become aware that the extensive and intimate involvement of childcare providers in the lives of children extends to their families,

making the relationship between the childcare provider and the child's mother critical" (11).

Moreover, as Julia Wrigley points out in *Other People's Children*, it is easier to see "whether the house is clean" than to see if "caregivers paid any attention to the children in their care" (6). In other words, not only is a high level of trust implicit in the relationship, but any lingering doubt can manifest in micromanaging. As a result of the unclear markers of success in caregiving, it is difficult not only to agree on what constitutes satisfactory performance, but it is also difficult to control the caregiver's work. As MacDonald argues, it is this lack of control that can prove unsettling for mother-employers and can contribute to an adversarial relationship.

With this intensity also comes complexity and the knowledge that the nanny is not a replaceable cog in the machinations of family life but a woman with a unique identity and skill set. When an employee in any field of work is difficult to replace the power differentials can be upset because the employer becomes more invested in maintaining the employee's satisfaction. This may be even more complicated in the labor relationship between mother-employers and nannies because, as Anderson contends, "domestic work is not definable in terms of tasks but in terms of a role which constructs and situates the worker within a certain set of social relationships" (21). In some cases, mother-employers care deeply for the nanny they have hired and will assist with financial difficulties, legal proceedings for immigration, and other personal issues. Provisions of time, money, and other resources can easily transcend basic humanity and morph into maternalism, however, which is a dynamic Rollins speaks strongly against since it can be a way that employers assert dominance and incur a feeling of indebtedness from the nanny. In these cases, a mother-employer's altruism may lead her to develop a savior complex in which she feels she can lay claim to a sense of righteousness and piety for extending herself past the norms of a typical business relationship to help the woman who is 'less fortunate' (typically

materially) than she is herself -- even, it is important to note, when she expects her nanny to work beyond the norms of a typical business relationship. Either unbalanced exchange is one that often results from a conflation of the responsibilities one has to kin versus the responsibilities one has as an employer or employee. Domestic workers, particularly nannies, are often called 'one of the family,' but in truth, they seldom are treated as such. As Wrigley points out, it is not uncommon for employers to "ask more from the caregiver than would be expected in ordinary business relationships" even though "they are not sure they want to transcend their own roles as employers" (89). Without clear boundaries, the borders between obligation, favors, and tasks that are central to child care labor become blurred.

Other times a mother-employer may offer assistance in order to be in the good graces of her nanny and hopefully lay claim to a nanny's continued service to her and her children. MacDonald does not see maternalism in these acts of 'goodwill,' but instead claims that mother-employers see their generosity as a "kind of insurance policy against maltreatment of their children" (63). Uttal and Wrigley found similar patterns with the latter noting that employers typically "do not forget that in offering aid they are also cementing ties that can help their children" (90). Presumably, there is an element of true altruism, but the situation is often muddled with other self-serving interests. Meanwhile, the mother-employer may begrudge the assistance she has provided believing she is trapped with little choice other than to give more than she would like in order to safeguard the relationship that has developed between the nanny and her child(ren). She may feel that the nanny is taking unfair advantage of this.

While there are often only shades of difference between why an act is performed, how it is perceived, and what is expected in return, these nuances highlight the sense of vulnerability that both women may experience. Moreover, the emotional involvement of the mother-employer,

and often the nanny, can also mean that *both* women feel that they are ones with less power in the relationship. According to Uttal, this is not unusual. She writes:

The political economy of the childcare market, which privatizes the care and devalues the labor, and the outdated ideological context, which questions mothers who transfer the care of their children to others, combine with the structural organization of daily care to complicate matters, because neither childcare providers nor mothers feel they have much power in the arrangement. (111)

With that said, it is important for both mother-employer *and* nanny to be open to 'world'-travel. In the opening to a review of *My Hollywood* culture columnist Hanna Rosin illustrates this point in an anecdote in which her nanny, who had cared for her children for nearly a decade accidentally crashed the car into a central pillar of our house. While her nanny immediately presumed Rosin would fire her, Rosin claims she could "honestly say that the thought never crossed [her] mind" because a "pile of bricks" was worth much less than a "decade's worth of love" for her children ("New Nanny Fiction," www.slate.com). In this case, it is difficult to discern if Rosin is boasting about her reaction, but she reports that, for her, the surprise lay in the "radically different reactions" she and her nanny had to the accident, which reinforced that "after all this time we are largely strangers" (ibid). Both women it seems felt that the other would thrive well without the other, when, in actuality, both felt a sense of powerlessness. There are clear overlays here with Lugones' work regarding entering the other's 'world,' and this accentuates the veracity of the claim that 'world'-travel could help these women feel more secure. Although with disclosure, comes risk.

This issue was put into stark relief when a mother, Helaine Olen, contributed an article titled "The New Nanny Diaries Are Online" to the *New York Times* defending her rationale for

firing her nanny, Tessy, after she read her blog about her sexual exploits and other behavior she felt was unbecoming for a child careworker (www.salon.com). The journalist covering the story claims that the conflict, which in this case was between women of similar social classes,

highlight[s] an uncomfortable condition of middle- and upper-class life that we don't like to talk about very much. It's incredibly hard to wrap our heads around the tricky contradictions and muddled ways we view the people -- usually female, with varying degrees of education, money, and racial advantages -- who help parents privileged enough to employ them balance the responsibilities of work, social life, and childrearing. It's a powder-keg relationship, packed with class, gender and age anxieties, doused with the lighter fluid of psychological transference and jealousy. (www.salon.com)

In "The Chronicles of a Nanny," Rebecca Traister also highlights a passage from Olen's essay in which she writes: "We often build up a mythology of friendship with our nannies, pretending the nanny admires us and loves our children so much that she would continue to visit even without pay" (qtd in Traister, www.salon.com). This fictive premise can be benign -- with the nanny and the mother-employer playing active roles in its construction. Emotion, rooted in a mother's love of her child(ren), can help form the belief that the nanny loves her children almost as much as she does and a nanny may play along for reasons pertaining to job security and financial reimbursement. Unfortunately, this can also lead to a nanny being undervalued because her labor is not seen as work.

In light of this, it is not surprising that some mother-employers admit that they simply do not want to become invested in the personal aspects of developing a relationship. Some women simply want to keep a professional distance, others feel that they do not have the time to invest in becoming better acquainted with the nanny they have hired, and still others seek to avoid

becoming complicit in a woman's life that they presume is inherently complex due to her placement in a less-privileged class. Wrigley notes that many mother-employers are "more resentful when class subordinates take time than when they take money" in light of the fact that these women "hire caregivers to reduce their load" and therefore "become angry when [the caregivers] add to it" (90). While this may seem standoffish in light of the intimacy of the work, Uttal suggests that in some cases this approach yields greater autonomy that can "turn the structurally hierarchical and racialized employer-employee relationship [...] into a respectful, client-service provider relationship" (130). As women gain more temporal distance from the romanticized stories of mammies and governesses and become better able to appreciate the 'worlds' of the women with whom they work, it seems possible that this last dynamic will be given the space needed to flourish, particularly if it is the goal of the employee. However, it seems unlikely that this relationship will ever mimic the more ascetic labor relationships seen in business for all the reasons mentioned heretofore.

Again, as would be expected in novels by women and about women, each of the novels contains relationships in which the primary conflict is interpersonal, with authors depicting a full range of emotional relationships between mother-employers and nannies. In *A Gate at the Stairs* and *Lucy* the mother-employers see their respective nannies as peers or even friends. In *The Help* and *Men and Angels* the mother-employers see their respective nannies as subordinates. In *The Love Wife* the mother-employer see the nanny as an adversary and in *My Hollywood* the relationship seems to contain elements of each of the aforementioned dynamics. Meanwhile, some relationships start out well with good intentions but devolve into irreconcilable acrimony while others experience initial challenges but become more congenial as result of bilaterally resolving the conflict.

The nannies, on the other hand, also experience a wide gamut of emotions for the mother-employers as well as toward the children they tend. In *Lucy*, the narrator, after securing separate employment and relinquishing her desire for a mother-substitute (including the anger involved therein), befriends her former employer. In *The Love Wife*, the nanny sees the mother-employer as an adversary, with only a glimmer of hope for reconciliation at the conclusion of the novel. Some nannies feel incapable of entering the 'world' of their mother-employer either because they judge the mother-employer for poor parenting or because they feel they are ill-treated. Some mother-employer/nanny relationships defy categorization. Similarly, in some novels the nannies develop close relationships with the children they care for (i.e., *A Gate at the Stairs*, *The Help*, and *My Hollywood*), whereas others barely reference the children with whom they spend so much time (i.e., *Lucy* and *All the Finest Girls*). Moreover, some mother-employers fret about the close bond that develops between their children and the nanny (i.e., *Men and Angels*, *A Gate at the Stairs*, and *The Love Wife*) whereas others seem to recognize the inevitability and necessity of this bond (i.e., *Men and Angels* and *A Gate at the Stairs*). These feelings are not mutually exclusive as the aforementioned lists show. The relationship that exists between mother-employer and nanny can have direct roots to this bond as a result of insecurity, jealousy, anger, or love. In sum, there are few consistencies in these novels, which mirrors the wide variety of relationships that exist in real life.

Third, the immigration status of the nanny and the strength of nation-states that export their human capital can play large roles in the degree of exploitation that nannies may experience, which affects the formation of alliances as well. Actions taken by the World Trade Organization (and other similar organizations) along with the overall ability more women have to travel outside of their homeland has led to an influx of cheap labor. The U.S. seems unwilling

to enforce immigration/ labor policies due to the economic boon that unauthorized labor provides.¹⁴ Moreover, many developing countries rely heavily on the remittances these women send back to their families and are reluctant to protect their citizens when they are abroad (see: Anderson; Guevarra; Parreñas, 2001). Even if the desire to assist were present it is unlikely these besieged governments would have the political power required to create fundamental change. For some women with tentative legal status, particularly those who lack strong language skills and have only received a modicum of formal education, childcare is one of the few positions they can secure that permits them to contribute the much-needed funds their families require.¹⁵ Due to current government regulations, many women who pursue work in the United States must leave their families, including their children, in order to earn a wage that will offset the poverty and lack of educational opportunity.

There has been significant work done by feminist scholars on this front, including by many of the sociologists already referenced as well as by Saskia Sassen. Most of the sociologists cited agree with Cox's belief that structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have been "designed to cut government spending and encourage foreign investment and include measures such as reducing expenditure on health and education programmes, ending food subsidies, reducing wage rates, devaluing local currency and privatizing state-owned enterprises" (Cox 18). She argues that while these "measures are meant to promote efficiency and competitiveness in the adjusting country and so create future wealth through the resultant expansion of the private

¹⁴ See Grace Chang's *Disposable Domesticity*.

¹⁵ Of course not all women who enter childcare do so because they cannot find other work. For some women childcare is a calling that fulfills what they perceive to be a basic need in themselves. Childcare positions can fill atypical hours for others (e.g., college students, food servers, teachers, and even mothers who either seek to stay at home with their young children or mothers with older children who may be in school for most of the day). These women are often perceived differently than undocumented caregivers, as Anderson highlights in her research, and "make up a much smaller part of the employee pool than immigrant women from developing countries," according to Wrigley (48). The most convincing evidence for this is the salary and other professional perks that each of these groups can expect to receive from employers who hire them.

sector," they have had a severely detrimental effect on women internationally (Cox 18). These programs have had a profound impact on immigration patterns. Several well-regarded sociologists have examined the ways in which neoliberalism, SAPs, and immigration have altered migration patterns, particularly by focusing on the women who emigrate, the husbands who are asked to adapt to different gender expectations, the children whose mothers have left in order to provide them with material items and educational opportunities, and the ways in which the immigration of such a vast pool of cheap feminized labor has impacted the U.S. economy and family life therein (see: Anderson, 2000; Chang; Ehrenreich, 2002; Glenn; Guevarra; Hochschild, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; MacDonald, 2010; Misra; Parreñas, 2001; Romero, 2002; Uttal; Wrigley). These macrolevel structures of power differentials are often mirrored in the microcosm of an individual's home. For instance, immigration status often involves issues of class and race and is an issue of national policy structuring, but the vulnerability that results from working without documentation can encourage an undocumented woman to seek a live-in position while leaving her more susceptible to abuse by an employer (see: Parreñas). The broad strokes offered here are only meant to provide the most basic grounding for the explications ahead. Suffice it to say, it would be advantageous to any scholar committed to reform on this front to consult research already conducted. As noted, these issues have not been addressed sufficiently in contemporary fiction.

The ways that class, race, and cultural differences coalesce can prohibit the communication and empathy that is required to 'world'-travel. As Lugones highlights, white women in the global North are rarely expected to 'world'-travel and some white authors may fear, as Alcoff points out, that it would be "arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" for them to speak for women whose 'worlds' are foreign to them. "Narrative empathy," on the other

hand, according to Harrison, can "operate by encouraging readers to identify resemblances that they might not otherwise observe in characters from other cultural groups" (270). It is clear that authors recognize the importance of 'world'-traveling, however, via the incorporation of literal travel in the plot of many novels and via the reliance on multiple narrative perspectives. While globalization will not be the focus of this dissertation, the ways in which proficient 'world'-travel impacts the development of novels and the empathy that is derived from reading these novels will be examined closely. Considerable time will be allocated to analyzing how travel is contextualized in *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*. In both of these novels, readers witness profound changes in the narrator's perspective as a result of literal and figurative travel. Ample space will be devoted to examining the ways that class and race collide via 'world'-travel and the ways that physical travel can both inspire and occasionally restrict metamorphoses. In *My Hollywood*, both characters travel on more than one occasion and both experience substantial 'world'-travel as well. In *All the Finest Girls*, which is told in first person, the narrator is a young woman who visits St. Clair for the funeral of her childhood nanny and in the process becomes better acquainted with her nanny's own children. This divergence from the mother-employer/nanny relationship permits examination of the ways in which the changes taking place in traditional mother/child relationships is perceived by children. Being that intensive mothering invests heavily in the child's satisfaction and success, this analysis will also provide room to examine the ways that the mother-employer/nanny relationship ripples out. The theme of emotional and physical travel will be highlighted in the explications of the other novels that appear in this dissertation when it is fitting to do so. Space will also be dedicated to analyzing the ways in which authors encourage readers to travel via reading and how this travel can alter readers' perspectives in the process.

The fourth issue that often affects alliance building between mother-employers and the nannies they hire is the allegiance that many mothers have to intensive mothering. As already highlighted, the majority of mothers in the U.S. are employed outside the home. While not all working mothers employ a nanny, some type of childcare must be obtained, and, regardless of the choice, it will deviate from the ideal that is dictated by intensive mothering. This is significant because as MacDonald points out: "Never before have the daily lives of so many American mothers been so at odds with prevailing beliefs about children's needs. This historical period is particularly significant in that it is *white middle-class women* whose approach to parenting is viewed as deviant" (3). The ambivalence these women feel regarding their choices can be blatant as shown via the discussion on the mommy wars or in movies like *Spanglish* or *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*. Other times it can be less overt, manifesting itself in a taut relationship between mother-employer and nanny. It is not just the mother-employers who are affected by subscribing to this ideology, however. MacDonald argues that the intensive-mothering ideal discourages "caregivers' willingness to trade fair pay for recognition" and that the "emphasis on self-sacrifice" has "produced a race to the bottom for nannies as they gave up more and more of themselves and their rights as workers in order to prove their worth as caregivers" (161). Moreover, while mass media, in the global North at least, typically focuses on the plight of the white, middle-class mother-employer, some nannies of color who are also mothers experience emotional difficulties as a result of feeling that they have 'abandoned' their own children.

Intensive mothering also fosters a belief that children are commodities in the global struggle for financial stability. In this form of competitive childrearing the global market, and what can be extracted from it, is seen as a zero-sum game and therefore each participant must

jockey for the largest share. As a result, each woman is encouraged to be pitted against the other in an effort to have her own children become the ones who are best in line to succeed. This model, which is often adopted by middle- and upper-middle-class parents in the global North, persuades many a mother to hire a nanny even when it is understood that the nanny and her own child(ren) may be disadvantaged in the process. Class differences also mean that paid childcare looks radically different for the mother-employers who have the means to purchase the best care possible compared to those lower in the 'nanny chain,' to use Hochschild's term, who must make do with the care that they can afford even if it means leaving small children in the care of slightly older siblings or in unsafe formal care. Unfortunately, even if the mothers are able to make peace with joining the paid labor force (regardless of if it is a choice or not), their children are still raised in societies that place a high value on the relationship between a biological mother and her child(ren). Children raised in the care of a woman other than the mother may feel bereft, as Parreñas highlights in *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*. Styron's novel, *All the Finest Girls*, which will be discussed in chapter four, confronts this issue.

The differences a nanny has from the mother-employer in terms of class can create difficult terrain in regard to cultural beliefs about mothering, too. These beliefs can inform the ways that power is wielded or resisted in the arena of intensive mothering. MacDonald posits:

Like their counterparts in other classes, mothers in the professional and upper-middle classes perceive their duty as mothers as forming a solid attachment with their children. But in addition to this, these mothers hold themselves responsible for successfully transmitting status to their children. They must pass on their education and skills in the form of human capital; they must pass on their class-based habitus in the form of cultural capital; and they must give their children the right connections through social capital.

Most studies of motherhood underestimate the pressure that middle- and upper-middle-class women feel to ensure their children's upward mobility -- or at least status stability -- particularly in a time of great risk and volatility. Existing research often seems to assume that status attainment is a 'natural process' that takes no particular effort, provided that parents have the proper educational background themselves, or that the family has adequate financial resources to provide for college. (202)

In other words, even when a woman hires a nanny, she still retains a sense of responsibility to not only make sure her children acquire her *own* values, morals, and social capital, but also in turn feels that she must monitor the nanny she hires so that the nanny will follow the prescription for success that she believes is necessary. MacDonald found that the working mothers in her study "felt responsible for everything that occurred inside and outside their homes during their absence, and how those activities or relationships might affect their children over time, as they grew into adulthood" (104). She concludes that "[t]his sense of blanket accountability, the never-ending responsibility for how their children turn out, haunts mothers as a panoptic gaze" (202). Mothers internalize this way of thinking in infinite ways.

Nannies bear their own discomfort under the panoptic gaze, only for nannies it is often in the form of intense employer scrutiny (e.g., filling out hourly logs for parents, intrusions of privacy by nanny cams and other technologies of distrust, regulation of wardrobe, monitoring social relationships, prohibiting romantic partners from visiting the home), experiencing unsubstantiated claims on websites that permit other caregivers and/or mothers to report potential indiscretions, and a broad-spectrum watchfulness by the general public and media that often privileges biological mothers as providing the gold standard of childrearing. These efforts are often taken to insure one's self against those who dole out judgment upon mothers who do not

fulfill their 'obligations' and by women who feel that they are remiss in outsourcing their child(ren)'s care. According to Ruddick, "Teacher, grandparents, mates, friends, employers, even anonymous passerby can judge a mother by her child's behavior and find her wanting" (111). I hypothesize that, while this is true, mothers also receive the benefit of the doubt, whereas nannies often do not.

This aspect of tending children is not brought forward to establish a race to the bottom in terms of oppression or to set up a false comparison between two sets of women whose experiences with the public gaze are quite different but to highlight the ways in which both sets of women are constrained, monitored, judged, and disciplined.¹⁶ It also highlights the ways in which mothers replicate the oppression they have experienced. A mother-employer's effort to micromanage her nanny can elicit in the nanny feelings of incompetency and/or hostility that can cause rifts in relationships. The ideology of intensive mothering affects the fabric of each novel in this dissertation in profound ways and since this will be one of the key aspects of the research that follows, specific examples of the ways in which this plays out in the novels that comprise this research will not be provided here.

Fifth, the difficulty of establishing alliances between women from the global North and women in the global South as well as across race and class differences solely in the global North has been the subject of discussion in women's studies for several decades. The term 'sisterhood,' which can be a descriptor for the bond that exists between all women based on their shared oppression rooted in gender, is rife with misunderstanding as well as legitimate concerns regarding a lack of shared objectives and histories. Understandably, some feminist theorists believe truly symbiotic sisterhood-based alliances are impossible due to colonialism,

¹⁶ See MacDonald, 99-101.

imperialism, and oppression among other social factors. Exploitation also plays a role. Romero, for instance, argues:

Hiring a woman from a different class and ethnic background to do the household labor provides white middle-class women with an escape from both the stigma and the drudgery of the work. White middle-class women not only benefit from racial and class discrimination which provides them cheap labor but actively contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of an oppressive system by continuing to pay low wage and by not providing health insurance, social security, sick pay, and vacation. (*Maid* 73)

She adds: "In their own homes middle-class white women make decisions that transform sisterhood into a means either to extract emotional and physical labor or, conversely, to improve working conditions and to increase pay and benefits for women of color employed to do their housework" (*Maid* 150). Indeed, for many women the rhetoric of sisterhood has been used to gloss over very real challenges that exist for women who do not benefit from the advantages some women experience as a result of their race, class, sexual preference, and/or religion among other factors.

As mentioned briefly earlier, Frye asserts that white women, including women like herself, "are almost white men, being white, at least, and sometimes more-or-less honorary men," which allows them to "cling to a hope of true membership in the dominant and powerful group" (121). Again, the veracity of this statement is worth examining more closely, but it can certainly be asserted that women who have discarded their role as homemaker, as well as the innumerable tasks that are presumed to fall under the purview of the role, see their 'substitute' as one who should assume *all* the tasks that she would have performed herself without challenging the patriarchal structure of their homes. Romero states:

Relationships between white women employers and minority women are strained by the nature of the work domestics are expected to do. Women of color are hired to perform not only physical labor but emotional labor as well, and they are used to fulfill psychological needs. Housewives, whose work is defined as an expression of love, expect a domestic to possess similar emotional attachment to the work and to demonstrate loyalty to her employer. It follows that the more personal service is included in the domestic's daily work, the more emotional labor is extracted and the more likely the employer will insist that the domestic is 'one of the family'. Conflict arising from the extraction of emotional labor may be related to the employer's refusal to pay for fulfilling psychological needs. (*Maid* 73)

Again, just as women in heterosexual couples are often expected to carry the brunt of the emotional labor in romantic relationships, nannies are expected to do the same for their female employers.¹⁷

These aspects of life can be difficult to see in the often muddled experience of life with the tangential distractions and immediacy of children's needs. Wrigley notes:

People from very different backgrounds seldom have intimate encounters. Caregiving relationships, though, bring parents and caregivers together in the emotionally and culturally charged sphere of child rearing. Their conflicts, power struggles, and attachments illuminate tacit cultural assumptions. Only when people are faced with 'the shock of the other' do they realize what their values are. (4)

This shock Wrigley references can be difficult to process, particularly when it is so personal and unamalgamated. Lugones' work, however, addresses her optimism that 'world'-travel will dissipate the 'shock of the other' and lead to more fruitful female alliance. Literary works can

¹⁷Nannies impact heterosexual relationships in other ways as will be highlighted in the conclusion and discussed in future work.

offer a distilled and knowable perspective and are often quite adept at revealing the 'private' nature of relationships -- especially those injected with issues of class and race and which ask us to question our own biases. Keen argues, "fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers' feeling empathy" in part because readers can engage "without experiencing a resultant demand on real-world action" (4). I argue that the inherent intimacy of the mother-nanny relationship whether in real life or as it is depicted in literature can be a location rife with potential. Even if the first forays are awkward, eventually skill and grace grow and the individual will feel more comfortable encountering 'worlds' that hold few similarities and put their ideas for reform into practice.

VI. Format

With this in mind, the proposed dissertation will begin by analyzing the contours of the relationships that evolve between nannies and U.S. mothers, specifically through the lenses of class and race. Marilyn Frye's, Lugones', and Ortega's theoretical work will be integrated as structural support that will complement the analysis offered regarding empathy. Frye's essays on oppression, race, and arrogance and love will be used to help redefine the ways in which mother-employers are, at times, replicating models of oppression that have been (and are) used against most women by many men, particularly focusing on the ways in which ingrained attitudes of superiority, paternalism/ maternalism, ignorance, exploitation and oppression may contribute to less productive relationships between mother-employers and the women they hire to tend to their children. When warranted, work by sociologists (particularly Anderson, Hondagneu-Sotelo, MacDonald, Parreñas, Rollins, Romero, and Wrigley) will be utilized to help explain the cultural underpinnings that are brought into relief by characters in the selected novels, particularly

concerning attitudes about mothering, power structures in domestic labor, and globalization trends. Although determining author intent can be thorny, there will be times when the author's biographical information will be incorporated in order to provide a context to the period in which the novel was written or, as occurs in two novels, when the author has included a personal biography as an addendum to the novel outlining her own relationship with a nanny as a child.

Chapter two focuses on class and relies upon two novels in its analysis. In *A Gate at the Stairs*, Moore highlights a burgeoning relationship between a local college student, Tassie, who is the daughter of an artisan farmer, and a restaurant owner, Sarah, who adopts a bi-racial child. Both women are white. Due to similarities in access to social capital, Sarah fosters a personal and egalitarian relationship with Tassie, who is the sole narrator, but the novel's conclusion demonstrates that despite the rhetoric of Tassie being part of the family, she is not. The second novel is *Men and Angels* by Gordon, which focuses on a traditional suburban family and the young, American nanny named Laura who joins their family so the mother, Anne, can pursue her academic research on a female painter. Again, both women are white but in this novel Laura comes from a working-class family in which she felt ostracized and unloved by her mother and as a result turns to religion to replace the lack of affection. As her mission to 'save' Anne's children (or at least their souls) heightens, her care becomes more questionable. Gordon permits both characters narrative space via alternating chapters, but as the relationship between Anne and Laura grows increasingly tense, culminating in an unsentimentalized tragedy at the end of the novel, Laura's voice is literally drowned out. This chapter will argue that class, while certainly a critical component in the development of a positive relationship, is only one of many barriers to alliance building between characters. It will also identify the ways in which these authors use a character's class to restrict or encourage empathy from readers.

Twisting the kaleidoscope slightly away from class while still keeping in mind the ways in which class influences race, chapter three hones in on the specific ways race can impact relationships between mother-employers and the nannies they hire. This chapter will argue that the mother-employer relationship is being depicted with increasing complexity in novels, partly as a result of the ways in which white mother-employers in these novels express ambivalence about utilizing the power that they have by virtue of their race, class, and kinship norms. This chapter will also explore the ways in which multiculturalism and intensive mothering contribute to mother-employers' fear that they have become outsiders-within their own families and, as a result, promotes some women to stabilize their position by claiming the identity of savior. Three novels will form the basis of this research.

The first novel in this chapter is Kincaid's *Lucy*, which explores the problematic notion of the white savior via Mariah, a 'progressive' upper-class woman and her fascination with their nanny, Lucy, who is a young woman originating from the West Indies. *Lucy* is one of two novels in this dissertation that is told by a single narrator and the only novel that contains a sole narrator who is a woman of color. (Kincaid is one of only two authors in the scope of this research who is a woman of color herself.) The nanny in this novel, Lucy, can be antagonistic toward the mother-employer; her anger is rooted in her angst regarding her relationship with her mother as well as her struggles growing up under colonial British rule. The novel's theme of colonization is often analyzed in literary criticism essays, and in many ways the relationship that exists between Mariah and Lucy reflect this relationship. Lucy is undoubtedly the more sympathetic of the two primary characters, which is expected as the sole narrator, but Kincaid's novel simultaneously raises questions regarding how race and class are viewed by some upper-class individuals and how cultural beliefs both erase individuals of non-Caucasian races and working-class

backgrounds from mainstream society while also bestowing upon them certain qualities including privileged insight, earthy pluckiness, ability to thrive in desperate circumstances, and general independence. Not only does the issue of benevolence come forward again, but it becomes co-mingled in complicated ways for Mariah, who experiences guilt for the opportunities her race provides her while remaining ignorant of the true reach of her privilege.

The second novel in chapter three is *The Love Wife* by Jen, which depicts a nanny who comes to assist a multiracial family as the result of Carnegie's grandmother's last will and testament. Due to Carnegie's interracial marriage to a white woman his mother nicknames Blondie, Mama Wong decides to send a relative, Lan, from China to live with the family and inculcate the children (two of whom are of Asian descent and have been adopted and one of whom is biological but appears Caucasian) with traditional Chinese values, customs, and beliefs. Blondie is threatened by the new woman's role in the family and readers become privy to her and Lan's attempts to justify their identity, garner Carnegie's attention, and win the children's affection. Via a stream of consciousness format that can border on chaotic, all the members of the family and Lan have the opportunity to express their thoughts. The novel, which is set in the early part of this century, explores the ways in which race permeates relationships despite the argument that U.S. culture is often considered post-racial.

The third novel in this chapter is *The Help*, which was written in 2009 but is set in Jackson, Mississippi in the 1960s. In this novel, Stockett takes readers back to an era when the civil rights movement for African Americans was gathering momentum. She focuses on three women -- two African American housekeepers, Aibileen and Minnie, and one white twenty-two-year-old, Skeeter, who had recently graduated from college. Aibileen and Minnie are less vitriolic than Lucy despite experiencing, on the surface, more egregious offenses to their dignity

and personhood. This novel will be used to help elucidate ways in which twentieth-century race relations in the United States have been problematic, show how Styron depicts empathy developing in a relationship in which there are profound power differentials, and trouble the notion of white guilt via an examination of the role of the white savior. This section of the chapter will also examine the effects of having a primary narrator being a person raised by a nanny rather than the one employing a nanny.

Chapter four argues that literal and figurative travel complement one another and, together, can foster empathy, particularly when a character is depicted as being in a position of liminality. The two novels that will be explicated are Simpson's *My Hollywood* and Styron's *All the Finest Girls*. The first novel, *My Hollywood*, is told by two protagonists. Both women contribute to the novel's sense of being satirical and witty. The first narrator is Claire, a struggling composer and upper-middle class mother who experiences profound ambivalence regarding competing attachments to her new child and her career as a composer. She often questions her decision to hire a nanny, her ability to continue working, her talent as a musician, her aptitude as a mother, and her commitment to her workaholic husband, all while recognizing the privileged position she finds herself in. For Claire, this only serves to build upon her already present guilt for not conforming to the demands of intensive mothering. The second narrator is Lola, a woman who left her comfortable social standing (and her family) in the Philippines so that she could secure more lucrative work than would be possible in her home country. She hopes to assist her children financially so that they can attain the educational status necessary to become more materially secure. She deals with her own ambivalence of enjoying her leadership role amongst the nannies in the communities in which she works and lives and relishing the money that earns her respect while also mourning her decreased closeness with her husband and

adult children. She also struggles with her intense attachment to Claire's child, William, as well as her relationship with Claire. Alternating chapters permit each woman's voice to come forward, at times even retracing a single incident from different perspectives. As alluded to earlier, *My Hollywood* incorporates both physical and emotional travel in complex ways throughout the novel and these aspects of the novel will be closely analyzed.

The second novel in this chapter is *All the Finest Girls*, which depicts a grown woman's quest to discover more about the nanny who cared for her as a child by traveling to the woman's Caribbean village for her funeral. After recounting aspects of Addy's warm relationship with Louise as a child and Louise's ambivalence about working in the United States to help support her family back home, Styron explores Addy's attempts to learn more about Louise via her sons, who are now also grown. Addy is the sole narrator and Styron presents her as a character whose emotions sometimes cloud her otherwise astute assessment of her place in the world. The brothers carry their own perspectives about Addy as well as their emotional difficulties concerning their mother's choice to work abroad and their ambivalence regarding Addy's choice to attend their mother's funeral. Parreñas, as well as other sociologists, have directed critical attention to the notion of "distance mothering" (or, as it is sometimes called, "transnational mothering") including the impact that this type of mothering has upon the children who remain in the country from which the mother emigrated. Similar to the analysis of *The Help*, this section will trouble the ways in which children of nannies, whether they are biological or charges, are impacted by a mother-employer's and nanny's decision to enter this type of commodified relationship. This section will examine the ways in which the children perceive their relationship with the nanny and construct a sense of identity that differs from children who are raised nearly exclusively by their biological mother.

VII. Nannies: Everywhere and Nowhere

While the role of nanny and/or governess is often present in British novels from the Romantic and Victorian periods, current fiction that focuses on contemporary life often glosses over the fact that nannies are part of our social and family structure, even in novels in which women with young children work outside the home. This is not a new trend. Previously, movies such as *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *It's a Wonderful Life* show domestic servants in the background of the middle-class family as help that is taken for granted. There are few adults in the global North who do not have vivid images of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* tying Scarlett O'Hara's corset, Mary Poppins flying in on her umbrella, or Maria Von Trapp singing with her charges through the streets of Salzburg.¹⁸ Toward the end of the twentieth century and beginning of this century, domestic workers are seldom linked with average families and instead mark the status of the financially elite in mainstream television shows, including *Diff'rent Strokes*, *Frasier*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Mr. Belvedere*, *Silver Spoons*, *The Nanny*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Weeds*, and *Will & Grace*—all of which are half-hour comedies in which the domestic worker's socio-economic status and personal life outside the home in which she works is left almost entirely unexplored unless the employer becomes romantically interested in her. Some of the aforementioned shows do not include children as primary characters; the domestic servant tends adult members of the household [often in an emotional support role, to offer the Every(woman)'s view of the wealthy, or for sexual intrigue]. At least two television shows, *Who's the Boss?*¹⁹ and *Sex and the City*, depict domestic workers as 'saviors' to women who could not otherwise cope

¹⁸ Each of these characters actually fulfills a different labor role. Mammy is a slave and therefore in a much different situation economically, racially, and in terms of the level of agency to which she has access. Mary Poppins, an actual nanny, is the least realistic due to the author's inclusion of magic realism; and Maria Von Trapp is based on an actual person who was, and who is portrayed as, a governess. The common denominator is the women's emotional investment in their charges and their work as caregivers.

¹⁹ Despite the small minority of male nannies and housekeepers, *Who's the Boss?* is not the only television show or movie depicting men in this role. Others include: *Charles in Charge*, *Mr. Nanny*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *The Pacifier*. As with the motif of weak marriages, this is an interesting topic that warrants further research.

with the joint demands of employment and motherhood. In *Gimme a Break!*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Will and Grace*, and *Weeds*, the domestic worker is depicted as the ‘salt of the earth,’ commonsense individual who must instruct the employer on how the ‘real’ world works.²⁰ Domestic workers portrayed in television shows offer everything from glaring contempt for the antics of their employers to compliant ‘friends’ who seem to enjoy being at their place of employment more than anywhere else.

Scores of romance novels also feature nannies, often with ludicrous titles such as *Marrying the Virgin Nanny* by Teresa Southwick, *The Millionaire’s Nanny Arrangement* by Linda Goodnight, *Promoted: Nanny to Wife* by Margaret Way, *Nanny to the Billionaire’s Son* by Barbara McMahon, and The Nannies Series' *Friends with Benefits* by Melody Mayer. These novels are often based on preconceived notions of what a nanny is (i.e., young, attractive, unmarried with no kids of her own) and what a nanny wants (i.e., to usurp the wife/mother’s role and have a sexual relationship with the father of the children she tends), when, in actuality, many nannies who work in the global North are doing so to support their own children, family, and perhaps extended kin; escape abusive relationships in their home country; and may not want to remain in the country of employment let alone maintain a relationship with an employer’s husband. More literary novels can perpetuate these notions, too; it is hardly unusually to encounter a nanny and the father of the child(ren) in a sexual tryst. These misconceptions, which are flaunted in fictionalized and journalistic stories about nannies, may curtail harmonious exchanges between mother-employers and nannies.

Domestic servants responsible for childcare typically become more distinct and therefore more memorable characters in novels and movies, which supports the perception that it is a

²⁰ This echoes previous traits of physicality, hardiness, and unencumbered sexuality that are frequently associated with domestic workers, as explained by Rollins.

promotion to have access to childcare rather than cleaning. By the very nature of the position, these characters are subject to children's gaze in ways other domestic workers may not be. Wrigley claims children "see who does which work, and which work is most valued" and in this way the "household comes to mirror larger social inequalities" with the children becoming actors who internalize and perpetuate exploitation (139). It is important to recognize that the cultural messages regarding race and class that the mother-employer/nanny relationship embodies, which are replayed in countless ways in hundreds of thousands of homes in the United States, are absorbed by children who are forming their own outlook on the world. Romero similarly warns against consuming the mass media stereotypes of domestic workers. She sees film and literature as "dominated by images of devoted maids, nannies, and caregivers and benevolent employers who embrace sisterhood across racial and class boundaries" (7). Nannies, more often than other domestic servants, are portrayed as happy to work, fulfilling a vocational calling, or have few or no other aspirations other than childcare.²¹ Mary Poppins and Nanny McPhee in their eponymous movies are not solely saccharine and accommodating, in fact both offer a good dose of discipline with their affection, but viewers and the characters within the movies and novels recognize in both women that the magical figure has little agency. In both selections, the nanny seems almost compelled to proffer her supernatural abilities to families in need.²²

This is less prevalent in domestic positions such as butler, housekeeper, and maid, all of whom may be portrayed as surly, dim, or disdainful. Often, however, these characters, like nannies, are also happy to perform the menial labor assigned to them. For instance, Alice rarely seemed put out that she had to tend to the Bradys and Amelia Bedelia's perpetual befuddlement

²¹*The Sound of Music* is one possible exception; Maria Kutschera leaves the von Trapp family in order to retain her initial, and arguably more selfless, commitment to become a nun. She returns because she loves the children too deeply.

²²Troublingly, in *Nanny McPhee*, the nanny becomes more attractive as the children meet each of her behavioral milestones. Not only does this place a strange, but prevalent, emphasis on a woman's aesthetic appearance, but conflates goodness with physical attractiveness. Moreover, the implication that the children's self-improvement is intimately linked with her own sends an unsavory message to children, who many already receive mixed messages about the commodification of emotional labor.

and cheery effort is a source of entertainment for readers. In *Cinderella*, which is one of the few movies geared toward children in which housework is seen as a drudgery from which one would want to escape, Cinderella's mice-friends seem more disturbed than she is with the work load she must assume and the power differentials between the women. Ultimately, domestic workers are absent, underdeveloped, or serve as a prop by being either an overly chummy protagonist or a too handy antagonist for the employer. In both cases they are portrayed in ways that may impede readers and viewers from developing empathetic identification. Ironically, they remain indelible figures in our culture despite existing only within the parameters of her service for the family who has hired her.

VIII. Themes in Mother-Employer/Nanny Fiction

There are four notable themes that run through novels that center on mother-employers and nannies. These themes certainly apply the novels selected to this research but also generally apply to novels outside of the scope of this work. First, all the mother-employers are white. As far as my research has revealed, no novels by U.S.-born authors have been published that feature a mother-employer who is also a woman of color.²³ This certainly deserves vigorous examination, but the primary focus of this work will not include a theoretical examination of this topic in order to maintain a tighter focus on the role of the nanny as well as the relationship that exists between the mother-employer and the nanny. Unlike mother-employers, nannies vary in ethnicity in the novels that will be explicated. Three are Caribbean, two are white, one is African American, one is Chinese, and one is Filipina. Too often nannies who are women of color serve

²³ When one looks beyond the global North, women of color appear, of course. Like Great Britain, India has a long history of employing (and exploiting) women of the lower-class for domestic service due to a scale of poverty that permits even families of modest means to be able to afford daily domestic service. Novels such as *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa and *The Space Between Us* by Thrity Umrigar showcase the mother-employer/nanny dyad between women of color as does *Minaret*, which features a Muslim nanny working for a Muslim mother-employer in London; however, the mother-employer is nearly entirely absent from the novel. *Minaret* is penned by Leila Aboulela, a Sudanese woman who writes in English.

as 'mirrors of enlightenment' in novels. While the mother-employer in the novel may not see her own flawed thinking and varying degrees of entitlement, it is typically clear to the nanny and thus, by extension, becomes clear to the reader too, particularly when the novel permits the nanny space to speak. Often, as Keen highlights, the reader is white as well. In this way I argue that the nanny is positioned only a small step away from the role of the magical Negro,²⁴ a point I will refine in chapter three. Moreover, while the women of color who appear in these novels (as well as novels not included in this research) fill the role of childcare provider, their own effort to secure childcare is rarely highlighted. In fact, only three of the novels in this body of research allude to the children of the paid childcare provider even in passing. As a result, the lack of literature that depicts the ways in which nannies themselves perceive their roles as mothers, particularly in regards to intensive mothering but also in the ways in which their own perspectives shape the dynamic that exists between herself and her employer, will not be explored as deeply as it should.²⁵

Second, all of the mother-employers in these novels seemingly belong to the securely middle- or upper-middle-class. There are some differences in the mother-employers' socio-economic status but none of the mother-employers are particularly concerned about meeting their financial obligations or question if they should consider group childcare instead of personal care for their children. The mother-employers' concern regarding childcare is finding the *best* care available not *affording* the necessary care. Novelists who depict the characters as being close to or part of the now famous 'one per cent' often handle the privileged concerns of the elite sympathetically, thereby eliciting empathy from the reader as well. Many of these novelists, it is safe to assume, belong to a similar social class and ideological perspective as the characters they

²⁴ This term was first popularized after Spike Lee used it in a 2001 speech.

²⁵ An upcoming issue of *Feminist Studies* will feature an article that addresses this specific point via an analysis of *My Hollywood* by Mona Simpson and *The Space Between Us* by Umrigar.

depict. Unlike the bestselling chick lit novel *The Nanny Diaries* by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus in which the socialite mother is censured for foisting her young son on a nanny even though she is not employed, the mothers in the novels in this dissertation are not caricatures or whipping girls for a conservative agenda.²⁶ (*The Help* is an exception and this point will be discussed in chapter three.) Instead, they are flawed within reason and their wealth is painted as average despite the fact that the lifestyle they are described as living is clearly not. Without the concerns of everyday bills and looming unemployment, the mother-employers in these novels focus on who they are as women, the type of mother they want to be and are, the values they want to instill in their children, their expectations of marriage, and the morals that guide their humanity. In the process, they often garner readers' empathy. It can be presumed that these readers often share similar struggles. The nannies, on the other hand, vary considerably in these novels from being homeless to financially secure; however, most would likely be considered working- or lower-middle class. Tassie in *A Gate at the Stairs* is a possible exception, but she is also an American woman in her early twenties attending college. It is understood that if her employment were to end her parents would still provide her basic necessities. It is also presumed that her work as a nanny is temporary. As a result of the nannies' lower class placement, these characters may be less identifiable to the average reader of women's fiction. This hypothesis will be explored more carefully in the following chapters.

Third, in six of the seven novels the nanny completes substantial travel from one physical location to another. This journey is never the focus of the novel even when the woman travels from her home country to the country of employment. In five of these novels the mother-employer also travels a fair distance physically and in three of these cases she travels to the home

²⁶ This stands in direct contrast to mothers who belong to the working class or who are experiencing poverty. In these cases the government (and society) often encourages a woman to put her child(ren) in the care of other women.

country of the nanny. The theme of travel will be explored throughout this research primarily via Lugones' theoretical work how 'world'-travel may be critical to developing empathy. The reoccurrence of literal travel will be examined and juxtaposed with the ways in which metaphorical travel is (not) achieved by the characters. Moreover, this component of the argument will also examine the ways in which readers are asked to 'world'-travel via the experiences presented in the novels. I will briefly explore how terminology associated with travel is often coupled with reading and how this affects the development of readers' empathy.

Finally, every mother-employer has significant difficulties concerning her marriage while the nannies' romantic lives are included in nearly every novel in which the nanny is not married. Out of the six novels that include a married mother-employer, five of the women experience either a separation or divorce while in the outlier case the mother-employer chooses to ignore her husband's presumed infidelity. Significant space could be devoted to examining the reversal of the marriage plot, the role waged work has upon a marriage, and the ways in which a nanny can impact the dynamics of a marriage or, in some cases, the ways in which a poor marriage encourages women to seek out the assistance of a nanny. These are points I will likely address in future research, but I did not feel that the subject matter connected cohesively to the primary line of this research. When appropriate, however, this concept will be considered as it relates to the level of intimacy the mother-employer and nanny experience with one another. In contrast to the mother-employers, all the nannies in these novels who are unmarried and not African American embark on a new romantic relationship with a man who is not the father of children she cares for. In *The Help*, the white protagonist embarks on a new relationship that starkly contrasts the two African American nannies, one of whom is in an abusive relationship and the other who remains unattached through the duration of the novel. In all the novels, the romantic relationships are a

subplot; however, the purpose of this work is to study relationships between mother-employers and nannies and the novels chosen as research reflect this.²⁷ It is also worth noting that in every novel that surfaced via this research the romantic relationships of mother-employers and nannies are written as heterosexual.

Many of these themes will be given space to be examined separately, but these themes often overlap in the ways that they impact the relationship that forms (or fails to form) between the mother-employer and the nanny. In addition to the themes listed above, significant attention will also be given to the roles that narrator and point of view play in the formation of readers' empathy as well as how this empathy is intertwined with a reader's ability to 'world'-travel. In this body of research, two novels are told exclusively from the perspective of the nanny, one is told from the exclusive perspective of the mother-employer, and the remaining four novels utilize multiple narrative perspectives. This is an unusually large percentage considering that this device is significantly less common than the more traditional options of first-person, third-person limited, or third-person omniscient. In the four novels that utilize alternating protagonists (i.e., *The Help*, *The Love Wife*, *Men and Angels*, and *My Hollywood*) it seems evident that the white protagonist would be regarded as the one that is the true primary character. While this point will be explored further, this initial observation seems to suggest that novelists are highly cognizant of the need for 'world'-travel, even when their work suggests they need to complete more 'world'-travel themselves as well. This also reveals that novelists are willing to explore the myriad ways that the mother-employer/nanny relationship is shaped by the perspective of the individual experiencing it while also offering varying levels of validity to both points of view. In this regard

²⁷ Often in novels that would be classified as 'chick lit' or 'romance' the nanny's romantic life is front and center, regardless of the nanny's ethnicity. For instance, *Substitute Me* by Lori Tharps includes an African American nanny who has an affair with the father of the child she tends and easily vies for empathy with the white mother.

an author's ability to experience empathy, develop empathy for her characters, and elicit empathy from readers remains worthy of sustained attention.

IX. Conclusion

Through all of these novels, mothering, relationship building, and empathy echo one another and the objective is to examine how Lugones' concepts of 'world'-travel and empathy can be applied to the ways in which the primary characters in these novels either connect or misunderstand one another. The ways in which the individual authors express empathy toward the characters they have developed and the ways they encourage readers' empathy will be explored at length. The social justice ideals that are at the foundation of this work strive for a dismantling of racism, an establishment of fair wages and respect for all work, and an awareness of female alliance building and mothering. To elucidate the points of success and friction in these areas, I will analyze what contemporary novels tell readers about the complex relationships between mother-employers and nannies. While the data in this case are novels, the analysis of these novels depends on theory from a variety of disciplines. As Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding argue in the introduction to *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*:

A considerable amount of feminist thinking today works across borders in ways that unsettle familiar philosophical and political frameworks. It cuts across the borders of traditional disciplinary configurations, borrowing, incorporating, and transforming the methodological approaches as well as the concrete concerns of the disciplines. (vii)

This certainly applies to using novels to examine the relationship between mother-employers and nannies as well as using research from the domains of sociology, psychology, cultural theory,

and feminist theory to better understand the novels that are designed, in part, to mirror aspects of women's lives. In the context of this work, I am specifically interested in how the nanny novel can improve relationship dynamics between mother-employers and nannies, as well as how this relationship affects the relationship that exists between a mother-employer and her child(ren) and a nanny and a mother-employer's child(ren).

With that said, I enter this research with some trepidation. After all, I am a white feminist of comfortable means with substantial formal education. While I grew up in a large metropolis in a blue-collar family, have attended schools that were ethnically diverse, and am a mother myself, I cannot say that I am a seasoned 'world'-traveler in the way that Lugones recommends. I admit that part of my impetus of this research is self-education, but there is also the hope that knowledge production will be fruitful in alliance building. I cannot guarantee that my effort at constructing knowledge will mean that I am not engaging in the "production of ignorance" that Ortega references, but I can be clear in asserting that I do not presume to present perfect knowledge but instead an effort toward offering initial thinking on a subject that deserves considerable attention. While I hope to include the voices of women who can comment in meaningful ways on the knowledge assembled here, I do not know if I am capable of determining if I am exploiting their writing, as Ortega suggests, or including their analysis from an ego-centric place. I can say that my goal is not to 'speak for' anyone, but to offer my own voice and analysis to a chorus of women from varying backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences. I believe empathy requires practice and the forthcoming work will analyze how empathy can be practiced in the construction of novels, the reading of novels, and in the lives outside of the pages that readers travel.

Hallways Between Upstairs and Downstairs: Contextualizing Social Class and Nanny/Employer Bonding in Contemporary Novels

Introduction

Few novels address the ways in which class affects the relationship a mother-employer has with the nanny she hires, at least as the forefront of the plot. This may be, in part, because there is scant research on nannies' class by sociologists, at least in isolation from race.²⁸ As Pierette Hondagnue-Sotelo contends, "Class is a slippery concept in the United States, where nearly everybody from warehouse loaders to millionaire entrepreneurs, is likely to identify as middle class" (188). The impact of race and citizenship status is more commonly studied in the field of domestic service, and often, workers' low-class status is addressed almost as a given. Indeed, few women with the social capital and education associated with being securely middle-class or upper-middle-class willingly assume the role of domestic servant, particularly as a housekeeper or a maid. Nannying does have broader appeal, particularly for young women seeking part-time work with "short term commitment that revolves around school-aged youngsters," according to Gabriella Boston ("New Class of Nannies" www.washingtontimes.com). This is not to say that race is not a critical component in many mother-employers' hiring practices or that race does not overlap in profound ways in regard to affecting access to class-based customs. In fact, race will be a key aspect of the research that drives the work in the following chapter. Rather, this point highlights that civil rights groups have been effective in promoting race consciousness, sometimes at the sake of class consciousness, and, as Julia Wrigley notes in *Other People's Children*, class differences are

²⁸ Julia Wrigley's *Other People's Children: An Intimate Account of the Dilemmas Facing Middle-Class Parents and the Women They Hire to Raise Their Children* does give focused attention to the differences that the class of the nanny has upon the relationship that forms with middle-class mother-employers. Her research will be used throughout this chapter.

"[l]ess visible, but just as pervasive" as race differences (4). Class has an underestimated influence on how a nanny is perceived, which, in turn, affects both the level of responsibility that is entrusted to her as well as the salary that is offered. I argue that along with race, and gender, nannies are often 'marked' by their social class -- although both of the previous criteria can affect the latter.²⁹ Novels that examine childcare workers and the nuances of their position offer critical insight into the lives of nannies as well as the domestic lives of working women who require these women's labor to achieve the monetary or professional goals that they have established for themselves. In *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* Cameron MacDonald writes: "These relationships [between nanny and employer] are interesting not only because they constitute a major form of child care for the increasing number of dual-career couples, but because they offer a window on social class differences in American society and what they mean for people's child-rearing strategies and values" (ix). *A Gate at the Stairs* by Lorrie Moore and *Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon, which are the two novels that will be explicated shortly, will provide the 'window' MacDonald references.

Most women are quite aware of the important role their nannies have in the fabric of the family life, but fewer women are completely cognizant of the ways in which class affects the relationships that form between their nannies and themselves as well as with other people in their families. MacDonald offers significant research on the class of mother-employers and the way that their status impacts both mothering and the relationship they develop with the nannies they hire. MacDonald contends that intensive mothering³⁰ is "cued by class" and affects the "kinds of guilt women feel when away from their children, what outcomes they worry their presence might

²⁹ Religion, education level, sexual preference, and appearance are also implicated, and together these factors strongly affect who is hired for the most desirable childcare positions as well as the type of work that will be expected once hired.

³⁰ See chapter one for definition of intensive mothering.

cause, [and] what aspects of their mothering responsibilities they prioritize" (202). She also argues:

Like their counterparts in other classes, mothers in the professional and upper-middle classes perceive their duty as mothers as forming a solid attachment with their children. But in addition to this, these mothers hold themselves responsible for successfully transmitting status to their children. They must pass on their education and skills in the form of human capital; they must pass on their class-based habitus in the form of cultural capital; and they must give their children the right connections through social capital. (202)

MacDonald adds, this "status attainment" is not only "hard work" but is "primarily women's work" (202). As a result, women who have secured placement in the middle- and upper-middle-class understand to varying degrees that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children do as well as or better than they have economically. Indeed, there are few things as important in parents' lives than their children and, as a result, a woman's specific beliefs, attitudes, and goals about class can often become crystallized in her selection of and relationship with the nanny she hires.

Hiring a nanny from the pool of candidates available is seldom one that permits women to hire 'substitute' caregivers who match their own demographics, however. MacDonald verifies this, suggesting as she does that the conflict between values can ultimately be beneficial.

Letting go of the shadow-mother imperative not only means giving up the idea that the mother will be the primary adult in her child's life and challenging the competitive ideal of childrearing for the marketplace, but it also means abandoning the idea that the family's class-based assumptions will be the only values to which a child will be exposed.

The mother-nanny relationship is one of the few places where different versions of motherhood come into intimate and repeated contact. Here, unlike other venues of daily life, the link between values and class position is unavoidably evident. Neither employers nor nannies can simply take for granted the rightness of their childrearing practices, as parents normally do when surrounded by others who share their class-based assumptions. They have to articulate, rationalize, and justify these values to themselves and to the other party. (204)

It is this forced communication and justification that can ultimately encourage a reexamination of values, according to MacDonad, but try as she does to emphasize a symbiotic exchange, there is still an underlying message that hiring an individual from another class will ultimately benefit one's children. On the other hand, I argue that it is the communication and effort to understand the perspective from which the other individual performs parenting that can foster empathy in the mother-employer/nanny relationship.

Nannies belonging to a higher social class who have increased social capital often garner more lucrative and desirable positions that involve fewer children, more independence, and better benefits. This segment of the childcare labor market often receives the most robust salaries as well as substantial perks, including paid vacation, sick leave, health insurance, and/or use of a vehicle as well as a general higher sense of status as part of the family since these women are more likely to "exten[d] themselves personally" and receive "work that does not differ in kind from that taken on by the parents" (Wrigley 66). Wrigley notes that when women hire class peers as nannies they are effectively "minimizing distinctions between child care" because "[t]hese caregivers operate with some authority, preparing children for a cultural world they themselves know and understand" (50). Many families who have the financial resources to be the most

selective seek a nanny that most closely resembles their own ethnic, religious, and economic background -- nannies who are accustomed to the mores of the middle- or upper-middle-class and who can instill in the children of the family the same values that the mother would were she a full-time stay-at-home mother. (Moore presents this type of nanny in her novel *A Gate at the Stairs*.) Wrigley points out that because higher status caregivers are often like men in the sense that they are "quite selective about the chores they will accept without protest," mother-employers "with heavy work schedules thus have an incentive to hire class subordinates, rather than less cooperative class peers" since their increased vulnerability leads them to take on additional work for less pay (17). Mother-employers who do seek out candidates who they view as less than equal often do so using criteria that are based on a childcare worker's access to social capital.

Ironically, despite the low wages and intense workload assumed by class-subordinate nannies, mother-employers are prone to conflate the role of employer with that of benefactress. In the article, "A Very Private Business: Exploring the Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers," Bridget Anderson, who concentrated her sociological research in London and studied the crossovers of government policies on immigration, perceptions of race and nationality, and childcare, points out that some employers feel that they are 'saviors' to women who would not otherwise have access to the same financial and material gains that they garner as a result of working for a family of significant material means. Anderson, therefore, claims that "power exercised over domestic work may be very direct, and 'personalistic' as well as 'materialistic'" (255). MacDonald supports this finding when she explains:

Tensions between nannies and their employers are not, for the most part, an expression of resentment that one party earned more than the other or that one has authority over the

other. These conditions are taken for granted. How the highly gendered work of mothering is enacted in class-based ways generates most of the conflicts in these relationships. The performance of class *via gender and through mothering* locks both sets of women into value-laden conflicts that are difficult to overcome. (203-204)

This may well come about because the "cultural repertoires that guide childrearing practices in working-class and poor families differ from those that guide the middle- and upper-middle classes" in addition to the fact that "very few childcareworkers share their employers' class and cultural background" (MacDonald 55). Many of these class-based conflicts are dealt with directly in Gordon's *Men and Angels*.

What is evident when these two novels are examined side-by-side is that class matters. While not immediately apparent in these novels, I will argue that the nannies' class placement is a factor that has a profound impact on the resulting relationship that the mother-employers establish; however, I will also contend that even when class placement is analogous between mother-employer and nanny, the inherent power differentials still restrict kin-like status. It is important to examine the ways that class shades initial meetings, a mother's identity and feelings toward finding a balance between work and childcare, as well as the ways that a nanny's socio-economic status and access to cultural capital influence her power in the relationship. While the mother-employers in *A Gate at the Stairs* and *Men and Angels* are remarkably similar demographically, their approach to their respective caregivers and the labor relationship that develops is quite different, as are the women they hire to care for their respective children. This chapter will analyze the differences that become evident when the nanny who appears in a novel has access to a relatively high degree of social capital compared to when a nanny does not, as well as how those differences impact the relationship that forms between the mother-employer

and nanny. Ultimately, these texts will show that even when a mother-employer and nanny share a similar class background, this marker by itself is not enough to assure that empathy -- or even a positive labor relationship -- develops. As the following explications are presented, Frye's analysis of love and Lugones' analysis on 'world'-travel will be utilized to help explain how empathy plays a role in the texts as well as the ways in which Moore and Gordon invoke readers' empathy for the characters depicted.

***A Gate at the Stairs* by Lorrie Moore**

Raised by two professional middle-class parents, Lorrie Moore has spent the majority of her adult life publishing quirky short stories and novels that utilize black humor and puns while teaching creative writing in Madison, Wisconsin. Her novel *A Gate at the Stairs*, which was published in 2009, follows in the footsteps of previously developed introspective narrators whose story shines brightest when the action is quite mundane. Set in the months following the 9/11 attacks, there is a sense of uncenteredness in the novel that mirrors the discombobulation that was occurring at the national level and infiltrates the lives of the two protagonists in the novel, albeit for different reasons. Moore's sole narrator is a young university student named Tassie Keltjin, who works as a nanny for an upscale restaurant owner from the East Coast named Sarah Brink. Sarah has experienced profound personal loss and is attempting to reorient her life through the adoption of a bi-racial child despite her husband's disinterest. Moore insists that the novel is not about her life "in any way," but as Robert McCrum, literary editor of *The Observer*, points out, the author's life as a single mother of an adopted, bi-racial (part African American) son for the past ten years, does make it "tempting to read Moore's work as a surreal road map to the author's interior" (www.guardian.uk.co). Regardless, readers rely on Tassie, who is

inexplicably jaded for a twenty-year-old with average-at-worse parents, for insight regarding the people she encounters as well as herself.

In many ways, Tassie is a chameleon when it comes to class, and, as a result, she offers insight from a rare vantage point. Tassie is the daughter of a Midwestern farmer who cultivates organic, artisan potatoes for high-end restaurants, and the novel follows her third year as an aimless student at an unnamed Wisconsin university while tending the child of well-to-do liberals. She therefore straddles at least three different socio-economic worlds in ways that permit fluidity and comparison. Moore's strong sense of class in this novel prompted novelist Jonathan Letham to write: "Moore's class diagnostics are so exact she can make us feel the uneasiness not only between town and country [...], but between different types of farmers on neighboring plots" ("Eyes Wide Open"). It is clear that Tassie's family, which lives in poor, rural Dellacrosse (meaning 'of the cross'), is nearly comfortable but hardly wealthy (despite being better off than many other members of their community). Tassie has never been on an airplane or even in a taxicab and notes that their kitchen perpetually has the "faint reek of mice" (50). However, it is clear when Tassie refers to her family's trade as an investment in "Dadaist agriculture" that the stereotypical assumptions of uncultured physical laborers is not relevant to Tassie and that her own father's formative years on a college campus had been passed on (49). In this regard, along with the fact that her family's small artisan-focused farm set them apart from their peers in the farming town, Tassie is left in a rather lonely world. She does not feel that she fits in with her peers from high school, realizing over her winter break that she has little interest in visiting her old friends who, when she "conjured them in [her] mind, seemed dull and thickened strangers" (65). Similarly, after a friend's "tawdry and embarrassing" wedding, she concludes, "Everyone here seemed like a stranger, if not an outright alien" (65, 66). Her roots in

farming shade her opinions about her college town, Troy, too. She describes the town as "a piece of smug, liberal, recycling, civic-minded monkey masturbation" meaning it was "gestural" and "trying to make itself feel good -- which in Dellacrosse meant 'better than everyone else'" (153). It is from this indefinable place that she begins seeking a job to cover her rent after her roommate leaves her to move in with a boyfriend.

Class is also at the heart of her relationship with Sarah. In her initial interview, Sarah immediately gushes over the quality of the Keltjin family's produce, which she serves at her restaurant, La Petit Moulin, a place Tassie describes as "one of those expensive restaurants downtown" where "every entrée [is] freshly hairy with dill, every soup and dessert dripped upon as preciously as a Pollock, filets and cutlet sprinkled with lavender dust once owned by pixies" (174). This lays the groundwork for an initial bond (at least on Sarah's side), despite Tassie's own assessment of her father's produce, which is that it "has always catered to the rich in one way or another" (47). This comment alerts readers that Tassie is critical of classes she perceives as richer than her own including, most likely, her employer's, while showcasing Moore's subtle mockery of Sarah, who does not recognize the irony in glamorizing one of earth's most humble offerings. While Tassie is often critical, she also reveals throughout the novel a desire to acquire the cultural capital necessary to assimilate with Sarah's peer group, primarily via food and drink. She eats sushi, takes a class on wine, and drinks espressos and lattes at the local coffee house. (Dellacrosse had none of these offerings.) She tends to show off to readers her expanding intellect with comments such as, "My brain was on fire with Chaucer, Sylvia Plath, Simone de Beauvoir," but her course selections demonstrate a less ardent pursuit of literature, with classes such as the aforementioned wine appreciation class, Introduction to Sufism, Geology, British Literature, and Soundtracks to War Movies (4). Moreover she admits that she, like her friends,

"had already begun to lie, to bluff a sophistication they felt that at the end of the ten-second bluff they would authentically possess" (39). Tassie, it seems, adopts the mantra that she will have to fake it until she makes it, not realizing the degree to which her employer is utilizing the same tactic.

While Tassie seems too worldly, world-worn, and pun-ny for her age and admitted lack of experience, Sarah represents the 'soccer mom' of the twenty-first century. She is a forty-five-year-old woman who wants a career and children, social equality and organic food. She is indignant that the social reforms implemented during her lifetime at the government level are not always reflected in the fabric of daily life yet wants to distance herself from the majority of her politically correct peers, a fact that is shown most clearly when she tells Tassie that she does not have to remove her shoes upon entering her house because "[t]here's too much of that prissy Japanese stuff going on in this town. Bring in the mud" (11). (Ironically, Sarah also tells Tassie later that she bakes the books she borrows from the library for Mary-Emma to kill the germs, believing that the microwave is not efficient enough.) Despite her condescension, Sarah and her cancer researcher husband Edward Thornwood continue to associate with the progressive, educated elite of their community and discuss local politics, race relations, and cultural mores at dinner parties and the Wednesday Meetings Sarah commences in an "earnester-than-thou" manner (Leithauser, "Voices in the Heartland"). Sarah's conscientiousness, like that of her peers who also try to differentiate themselves from the status quo of the liberal intelligentsia, often morphs into righteousness.

The position that Sarah is looking to fill is rather exceptional in light of the fact that Sarah does not currently have children but is in the process of finding a child to adopt. Sarah foresees she and the person she hires as part of a team designed to work on behalf of Sarah's yet-

to-be-adopted child. She tells Tassie: "If we hire you, we would like you to be there with us for everything, from the very first day. We would like you to feel like part of our family, since of course you will be part of it" (24). Sarah considers Tassie a desirable co-parenting partner/mother substitute despite her inexperience, and, as it turns out, does involve Tassie in many of the intimate details of the adoption search, including meeting the birth mothers who may be relinquishing their respective children and being privy to her conversations with an adoption lawyer. Sarah's husband attends very few of these meetings, which creates the sense that Sarah is overly dependent on Tassie to fill the role of spouse, albeit a platonic one, and is paying her for more than just her time but her emotional support as well. She even calls Tassie at her family's home during the university's winter break to request that Tassie return early and attend another meet-and-greet at an adoption agency. Sarah pays for her airfare in order to have her companionship on the trip, and it seems from Tassie's preceding commentary on how dislocated she feels in her hometown that the offer may be more of a relief than a burden.

Sarah claims she was immediately smitten with Tassie, and it seems that her connection is based largely on the young woman's ability to serve as Sarah's doppelganger in regard to their shared cultural positioning. "For many white parents," according to MacDonald, "whiteness served as a proxy for a constellation of traits related to nurturance -- wholesomeness, safety, and shared culture" (79). I would argue that the term 'class' could easily replace the term 'whiteness' in this statement and remain true. Sarah's decision to hire Tassie is also an effort to upend the power differentials inherent in the mother-employer/nanny relationship because, according to Wrigley, by hiring a young college student she was able to "remove some of the taint of personal subordination" (49). Women, like Tassie, who have similar social capital as their employers do not experience the "same power differential" as many "ethnic minority women and Third World

immigrant women," according to Mary Romero (*Maid in the U.S.A.*, 162). Sarah's decision, as a result, is also not one that radically changes the dynamics of the mother-employer/nanny relationship as much as she believes, largely because their supposed egalitarian labor relationship is based almost exclusively on Sarah's perception of commonality with Tassie, whose intellect, upbringing, and judgment are valued and thus rewarded financially and personally. Wrigley explains that mother-employers are encouraged to make the position they structure "more palatable" to employees who may likely have several other opportunities for income and therefore often "sacrifice some of their power" in the process, but she also points out that "[e]ven when the employee is educated and acculturated, the caregiving job involves the personal subordination of employee to employer" (49). In other words, while the overt displays of power and dominance are reduced, the fundamental power differential that is based on control of employment and salary remains. Moreover, while Sarah would likely be quite open to finding a nanny of color, it seems quite unlikely that Sarah would have welcomed a woman who had insufficient language skills or one she could not see as her own substitute by virtue of social capital. Her frequent mini-sermons indicate that she views Tassie as a younger version of herself as well as a woman she can help by being more transparent than she would ordinarily be. Being an egalitarian employer dovetails neatly with her feminist and socio-political goals; however, as Joan Tronto argues, Sarah fails to recognize the ways in which her personal goals are being achieved as a direct result of her material success and ability to purchase another woman's labor.

Sarah's relationship with Tassie does seem far-fetched and re-plays the notion that the 'salt of the earth' woman -- in this case Tassie, albeit only to a slight degree -- has more common sense and is more vital to those who, like Sarah, are overly idealistic, progressive, and securely upper-middle class. As stated, Sarah likely permits her vulnerability to be salient because she

sees herself as a mentor to Tassie, and this allows her to feel that the field of power is more balanced than it is. Sarah's desire to edify Tassie about what it is to be a woman (as least as she sees womanhood), the world of work and motherhood, and social capital by teaching her about fine wine and food serves a simultaneous purpose of permitting her to believe that she is important to Tassie beyond the scope of finances and strengthening her shaky image of herself as maternal. Born to a wealthy father and married to a doctor, Sarah's class status is secure, but this may also be an area she feels Tassie needs her help. Through Tassie, Sarah can fulfill the role of the wiser woman helping a young woman, but her efforts, although perceived as mostly kind-hearted, are also ego-centric (in the less positive sense of the word) and construct a situation in which she does not make a true effort to know Tassie in her own 'world'. Instead, she projects upon Tassie what she would have wanted an older woman to do for her when she was Tassie's age, not considering what Tassie, specifically, would want from her. While Sarah claims that she wants to involve Tassie because she is now part of the family, the bluff is evident. Not only is Tassie not really part of the family, but Tassie can offer little insight to the adoption process due to a dearth of life experience. Sarah is looking for emotional support from someone who has little choice but to offer uncritical feedback as well as someone to bear witness to her life, even if she has to pay for it. Tassie is likely to comply to both due to her financial need, her relatively young age, and her inexperience.

Tassie, as one would expect, seems less sure of the arrangement. She finds her way into the position with Sarah after too-frequent donations led her to be rejected from the plasma bank she had relied on for extra income. Tassie claims that she "liked children [...] or rather I liked them OK"; however, she admits that despite a few tricks up her sleeve, she "was not especially skilled at minding children for long spells" since she "grew bored" (8, 3, 4). She takes the job

due to a lack of other viable options that would suit her status as a full-time student. Even during her interview with Sarah, Tassie thinks to herself: "*Childcare*, like *healthcare*, had become one word. I would become a dispenser of it" (15). After Sarah and Tassie met several mothers-to-be, Tassie asks: "How long could this go on? And did it matter, as long as Sarah paid me?" (73). In other words, while Sarah is looking for a pseudo-spouse and emotional confidante in her employee, Tassie is initially more removed emotionally from the process and simply wants to be able to pay her rent. As Lynet Uttal notes in *Making Carework: Employed Mothers in the New Childcare Market*, it is not uncommon for the mother-employer to feel a stronger bond with the woman she hires than vice versa in part because she often overlooks the fact that the relationship they are experiencing is one that is based on paid labor (125-26). This is certainly the case in Moore's novel and she takes care to present that accurately. Moreover, as pointed out previously, the basis of the paid labor relationship is that Sarah can be more forthright since she is the one holding the purse strings. And, as is typical, Tassie navigates the relationship more carefully and does not reveal much of her personal life to Sarah. As indicated earlier, Tassie sees Sarah as someone who can model membership to the social class to which she would like to belong, and, as she aligns herself with Sarah, even defends her to readers. Tassie makes an effort to explain away Sarah's flaws, including "snobbery," which Tassie justifies as a trait that appears "even among the most compassionate Democrats," adding, "I could hardly say I was immune. What was education for, if not to acquire contradictions?" (185). It is important to notice in these moments the ways in which Tassie intervenes with readers who may be prone to dislike Sarah for her abrasive political posturing.

Interestingly, as the novel proceeds, the degree of empathy that characters experience for those around them impacts the ways in which readers are able to empathize with the characters

themselves. Readers, for instance, perceive Sarah as an individual who is ideological and cloistered within the benefits of her social positioning. While Sarah often subscribes to politically correct, liberal ideologies on class and race, she remains painfully self-centered and judgmental, making her less appealing to readers. Tassie, on the other hand, is presented as a clear-sighted observer who explains to readers what Sarah likely does not even see in herself, especially when it comes to issues of class and race. Tassie's humble journey includes little bravado and much emotional pain. She is the moral compass of the novel more often than not and searches for connection to combat her feelings of alienation. This vulnerability permits most readers to align themselves with her. Suzanne Keen offers additional insight in *Empathy and the Novel*. She claims "internal perspective best promotes character identification," but is quick to qualify this by pointing out that "character identification is not a narrative technique" because it "occurs in the reader, not in the text" (93). With this in mind, it is an interesting choice that Moore made to have a story that, in both tone and topic, appeals to readers who are closer in age to Sarah than Tassie to be told from a young (albeit precocious) college student. However, Moore's choice does allow Tassie to be intermittently judgmental and remain sympathetic because her viewpoint is understood by older readers to be in flux and based in part on naiveté. Sarah is not provided this same defense.

The two women's perspectives of external events are most clearly juxtaposed when Sarah and Tassie attend meetings with the birth mothers. It is here that readers are privy to the ways in which Sarah's ego-centric nature clashes with her ideological liberalism. This is particularly evident when she fails to ascertain that Amber, a pregnant, incarcerated woman in her early twenties would not likely appreciate a mixed CD of Sarah's favorite classical music, which marks Sarah's interest in increasing Amber's social capital. Moore is careful not to let her

seem too removed, however, and Sarah gamely plays along when Amber (sarcastically) gives her a butter container from the table as a present in exchange for the unwanted gift. After this meeting, Sarah's polemical perspective comes through again when she tells Tassie that the adoption coordinator was "ecstatic to have a white birth mother in tow, one with a little white bun in the oven," and claims that the agencies are "hawking Nazi babies" when they try to persuade her to consider children from South America due to the fact that "some of these kids are beautiful, very blond, or blue-eyed, or both" (35, 38). Sarah later admonishes parents who would rather go to China than adopt a bi-racial child from America. Her ideology remains academic -- an educated layperson's version of policy and social change. It also comes across as unsympathetic to the many U.S. women who have sought international adoptions for myriad reasons including infertility.

When Tassie later tells Sarah that she liked Amber, however, Sarah curtly informs her that the adoption had failed due to Amber's disinterest in any of the candidates she met, adding, "Amber was a coke addict and a meth-head" (79). Sarah knew of Amber's drug use when she met the young woman initially and eagerly tried to win her favor, but when she is no longer the one who has the power to choose, and is in fact rejected, her benevolence abruptly ends. Her narcissism and lack of empathy for Amber reveal a deeper cynicism regarding those who lack access to social capital in the same ways that she does. In another situation, Sarah tells Tassie that she is irritated when her cleaning person repeatedly leaves his pop in her freezer to explode regardless of her petitions that he not do so. Despite this and the fact that he had mangled some of her landscaping, she does not fire him. Tassie explains that Sarah "felt poorer people were entitled to do things that rich people weren't" and that this sort of pandering occurred "in lieu of a revolution" because it was "less bloody all around" (227). Tassie does not think less of Sarah

after hearing these comments, which are not made in reference to her cleaning person or her own actions but as a general commentary on race relations in the United States. As she relates these comments, Tassie seems to be trying them on for size. Some readers would likely see Sarah's comments for what they are: false empathy. According to Richard Delgado, who discusses the prevalence of false empathy in *The Coming Race War? And Other Apocalyptic Tales of America After Affirmative Action and Welfare*, white liberals are especially prone to false empathy, which is a "sentimental, breast-beating kind," like Sarah's (12). It is this performed but empty and ego-driven empathy that Sarah falls prey to at various points in the novel even as she fails to recognize her susceptibility to enact the same behavior she criticizes. Readers, by extension, are prompted to consider how empathy and prosocial behavior overlap for Sarah and perhaps themselves as well.

Moore permits Tassie to experience her own moments of class bias too. The first examples were already offered and pertain to the ways in which Tassie views her former high school classmates, and Moore approaches this again in Tassie's depiction of lower-income mothers-to-be who are contemplating relinquishing their children for adoption as well as in the town-gown relations of Troy. Tassie notices that the women Sarah meet are financially insecure, and it is Tassie who describes one young woman, who "had scarcely a tooth in head," as a "slightly educated hillbilly" whose voice is "slowly surprising" for its "intelligence and humor" (33, 34). Here, Tassie seems to align herself with the observations of someone with increased cultural capital, which in fact she does possess due to her father's university heritage and her own academic pursuits. This becomes even more clear when Tassie and Sarah visit an adoption lawyer and Tassie believes the woman purchased the suit because she "probably hoped [it would] make her look rich" (84). Tassie adds, seemingly with some chagrin, "I was already

becoming a woman who sized up another one fast -- I was becoming typical" (84). In this comment, Tassie echoes Lugones, who posits that women in the United States "are taught to perceive arrogantly" as "part of being taught to be a woman of a certain class" (5). Lugones specifies White/Anglo women specifically and claims they are taught "to be both the agent and the object of arrogant perception," as Tassie posited (Lugones 5). Due to her role as narrator, readers witness the ways in which Tassie is aware, at times, of her biases and her proclivity toward aligning her thinking with those who possess cultural and material means. The same cannot often be said for Sarah, who is presumed by readers (and Tassie) to be hypocritical. Tassie, for instance, recalls the collection of bumper stickers on Sarah's car, one of which reads, "PERHAPS YOU WOULD DRIVE BETTER WITH THAT CELL PHONE SHOVED UP YOUR ASS," as Sarah fields a call from an adoption coordinator while driving (36-7). Both Tassie and Sarah, when they are aware of their condemnatory outlook, attempt to define themselves against this proclivity. Sarah seeks to distance herself from a dogma she is clearly already entrenched in or discredit it altogether; Tassie punishes herself for acquiescing to the groupthink that she sees herself adopting. Both women travel to a utopian world constructed by their intellect but do not necessarily construct a world based on the 'world'-travel that Lugones describes or resist being "lovingly, knowingly ignorant," as Oretaga describes it.

Tassie does not justify her criticism of the birth mothers, but Moore implies that Tassie fears she is not entirely different from the young women Sarah interviews save a few poor choices. During the meeting with Amber, Tassie tells readers: "Amber was not shy. If she had been shy, not one of us would be at Perkins right now" (34). Not only is she critical of the young woman's sexual choices, which is a safe moral high ground for her as a virgin, but she suggests that it is shaky ground she stands on and that all young women are just one small step away from

being an unmarried, pregnant prison inmate. Tassie is aware, for better or for worse, that she is not truly part of Sarah's peer group, as evidenced when she describes the first time she saw the menu at her restaurant and could feel the "sting of my own exile" (17). She also is aware that her mother does not endorse her efforts to be upwardly mobile, perhaps jealous after she had misread Tassie's father's financial standing before marrying him. Tassie's mother is critical of the sushi Tassie brings home from Troy calling it "fancy," a term she later repeats when her daughter orders a cabernet sauvignon (64). She also gives Tassie a "knowing face" when she describes Sarah, calling her a "*fineschmecker* running a place for other *fineschmeckers*" (52). Tassie makes marked efforts to distance herself from her mother's culinary limits and the life she lived before college in which she had not even had Chinese food.

Clearly, Tassie feels like an alien in her hometown, as already highlighted, and she is left with few examples of people to emulate other than Sarah. Therefore, it is hardly surprising when, on one of their trips, she tells readers, "I was starting to admire [Sarah]. Or at least I was fearing her less" (81). It is clear that she watches the woman closely, perceiving her to be a purveyor of fine taste, even in the most literal sense. In Tassie and Sarah's relationship, food reifies that Tassie is not Amber or Bonnie, the other birth mother she meets, and soothes the insecurity that she ever will be. Tassie pities and fears these women and, after she is mistaken by two different people at the adoption agency as a potential mother, she wonders if this "portended something not so sparkling for my future" (92). In other words, motherhood is not a suitable aspiration for Tassie and she is concerned that others do not recognize her effort to avoid it (and with it a life she sees as being lower-class). Couching her fear in this way makes Tassie's criticism of the women more relatable and sympathetic. Her enamoredness with the culinary offerings of her college town and the avant-garde food her employer prepares serves another function. It signifies

Tassie's openness to experiencing new things, which endears her to readers who have likely also experienced moments when life became larger in pleasant ways due to new experiences. This sense of adventurousness also provides a sense of trustworthiness in that readers believe Tassie is not dismissing new experiences and environments as automatically inferior because they do not match previous schemas.

The biological mothers who are interviewed are equally aware of the stakes that lay before them. One adoption lawyer admits to Sarah: "These birth mothers want rich, rich, rich. They wan[t] to know their babies would have all the things they hadn't" (93). In light of this, Sarah offers Bonnie tuition assistance if the adoption is completed and is angered when she finds out that this is prohibited. Several ideas crystallize in this plot point. Moore highlights not only the tacitly understood notion that education yields access to social and material capital, but also that Sarah's position in society permits her to use her own social and material capital to persuade those around her to acquiesce to her desires, just as she had been able to do with Tassie when she persuaded her to return to school ahead of schedule with the promise of monetary retribution. It also implies that Sarah herself finds education to be critical and a marker of difference between herself and the birth mother -- a difference that she feels ought to be 'corrected'. Moreover, it highlights that her relationship with Tassie is viewed, at least by Sarah, as one of that is considerably different than the birth mothers she meets -- despite the fact that Tassie is close in age to them -- because of her status as a college student and her ability to self-discipline her sexuality. Interestingly, Bonnie also wants to attend college, seeing it as a means to improve her life. Bonnie does not feel she can accomplish this while raising her child and the lawyer comments that Bonnie "is not romantic about motherhood: she would like to pull her life together and go back to school" (85). Moore constructs the figure of the mother as a neoliberal

subject. In an interview, Moore explained her interest "in the way that the workings of governments and elected officials intrude upon the lives and minds of people who feel generally safe from the immediate effects of such workings" (www.believmag.com). Moore immediately added: "All the political things we discuss with our friends are things my characters consider, too."

This could not be more evident than in the Wednesday Meetings, which is essentially a support group for biracial families to talk through the emotional, political, and personal repercussions that racial biases have on their children and themselves. These meetings are also the most satirized moments of the novel and starkly emphasize Delgado's previous claims about false empathy. Sarah coordinates these meetings in order to "plot [their] collective actions and all that shit" after Tassie tells Sarah that a group of teenagers had called Mary-Emma "the n-word" (153). The conversations at these meetings are overheard by Tassie as she tends the parents' children. Snippets include: "institutionalized bigotry can subtly convince you of its rightness" (155); "Racial blindness is a white idea" (156); "How dare we think of ourselves as a social experiment?" followed by "How dare we not?" (156); "What's now is these self-admiring people who say, 'I don't care whether a person's black or green or purple.' As if black were a nonsense color like green or purple" (187); "Darling, maybe it looks unhelpful, but it seems to help others. I mean, someone has to be an idealist" (189); "And the suspiciousness of religion, too. I find that antiblack" (195); "Diversity is made even more extreme by capitalism" (197); "I was once in a restaurant and saw Karl Rove sitting across the room. For five minutes I thought: *I could take this steak knife and walk over there and change history. Right now*" (197); "Your sense of humor is too dark," followed by "Don't say 'dark.' It's racist" (198). If they have not participated in analogous conversations, many readers have overheard similar commentary. Moore at once

encourages her liberal readers to identify with the sentiments while mocking the pretense altogether. The conversation's participants are not only working within the boundaries of liberal ideologies, but boastfully challenge some aspects as well. Delgado argues that "false empathy is worse than none at all" because, like the participants in these discussions, "It makes you overconfident" and "apt to be paternalistic, thinking you know what the other wants or needs" (31). Moreover, Delgado claims that the "shallow, chic kind" of empathy "is always more attractive than responsibility, which is hard work" (36). Indeed, the linguistic parading here does not mention action. Within the confines of the novel, Moore, in effect, questions if empathy is enough to spur prosocial action, as Keen does in *Empathy and the Novel*.

The Wednesday Meetings also showcase Sarah's incongruous attitudes toward race and class. On one hand, Sarah is overheard saying: "Without a restructuring of the class system, the whole diversity thing is a folly," but on the other, Sarah establishes these meetings after flippantly asking Tassie: "Would you supervise the children?" (157, 153). This is worth noting for two reasons. First, Sarah does not acknowledge the ways in which her material achievement permits her to establish and participate in community social action meetings to the extent that her childcare needs are met. Second, and more importantly, she does not see Tassie as an individual who is on the front lines of bi-racial parenting with her or see her as an individual who can offer valuable insight into the daily issues of raising a biracial child. Tassie does not participate in these meetings, nor does she seem particularly interested in doing so. She describes these meetings as a "spiritually gated community of liberal chat" (186).

Tassie, as the narrator, describes herself as the one who is the real buffer between overt racism and the little girl she cares for, but her experience and knowledge is not given credence by Sarah, who, despite her rhetoric, does not see Tassie as someone who is on the front lines

with her. Tassie is aware that the people she and Mary-Emma encounter on their trips around town presume that the young girl is her daughter and their chagrin at the child's mixed race and Tassie's age offends Tassie to the point that she wants to verbally reprimand those who make public their punishing glares. While she never confronts these bypassers directly, she becomes so outraged when a mother solicits a playdate with Mary-Emma so her own daughter can have exposure to a child of another race that she retorts, "I'm sorry [...] but Mary-Emma already has a lot of white friends" (229). Tassie revolts against the idea that Mary-Emma "would be used like that -- to amuse and educate white children, give them an experience, as if she were a hired clown" (229). (The echoes of Ortega's essay in which she accuses women with racial privilege of using racial-ethnic women's scholarly identity to promote their own standing are hard to miss.) Both women admit that they are ingénues at being a caregiver to a child of an ethnicity that differs from their own, and in that regard the meetings could be helpful for both of them. However, through these meetings, Moore creates a situation in which readers identify with Sarah's hopes for improved cultural conceptions of race, while seeing the ways in which she is both ego-centric and arrogant.

Busy as she is policing what is politically correct from her stance on her liberal soapbox, Sarah often fails to see the real child who has joined her family, as evidenced most notably by the flippancy with which she changes the child's name to one of her preference. This tendency is shown again when, after a conversation in which she outlines her concern about Tassie teaching Mary-Emma songs with grammatically incorrect lyrics, she tells Tassie: "We are pioneers [...] We are doing something important, unprecedented and unbearably hard" (223). Moore leaves the 'we' vague in terms of who Sarah includes in this pronoun. While there are certainly elements of truth in this statement, her self-aggrandizement and impersonal politicking proves abrasive. She

wants to be true to herself, protect her child, and be fair to her nanny, but as Wrigley contends, it is the "parents with the most egalitarian ideologies who can end up the most conflicted" because they "have competing principles" and "want to respect their caregiver's judgments and ideas, yet they want their children treated according to their own beliefs about what is developmentally sound" (102). Still, Sarah's willingness to judge rather than 'world'-travel creates a situation in which readers do not feel guilty for being critical of Sarah in return. As highlighted, Moore seldom lets a witch hunt form and tempers Sarah with comments such as: "In everything I do there seems to be some part missing. I'm discovering that it is almost impossible to be a mother and also anything of value outside the home. But that *almost* is the key, and I'm living in the oxygenated heart of that word" (138-39). Without criticizing hegemonic structures or professing her socio-political beliefs, Sarah poignantly captures what many modern mothers struggle with themselves.

This is not the only instance in which Sarah is sympathetic, and it important to note that, more often than not, sympathy for her is gleaned when she exposes her emotional vulnerability or recognizes the ways in which her socio-economic status has permitted her to whitewash the difficulties that she has experienced in life. Moore uses her trademark dark humor to poignantly present this when Sarah states two different times: "I once murdered someone and American Express covered everything!" (83, see also 115). (The core of this truth is left unexplored until much later in the novel.) The ambivalence she feels in regard to her material wealth presents itself in other ways too. Sarah admits that by conventional notions of motherhood, she is not an ideal mother as a result of her long hours at work. Tassie's own mother accuses Sarah of being "too busy for a child" and therefore "needs" Tassie, while Sarah's neighbor pointedly tells Sarah that she only sees Mary-Emma with her babysitter rather than with Sarah (52). Both women

regurgitate entrenched notions of intensive mothering and, according to MacDonald, mothers like Sarah, who are not required to work in order to provide for their families, are the ones who are most susceptible to feeling guilty for maintaining their careers in part because they are judged more harshly for not passing on their cultural cache (201).³¹ While no longer a trailblazer per se on the front of working motherhood, Sarah is still very much trying to navigate the expectations society has for her and that she has for herself.

Sarah's politics inform her role as a working chef and mother in ways that many women would likely identify with too, and if Sarah were less ideological she could garner greater reader empathy. Instead, her prickly and dogmatic agenda is purposefully antagonistic and often hypocritical (as with the aforementioned bumper sticker), neither of which are endearing traits. More than once, her inability to consider her audience isolates Tassie, which in effect isolates readers, even as she attempts to edify the young woman. For instance, Sarah remarks to Tassie: "These bumper stickers that say EVERY MOTHER IS A WORKING MOTHER are bullshit. Propaganda of the affluent. And an insult to actual working moms with jobs" (139). Sarah seeks to affiliate herself with working-class mothers, but her moral outrage seems hollow since, as mentioned earlier, Sarah's income (or her husband's) is not essential to the economic security of the family. Other times Sarah seems initially relatable to readers who are themselves mother-employers, such as when she criticizes neoliberalism by saying: "Maybe women have been caught in a trap: we work harder so we can have more babysitters so we can work even more so we can have more money to hire more babysitters," but Tassie's following reflection, "I tried not to feel personally stung by this," recenters the statement to one that is injurious (246). Even as

³¹ This is sharply contrasted by the cultural and government structures that all but force women on welfare to enter paid labor. Grace Chang provides an excellent analysis in which she claims that while middle- and upper-middle-class white women are encouraged to feel guilty for not bestowing their presence and, more accurately, their social capital upon their children, women of color and working-class women are encouraged to delegate the care of their children to someone else. Ironically, the care of many middle- and upper-middle-class children is outsourced to these same women since, as highlighted in the first chapter, the field is considered low-skill and offers scant monetary remuneration (74-78).

her audience may nod in agreement with Sarah, Moore places readers inside Tassie's vulnerability, which stems from feeling that her true position has been called out. Moore presents another instance that showcases both the emotional stakes in the mother-employer/nanny relationship and the ways in which women are invested quite differently when Sarah divulges to Tassie that she does not believe that she, as a mother, is "enough" for Mary-Emma, claiming "Emmie really shouldn't have a mother who is too busy" (245). Tassie's internal response, "*You have me*," comes across as both honest and naïve, and, while Sarah's statement could easily garner sympathy, if not empathy, Tassie's disclosure that she felt Sarah has "negate[d]" her since she "was the one who was hired to neutralize or at least mitigate the busyness," keeps readers on her side (245, 248). Tassie feels Sarah does not have to parent alone as a result of her own deep commitment to Mary-Emma (and, to a lesser extent, Sarah). Like Sarah, Tassie is also guilty of conflating a labor relationship with a kin-based relationship, as evidenced here.

Many mother-employers may also empathize with Sarah when she returns from work to find that Mary-Emma would rather cuddle with Tassie. Tassie sees "some maternal hurt scurrying to hide behind her thin-as-a-piano-string smile" but does not dissuade Mary-Emma's affections or attempt to placate Sarah (141). This interchange underscores Tassie's own desire to 'win' Mary-Emma's love, while simultaneously highlighting the rivalry that many mother-employers experience with the nannies who care for their child(ren). MacDonald, as well as other sociologists, has established that many mother-employers make conscious efforts to downplay the importance of the relationship nannies share with the children for whom they care. For these women, admitting that their child(ren) have a deep attachment to another woman proves threatening and acknowledging this fact via verbal gratitude or monetary reimbursement only makes the vulnerability more tangible. MacDonald also notes that the effort to downplay

the relationship is seldom explicitly stated but demonstrates the degree to which many mother-employers are threatened by the love they fear will be taken away from them. This effort to downplay the emotional labor is also one of the myriad reasons nannies remain undervalued. Moreover, Tassie's and Sarah's jostling for emotional stock with Mary-Emma demonstrates that neither woman truly knows or loves the other, according to Frye, who explains that the "loving perceiver can see without the presupposition that the other poses a constant threat or that the other exists for the seer's service; nor does she see with the other's eye instead of her own" (74). Instead, Sarah sees Tassie with an "arrogant eye," which Frye describes as contrary to the loving eye (75). Tassie, like Sarah, acts in a way that reflects their belief that the girl's love is finite, when, of course, it is not.

As stated, Tassie initially takes the position Sarah offers to make ends meet, but she soon understands more fully the deep complexities of the position that she has undertaken. When she receives her first check from Sarah, she explains that the three hundred dollars she received "seemed both too much and too little" even though she "did not actually bother to calculate the hours and what the pay should have come to" (123). Tassie's situation is not unique. Like many nannies, she finds it difficult to put a price on the emotional labor that is provided to both the child in her care and to the parent(s) with whom she works. Carework is often one of the lowest paying professions in part because emotional labor, which has been essentialized as feminine and at times racial (frequently in the United States as South American, Mexican, or Filipina), is not considered labor *per se*.³² Indeed, emotional labor is often at the heart (pardon the pun) of the issue since nannies are chosen, retained, and compensated for the affection they give and the attachment they develop with the children for whom they care.

³² Moreover, while the emotional labor, and at times physical labor, is strenuous, cultural norms shape women's beliefs regarding carework to be that the integrity of carework is sullied if it is commodified even while many nannies (and mother-employers, albeit to a lesser degree) recognize that their labor is critical.

Tassie recognizes that her role is not only to nurture Mary-Emma but to serve as a sounding board for Sarah's frustrations. In this way she is privy to many private issues in the family, but still has little influence in the how the terms of the relationship are established and maintained. She is aware that in this liminal-based location she is not truly a part of the family," but the belief wavers, with Tassie expressing at one point over a meal the whole family shares, "For a few stray minutes we seemed like a family, laughing and chewing. I felt included. We were all in this together" (146). Intellectually, she knows that as much as Sarah may claim they are family, she is paid help -- help that is not entirely different than a housekeeper. Therefore, when Tassie meets the couple's sixty-year-old homosexual housekeeper, she ascertains that there was a "nice kind of upstairs-downstairs vibe I was getting from him -- we two could be the downstairs" (163). Tassie's inclination to group herself with the housecleaner denotes her tacit understanding that her work is not entirely different than the person who cleans the floors, but she also wants to believe that the emotional labor she has invested with Mary-Emma would permit a separate label. This comment marks the difficult position in which many nannies find themselves. They are certainly not paid help in the same way that a plumber or electrician is due to intimacy with the family and repeated access to the members therein, but her membership remains one that is based exclusively on the employer's needs and desires.³³ Moreover, as the close of the novel illustrates, Tassie has no means of maintaining a relationship with Mary-Emma if her guardian does not wish to facilitate it. She is valued, however, and like the family's housekeeper is permitted some latitude on errors out of loyalty, but this is because Sarah, too, has greater emotional investment in Tassie than a tradesperson hired for a single service. She

³³ Tassie's insecurity in this regard highlights what MacDonald refers to as "family exchange norms," which permit family members to "expect flexibility, accommodation and sacrifice" as part of the inherent nature of the relationship (59).

sees the young woman as an extension of herself as evidenced when Sarah begins to wear Tassie's perfume.

This does not prevent Tassie from developing a loving relationship with Mary-Emma and feeling that her presence is crucial to the inner workings of the family. As Tassie's confidence as a caregiver grows and her affection for the girl deepens, she willingly performs mothering and mentally constructs a traditional family life with Mary-Emma at the center of it. Tassie, like many nannies, begins to see herself as a proxy mother, especially when she and Mary-Emma are out with Tassie's boyfriend. Tassie claims, "it was Mary-Emma, whom I already loved, whom I would imagine us having, we would have her, and love her, her giggle, her smile, her caramel skin. And sometimes it was true: the three of us would go out together, and we were like a family" (194). Tassie needs her paycheck but she also experiences a burgeoning relationship with the toddler who is now in her charge. Perhaps in light of this it is not surprising that Tassie becomes more critical of Sarah's mothering, especially after Sarah admits that she did not check Tassie's references. When Sarah tells Tassie: "I was a snob about you. I trusted my own instincts completely," Tassie internally rebukes her by saying: "I didn't know what to tell her. Like everyone, I felt I was a good person. How could I tell her she should have phoned the references? How could I tell her, *Why would you place your child in the hands of someone whose references you never checked out?*" (177). Tassie brings into question Sarah's aptitude as a mother, presenting herself as both more responsible and aware of the dangers that lurk beyond the façade of presentable, materially secure individuals. (Ironically, Tassie lacks similar clarity regarding her own life, as evidenced by the far-fetched plotline in which she discovers that her boyfriend who claims to be Brazilian is actually a fanatical Muslim terrorist.) Moore highlights here the benefits that those who have greater access to social capital experience in their daily lives. Due

to the benefit of probability as well as the sense of a shared association, individuals who could blend into the social circles of their employers are not scrutinized to the same degree as those who are viewed as different, inferior, or threatening -- a point that is addressed directly in *Men and Angels*. Moore also brings to light, as she does in many ways throughout the novel, the ways in which nearly every aspect of mothering is shaped by class, as MacDonald argues.

This concept of knowing another person shatters the rather plodding pace of the novel again when, before the end of the probationary adoption period, the adoption agency discovers that many years earlier, Sarah and Edward's biological son had been killed in an automobile accident that was attributed in part to parental neglect. The couple served only minimal time in prison due, according to Sarah, to their ability to afford elite lawyers. Their names at the time were Susan and John. Susan/Sarah and John/Edward pled guilty to every charge, but as she tells Tassie, "[o]ur lawyer was too good" and the judge decided that the loss of their son was punishment enough. The fact that Sarah is later able to use her financial resources to relieve, even if negligibly, the loss of her son via the adoption of another child allows Moore to frame Sarah as a literary example of the usury that Ortega admonishes. She criticizes white women's welcoming of women of color particularly when they are simultaneously "using women of color to [their] own ends" (Ortega 61). Sarah's adoption of a bi-racial daughter further emphasizes this point. These acts, Ortega claims, have "nothing to do with love, although the perceiver may claim that it does" (61). In this way, Moore constructs a difficult depiction of prosocial action in her portrayal of interracial adoption.

The issue of Sarah's and Edward's names also highlights the ways in which we fail to know one another. Repeatedly in the novel, Tassie describes how a comment Sarah offers seems to echo the question she was mulling internally and Sarah, too, remarks on the uncanniness of

their shared (and often rather peculiar) responses to the world around them (75, 86, 109, 130).

Tassie, while she notices the ways in which Sarah and she mirror one another, still claims: "The people in this house, I felt, and I included myself, were like characters each from a different grim and gruesome fairy tale. None of us was in the same story. We were all grotesques, and self-riveted, but in separate narratives, and so our interactions seemed weird and richly meaningless" (249). This sentiment has some merit as each character is embroiled in his or her own personal struggles, but Tassie seems to disprove her own claim when, after Sarah tells her she can no longer locate her favorite childhood yogurt other than at a store in France, Tassie waxes, "I nodded, trying to imagine the very particular sadness of a vanished childhood yogurt [...]. It was a very special sort of sadness, individual, and in its inability to induce sympathy, [...] it bypassed poetry and entered science" (136). First, the sadness is no longer "individual" since Tassie succeeds in commiserating with Sarah and even in the ways she induces readers to experience the loss with her. Tassie's empathy with Sarah is exquisite, for a moment. However, Moore also parodies empathy in that even if readers temporarily dismiss the humor of Sarah's prune yogurt, Moore includes Tassie's memory of one of her only excursions to Whole Foods in which she found herself "paralyzed by all the special food for special people, whose special murmurings seemed to be saying, 'Out of my way! I want a Tofurkey!'" (136). Moore is known for these moments of dark humor and aims her attention on the ways in which empathy also reveals unflattering idiosyncrasies. This particular moment highlights, as Lugones too suggests, that individuals with significant material means may be prone to expecting others to be attuned to their needs and desires. The liberal bent on altruism and the discussions of racial harmony do not, Moore insinuates, extend as far as grocery shopping. In this way, Moore prompts readers to

interrogate characters' dishonesty to themselves and the ways in which public personas may clash with personal proclamations.

Despite the accrued evidence that Sarah is similarly cloistered and expectant, her dealings with the court system show that Sarah is acutely aware of the ways in which class and access to social capital altered her punishment. She also recognizes the limitations of material wealth, however, and she and her husband's past wrongs continue to haunt her. Moreover, regardless of the material comfort they can provide Mary-Emma, there is a greater issue at hand, one that the couple's access to social and financial capital cannot change. Their failure to disclose their past to the adoption agency becomes a mortal strike against them. Moore's depiction of Sarah's multiple appeals to logic in order to keep Mary-Emma are likely emotionally difficult for many readers, but in the end it seems that Sarah relinquishes Mary-Emma too easily believing she should be punished for her past indiscretions. It is Tassie who chastises Sarah, as readers likely want to do, for selfishly putting her own guilt above the needs of a child. Sarah claims "Emmie deserves better," with 'better' involving, in her definition, at least one black parent (245). "What about the feelings of a two-year-old girl?" Tassie asks back, pushing Sarah to acquire the empathy she seems to lack. Delgado argues "that when a white empathizes with a black, it's always a white-black that he or she has in mind -- someone he would be like if he were black, but with his same wants, needs, perspectives and history, all white, of course" (12). Sarah is no different. Meanwhile, Tassie, perhaps because she does not fastidiously analyze the political implications, sees that a little girl's life is being disrupted again after too many previous upheavals in her short life. In effect, Moore suggests that Sarah is allowing her egotistical guilt and loyalty to intellectualism to supersede the needs of the small child. While Tassie exhibits an ability to 'world'-travel to Mary-Emma's place of vulnerability, her youthful adherence to choices that are

clearly 'right' or 'wrong' is also shown. Moore illustrates that none of us know the 'world' of those around us without putting forth effort, honesty, and empathy. Mary-Emma is ultimately removed from the home and soon after the couple disappears, with nothing said to Tassie.

Emotionally drained from her brother's death in the Middle East, Mary-Emma's relocation, and Sarah's departure, Tassie returns the following school year and takes a job as a barista at Starbucks, satisfied to offer easy and visible contentment in a cup. Near the conclusion of the novel, Tassie informs readers that "it wasn't, strictly speaking, Sarah's story. In the end I felt it belonged as much or more to Mary-Emma, whom, I realized, I had never stopped unconsciously to seek, riveted by little girls who would be her age in stores and malls and parks" (317). Despite efforts to know and remain in Mary-Emma's 'world,' other factors conspired against her. She, of course, has little power with the adoption agency, the birth mother, Sarah, or Mary-Emma's new foster parents. Despite the connection she formed, the labor she provided, and the grief that follows, there is little she can do. At the close of the novel Moore also returns to the concept of choice and the ways that class influences one's entitlement to it. This time Edward, who separates from Sarah, calls Tassie in order to ask her out for dinner. His romantic advance not only cements the idea that he never saw her as kin, but reconfirms that Tassie should be available in every way for her employer's gratification -- in this case sexually and emotionally to buoy his confidence as a male suitor. While Sarah made many efforts to create an egalitarian relationship, emotional labor remains a difficult commodity to regulate. This aspect of Tassie's employment cannot be shed even after her tenure with the couple has drawn to a close and she is no longer paid. As highlighted, Tassie understands that she cannot expect to be treated as a family member, yet she is left nearly speechless at his advance. Like his wife, Edward is unable to 'world'-travel. Moore proves she realizes where her readers' allegiances lie when she

concludes the novel with Tassie's statement: "Reader, I did not even have coffee with him. That much I learned in college" (322). Tassie reveals in her admission that she is no longer as naïve as she once was. Addressing the reader as she does is unusual, particularly in a traditional narrative structure such as *A Gate at the Stairs*, but in her statement is also Tassie's direct plea for commiseration and endorsement, which together can lead easily to empathy.

Moore's novel is complex in part because while she asks readers to consider numerous systems, including race- and class-based forms of oppression, international adoption, the U.S. war machine, intensive mothering, and artisanal food, readers are also asked to question *how* the systems are approached and consumed by the people who are affected by them. Sarah's dogmatic, judgmental approach proves isolating and ineffectual in the novel, while readers feel more comfortable with Tassie's quiet convictions, which could, it is suggested by Moore, be more productive had she not been as constrained by misguided overseers. By creating this affiliation between readers and Tassie, Moore also brings other issues to the fore regarding age, class, and gender. For instance, readers know the story is told from an unnamed point in the future, but are left questioning if Tassie's relative youth provides readers with a willingness to forgive her transgressions more easily. It does seem that Moore relies on Tassie's youth as a means of promulgating an "out of the mouths of babes" unhampered insight while Sarah proves her dishonesty as she attempts to cover up her son's death for which she feels responsible. This juxtaposed depiction of honesty is further intensified by Tassie's lower-middle-class status. Like many characters of this class who appear in novels, Tassie is depicted as more knowledgeable and in touch with the 'real' world, which again challenges power differentials and places her as the underdog readers want to see succeed. Last but not least, Tassie's less confrontational manner could be perceived as more traditionally feminine than Sarah's. Her passive, harmony-seeking

approach is also depicted as superior to Sarah's forceful criticism and is likely received more favorably by readers. These points require further examination in the context of how novelists create empathy, how empathy forms in readers, and what qualities of class and gender are used to sway how readers perceive and identify with characters. For the purposes at hand, it may be enough to study the ways in which Sarah's (incomplete) attempts at an egalitarian relationship fail and how Tassie's growing confidence as Sarah's protégée affects their interactions.

***Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon**

Born in New York in 1949, Mary Gordon is often defined as writer by her Catholicism, although she is, many would agree, quite critical of Church doctrine that does not support her feminist ideologies. She was raised primarily by her mother, who was a more conservative Catholic than Gordon, and, according to the novelist, was a "woman of great imagination and dreams, which, in that working-class way, had to be repressed to get on with life" (Gross 155). Gordon claims she was more deeply impacted by her father despite his death when she was seven. She describes him as an "intellectual and writer," but admits he "lied pretentiously about his past [...], concealing his birth as a Lithuanian Jew who converted to Catholicism and who dropped out of high school" (Hamilton, www.nytimes.com). Despite intellectualism, Gordon contends that he had a "real romance about the working class, particularly the Irish working class. That is the community he placed me in, so I grew up in a world dominated by a very insular, working-class Irish Catholicism" (Wachtel 82). He had encouraged Gordon to be "a lady and a scholar" despite the fact that their "financial condition was dire" (Robertson 5). In light of this, Gordon claims, "class is a very important element in my history" as well as being a "very

important and well-kept secret in American life" (Gross 147). Moreover, in Gordon's review of *Marya*, a novel by Joyce Carol Oates, she states:

objects of middle-class and academic life don't tell the way the objects of the working class do, and are therefore of less use to a writer. They are things, merely, and not portents. [...] Or perhaps it is that all readers of serious novels are, by the very fact of their reading, middle class; even if we, like the child Marya and her brother, are eating chocolate-covered peanut sticks, we like to think of them as exotica; their potency as symbols increases as our distance from them grows. (www.nytimes.com)

Gordon incorporates the same line of thought regarding class into her own work, particularly in regard to how class impacts the relationship between Anne Foster and Laura Post in *Men and Angels*.

Men and Angels depicts a more strained relationship between a mother-employer and nanny than the one Moore depicts in *A Gate at the Stairs*, but like Moore, Gordon encourages readers to play favorites with her characters. Unlike *A Gate at the Stairs*, *Men and Angels* is told by an omniscient narrator that permits substantial speaking space for each of the two primary characters. The tone of the alternating chapters is noticeably different, however. The novel opens with the nanny Laura Post, but it is Anne's voice that is the more reliable of the two and consumes an increasing amount of space as the novel proceeds. Anne is also the more identifiable character in the novel and it is her voice that eventually 'drowns' out Laura's voice altogether. Gordon does not present a simple relationship between these women as some novelists tend to do when describing this labor dynamic. Margaret Drabble wrote in the *New York Times* that the women's relationship in this novel is one of "symbiotic dependence" that is based on "the attractive and unattractive, the powerful and the powerless, the loved and the

unloved" ("Limits"). It is also based heavily on the ways class shapes cultural conceptions of attractiveness, power, and love. The difference between the two women's social class, and the fundamental lack of understanding therein, is a critical barrier in both characters' ability to construct empathy for the other.

Both Anne and Laura have agendas in the novel that do not focus solely on the children, who are far from key characters, but it is the children who bring these two women into one another's spheres -- spheres that would likely never merge under other circumstances. In many ways, Anne is quite similar to Sarah. Both women live in college towns, are affluent, are married to nonpresent husbands, and have professions that result from their passions rather than only pay the bills. Their personalities and ways of viewing the worlds in which they live are quite different, however. Far from the pretentious political correctness and rigid feminism that Sarah espouses, Anne appears, initially at least, to be a softer, more stereotypically feminine woman. She is beautiful, well-educated in the humanities from a prestigious university, relatively content to be a homemaker and devoted wife, passionately proud of her role as a mother to her two children, refrains from emotional outbursts, and maintains a culturally appropriate sense of modesty regarding her own achievements and attractiveness despite repetitive affirmations from her husband, friends, and colleagues. In other words, she wins readers' empathy effortlessly early in the novel and, if she were real, could easily be a friend of the many readers Gordon likely considers to be her target audience. Anne may even be a woman some readers aspire to be personally. Interestingly, this novel was published nearly fifteen years prior to *A Gate at the Stairs*, and in many ways, both women embody the struggles feminism has faced in their respective decades. Just as Sarah speaks to the post-racial, third-wave, eco-feminism that gained traction in the early twenty-first century, Anne seems to work within (and against) the image of

the 'power' woman of the mid-1980's who donned oversized shoulder pads and entered male-dominated domains of business in unprecedented ways.

This does not mean that Anne blindly accepts her position in her family or community. She acknowledges that her career has taken a backseat to her husband's professorial position at Selby College despite her well-pedigreed doctoral degree from Harvard. It is clear to Anne at least that "[m]aleness shaped the town" as it "had for two hundred years" because while the men's wives' "function was acknowledged as necessary" it was considered "much better if they lived unseen" (11). Those in power at the college did not want to be forced to envision the person in their colleague's life who was "making the bed [...], washing his underwear, wiping the noses of his children, mopping the floor he walked upon on his way out *her* door to *their* real life," according to Anne (11). The administration did placate Anne with an assistant position at the college art gallery, which she had "shamed" them "into giving her," but despite her disappointment that she was not the director she amiably befriended the director and maintained the status quo (11). This is not a position that challenges her or one in which she takes great satisfaction. Therefore, when the opportunity to complete research on a relatively unknown artist named Caroline Watson is presented to her, Anne is lured out of the role that fills her with immense pride: homemaker and mother.

This decision does not come easily. Unlike Sarah whose career was in place before Mary-Emma's adoption, Anne's focus on childcare seems to have commenced shortly after her marriage to Michael, a marriage that happened early for both of them as they attempted to "reinvent domestic life" after experiencing less than ideal childhoods (21). Despite recognizing the upheaval that the position will cause, Anne realizes that "whether she took the job or not, the way she felt about her family had changed. If she didn't take it, she would continue rowing away

from them. If she did, she would become different in her relation to them" (25). With change being the only certainty, she decides not to accompany Michael on a year-long teaching position he had already accepted in France. Anne does not permit the children to travel to France with him because the "prospect of living without her children made her feel derelict, unfranchised," rather than because it would be in their best interest to remain with her and in their family home (26). Anne reveals here that she may not be the selfless mother that she envisions herself as. While it is nearly uncontested that Anne is a good mother in many ways, the selfishness of her motives seeps through in ways that Anne does not always acknowledge despite her emotional perspicacity and claustrophobically close narration. Gordon, in this way, encourages readers to confront entrenched ideas regarding intensive mothering and question their own motives as mothers.

This gap in Anne's otherwise astute ability to examine herself occurs again in her relationship with Mrs. Davenport, who had worked as an occasional babysitter for the family. After accepting her new position, which requires periodic overnight travel and thus (in Anne's opinion) a live-in nanny, Anne determines that Mrs. Davenport's position has been rendered obsolete -- a fact she does not find overly upsetting since Mrs. Davenport does not hold Anne in high regard. Both women's distaste for the other is based heavily on their schemas regarding class as well as gender and even age. Anne states after coming home and seeing her asleep that for the first time she is able to see Mrs. Davenport as "old and vulnerable and unfortunate rather than aggressive and unpleasant and ill-bred" (29). Mrs. Davenport's grammatically incorrect speech indicates that she is from a lower, or at least less-educated, class than Anne. This rankles her all the more when she discovers a letter Mrs. Davenport had been writing to a friend in which she describes Anne's poor housekeeping and it is one of the few times Anne's 'golden girl' status

is challenged in the novel. It is worth exploring the ways in which Mrs. Davenport's assessment of Anne is different as a result of being outside of Anne's socio-economic class, which Anne seemingly shares with most of the other characters in the novel. Like Sarah, Anne does not always adeptly discern the ways in which class influences her relationships. This is certainly the case with Mrs. Davenport but becomes even more evident in her relationship with Laura.

Initially, Anne did not want to hire Laura, despite recognizing that the "girl had done nothing, said almost nothing" to cause her displeasure (15). Her statement is not entirely true, however. Anne does notice Laura's "light blue watery eyes [...] which her thick glasses clouded and enlarged" as well as that sweater had been "expertly darned" unlike the clothes of Selby students, who were not only unable to mend their own clothes but "wore them with holes, or threw them away" (13). She also recognizes that the latter causes her to "move away," largely "because she found it difficult to place her," unlike most people in Selby, who, according to Anne, were "recognizable, by caste or type" (13). Anne's impulse to categorize the woman she is interviewing by means of clothing and physical appearance is common according to Wrigley, who explains that because the childcare market is often informal and "highly stratified" parents are forced to discern differences in candidates by the way "she speaks, dresses, carries herself, and talks to and about children" (11). After recognizing the gulf between her social class and Laura's, Anne determines that Laura "wasn't a person she wanted to share her house with" (15). Laura's lower class and inability to enact the mores of those with whom Anne typically associates makes her feel uneasy. Anne is unwilling to consciously accept that it is Laura's class and lack of culture that causes her displeasure. This meeting is quite different than Tassie's interview with Sarah, who decides immediately to hire Tassie without even contacting her references; however, both women's swift judgments originate from the same class-based

preconceptions. It is also worth noting that Anne had attempted to secure the services of a local university student first, like Sarah did, but no candidates were available.

Anne is not the only woman to experience this sense of uneasiness with Laura. Laura's most recent employer, Joan Chamberlain, had taken Laura on a family trip to England. She recommends Laura to Anne despite firing her. Laura tells readers that the Chamberlains "hadn't understood" her, just like the Rutherfords back home, but readers discern that her fanatical discussions with the children about biblical scripture had been the cause of their nightmares as well as Laura's ensuing termination. In the process of firing Laura, Mr. Chamberlain blithely tells her, "Guess our eyes turned out to be bigger than our stomachs. Ha ha" (4). The Chamberlains make no attempt to secure help for the girl, or even another job, despite being in a foreign country and providing assurances before leaving that she would "be one of the family" (85). Anderson claims in *Doing the Dirty Work?* that a domestic worker is similar to a prostitute in that she "slips into the analytical space between body as personhood and body as property" (3). With the Chamberlains, Laura's religiosity is what causes discomfort, but it is her lower class status that allows them to believe that she does not matter enough to try acclimating her to their family's traditions. (They do not seem to recognize mental illness as a factor to her fanaticism.) As Wrigley points out, "[i]ncorporating a stranger into the household takes time and emotional effort that some parents simply do not want to expend" (49). This is most often the case when the effort to incorporate a person becomes cumbersome due to the gulf between the family's and the nanny's social and economic status. In other words, Laura's social class and inability to adopt the norms of the Chamberlains prevents the development of the more intimate relationship that can result from shared experiences and, instead, promotes a sense of benevolence from her employers as well as their children. In this way, Laura is not concerned with the shape of her

affairs since she had wearied of the Chamberlains -- particularly of them "congratulating themselves for including her in their wonderful lives" (86). The Chamberlains' proclivity to see Laura as an instrument to ease their burden rather than as an individual who requires effort to understand provides a backdrop to Anne's relationship with Laura. Not only does Gordon foreshadow Anne's own troubled relationship with Laura, but she openly solicits sympathy for the young woman who has been abandoned with little thought and no place to sleep.

Gordon takes Laura's ostracism one step further by creating Laura's introspective narratives in such a way that readers are forced to slog through passages that are dense with biblical evocations, admitted prevarications, and exposed agendas and manipulations. Her religious convictions are intense and create doubt regarding her mental stability. According to Keen, these aspects of her development as a character and style of narration can impede readers' empathy (xi). Laura's affiliation with evangelical Christianity, particularly in light of her physical placement as a Northeastern college town with left-of-center academics as employers, also situates her as an outsider both in the novel and in many readers' own experiences.³⁴ Through these aspects of her character's development, Gordon prevents the easy sense of relatability present in Anne's sections, which come across as genuine, well-meaning, humane (even when she is not acting so), and penitent for her self-recognized flaws. Despite assuming the role of the intruder/villain in some regards, Laura is not ubiquitously evil or unsympathetic, however. In fact, Laura's character can, at times, evoke tenderness, albeit only through pity for her unfortunate life and loveless childhood. In this way Gordon encourages sympathy rather than

³⁴Laura's identification as an evangelical Christian also marks her class. Near the time that this novel was published, there was a surge in the popularity and political force of the Christian Right, an evangelical and political branch of Christianity in which faith supersedes works and a literal adoption of the bible is *de rigueur*. Although large numbers of U.S. citizens identify with this brand of religion, nearly all are white conservatives, often from the South and rural regions of the U.S. The political arm of the organization, which some claim *is* the organization, often panders to white, working-class U.S. citizens. While the Christian Right boasts some very wealthy and powerful national leaders, many people outside their belief system associate allegiance to this sect of Christianity with the lower class and ignorance as a result of publicized arguments against evolution that resist academic findings and views on homosexuality (and other issues) that are highly prejudicial.

empathy. Despite their superficiality Gordon coaxes readers into identifying with the Chamberlains and Anne, who chastises herself for not thinking more fondly of Laura. While Laura has faith that God will provide what she needs, she is a soul adrift -- searching it seems for someone to show her the acceptance she never received from her mother. Laura claims that she had wanted to be near her mother but was only pushed away with admonishment for not being more like her socially adept and prettier sister. Even attempts to earn her mother's praise (and diminish her sister, who was often untidy) by cleaning their home result in the mother feeling that Laura is trying to "make her feel bad" (36). When the tirade of disparaging comments from Laura's mother infiltrates Laura's narrative, it becomes clear that she developed and continues to rely on her religious fervor to replace the love she craved from her own mother. (The degree of mental illness, which seems evident, is less clear.) David Kuebrich asserts in "Apropos of a Modern Faith: Feminism, Class, and Motherhood in Mary Gordon's *Men and Angels*" that it is critical for readers to realize that in the "poker game of life" Laura "was dealt a losing hand, being born as the homely daughter of non-nurturing, working-class parents" (296). Gordon plays out Laura's seemingly predetermined path to its expected conclusion with drama but not hysterics. The latter is avoided largely due to the emotional distance Gordon maintains between Laura and her readers.

As a child who had scant material means and even less emotional support, Laura sees her new life with Anne as a way to prove to her mother that she is lovable. She seeks acceptance into Anne's world of people who have greater means than she and her family so that she may flaunt her achievement rather than for personal development or job security. This is quite different than Tassie, who is ambivalent about her progressively stable membership of the liberal middle-class, viewing it as an inevitability that is part and parcel of her increased education and social capital.

Laura shows another difference to Moore's narrator early in the novel when she proclaims that "children liked her" and that she "always understood children (30, 4). Later in novel, however, Laura briefly recalls a time she had overheard the Chamberlain children tell their mother that they found Laura to be boring and no fun (86). This confirms her lack of reliability in terms of narration and self-perception. Anne's children like Laura, but readers learn before she begins the position that Laura sees all children as "victims of injustice from the moment of their birth" because they believe "human love to be important" and she sees her job as one in which she should help them eradicate this belief (4). Her unrecognized emotional transference undergirds the dramatic tension in the novel. Rather than depend on their mother, Laura wants the children in her care to instead embrace the love of God, as she has. She believes that the "presence of the Spirit" had made her previous employers "uneasy" and attributes her prior terminations to this uneasiness (34). Her intentions takes an even more ominous sense when readers are privy to Laura's plans for her newest position with Anne, which she describes in a way that mimics the cadence and language of scripture. The omniscient narrator states:

She would find work taking care of children. Then she would teach them. She would teach them the word of the Lord. That the love they longed for was as nothing. That the way of the Lord was light. And that she was the favored one, the chosen of the Lord. And they would see it. But at first she would not speak of these things. Until she saw they loved her. She would be wise as serpents. Wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (9)

Like *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Gordon plays on the fear that even when mother-employers believe they have hired the right caregiver, which, importantly, Anne does not, it is impossible to know another's true intentions. English literature scholar Ruth Perry posits an analogous point in her essay, "Mary Gordon's Mothers" when she contends that Laura may allow

Anne to cast off the guilt of flawed parenting on another women while retaining her self-image of a good mother.

There are two ways that Laura and Tassie are similar, however. The first is their ability to empathize with others. This is evident throughout *Men and Angels*, but one of the first instances is when, immediately after meeting Hélène, who is Anne's husband's colleague, Laura tells the woman, "You must be a wonderful friend to have so many friends" because, as she reveals: "Pride and loneliness. They ate the woman up" (7). Her empathic nature is not one that leads to prosocial behavior here, which Keen stresses is important to recognize, but is one of manipulation since she believes that it "would be easy to make [Hélène] think that she was helping Laura" (7). Readers identify that Laura's 'empathic' assessments of those around her are not always correct, however, and they would likely disagree, for instance, with Laura's description of Anne as "essentially rather empty. A person of no ideas" (8). In this way, while Laura may be empathic enough to maintain a charade of a selfless and adept employee, readers recognize that they must heed the cracks. Second, both Tassie and Laura appear many times to be performing the role of the empathic domestic servant, which adjoins to the previous point. Both women recognize the differences between their employers and themselves and work to either minimize them, as Tassie does, or execute a persona that is not sincere, as Laura does. In both novels, the nannies laugh at statements they do not find funny in order to maintain the illusion of commonality with their employer. While clearly very different characters, both women realize that their employment is based on their ability to perceive what their employers want from them as well as their ability to fulfill these expectations accordingly.

It would be easy to create an underdog that readers wish to see succeed, but Gordon nudges readers to chastise Laura for her evangelical beliefs, prevarications, and inability to

forgive her mother for weak parenting while still feeling compassion for her plight. For instance, after a conversation about birthdays, Laura snatches at the opportunity to evoke Anne's sympathy by telling her that her birthday was imminent, even though it was not, and manipulates the children's affection for her into garnering a party with a homemade cake. As Laura celebrates her fraudulent birthday party with Anne and her friends, she is not filled with unexperienced joy, or even guilt, but claims smugly that her family "would never be able to meet anyone like the people who sat around that table, singing to her, honoring her, giving her presents" specifically Adrian, who she believes her mother would only come into contact with if she worked at a dry cleaners and even then "he would never talk to her" (117). This again is quite different from Tassie who feels little need to infiltrate her employer's circle of friends, even at the Wednesday Meetings, which have the potential of facilitating her ability to care for Mary-Emma. While Laura's efforts may be justified, Gordon restricts sympathy by focusing on Laura's darker sense of revenge. Instead of being construed as warranted, she is perceived as gloating. Gordon tilts the scales back, however, when readers experience Laura's delight at a present from Anne that was not purchased from the sale rack, as her mother would have done, not as a result of insufficient funds but based on her belief that Laura deserved little more.

Laura's childhood difficulties and current ostracization do not preclude Laura from fulfilling her requirements as a nanny. In fact, Anne maintains many times throughout *Men and Angels* that Laura is not only "wonderful with the children" but "marvelous around the house" as well (40). She still perceives a disconnect, though, largely because she is unable to envision Laura as a woman with a rich interior life. Anne arrogantly states: "Work, beauty, those abstractions one can apply to tasks only after reading many books -- what did they mean to a girl like Laura?" (41). This, ironically, prevents her from opening her own life to Laura in any

meaningful way and as a result forces a sense of alienation for both women. Despite this, Anne asserts that she "put up with Laura, because all the qualities that so annoyed her made Laura the perfect servant" adding that her "dullness" and "lack of imagination" not only "kept her from being bored" but "made her happy at her job" (122). Moments such as these permit Gordon to demonstrate Anne's inability to see the work of mothering as anything beyond an act of devotion (albeit a non-religious version). She does not recognize the emotional labor that Laura has invested in the family's well-being, nor, interestingly, does she see her own domestic labor and emotional labor in her children's lives as boring or devoid of intellectual stimulation. Her devotion to the work is what makes the labor worthy. Moreover, she does not see the ways in which Laura permits Anne to continue to "fulfill the intensive mothering ideal," which many nannies understand to be part of the "tacit agreement behind shadow motherhood" (MacDonald 158). In other words, like the Chamberlains, Anne does not see Laura as a peer or even as a fully-formed person but instead sees her as an expendable placeholder. While in some ways her choice of hiring a nanny who cannot fulfill the social conditioning that she recognizes as critical is strange, it also highlights her fear of bringing a woman into her home who could challenge her position in the family and whom she would see as a qualified 'competitor' in regards to earning her children's affection.

Anne's husband's perspective is not radically different from her own. He responds to Anne's prompts for advice on her troubling relationship with Laura by saying, "I think she's kind of pathetic. Lonely, empty in some dreadful way. But that emptiness makes her good with the kids. She has a terrific amount of patience. People whose lives are really full aren't the best with children. They don't have the endless time that children need" (158). It is unclear here how he envisions his wife, whom he does not see as lonely or empty yet is thought of as a devoted and

admirable mother. Moreover, this line of thinking permits him to envision himself (and Anne) as Laura's savior and as someone to whom Laura should be grateful, although neither seems particularly interested in exploring their observations regarding Laura in more reflective ways or attempting to help her feel less lonely or empty. Instead, simply opening their lives for her consumption is apparently enough to placate their sense of duty. For both Michael and Anne, paid caregiving is not on par with the care that Anne provides as the biological mother. The undercurrent here resonates deeply with the intensive mothering dogma that privileges the work of the mother as crucial to a child's well-being while diminishing the emotional labor invested by those who are paid for their time, energy, and personal investment. This angst regarding her inability to welcome her nanny into her life and the lives of her children is a source of difficulty for Anne because it contradicts her image of herself as a socially conscious, loving mother.

Certainly, Sarah and Anne both seem more invested in the feelings (or lack thereof) that they experience in reference to their respective nannies than their husbands. This may be due largely to the ways in which both women see their nannies as extensions of themselves as well as the role they are expected to perform in the public sphere -- as mothers and as women. Both Tassie and Laura push the women who hire them to recognize aspects of their lives and their personalities that they may have preferred to have left undiscovered. Therefore, when Anne admits, "It was unbearable, the things that Laura made her feel. She could have gone through her whole life without feeling them. It was Laura's presence with her in the house, it was the life she had to live beside her that made these antipathies so brutish and so real," Gordon shows readers that Anne is most distressed by being pulled out of her sphere of comfort and, to an extent, delusion (121). Her reaction is not unique, according to social critic Caitlin Flanagan, who posits in "How Serfdom Saved the Women's Movement" that the "relationship [mothers] have with

their children's nanny is a source of the deepest and most painful kind of self-examination" (www.theatlantic.com). She adds: "The relationship is in many ways more intense -- more vexing, more rewarding, more vital, more fraught -- than a marriage" (ibid).³⁵ At first blush Flanagan's assertion seems to be hyperbolic, but the novels examined herein certainly demonstrate that there is some cultural saturation of this notion. Comparative literature scholar Susan Rubin Suleiman extends Flanagan's point even further in her essay, "On Maternal Splitting: A Propos of Mary Gordon's *Men and Angels*." She contends that despite advocacy within certain branches of feminism for a more humane depiction of motherhood, women continue to both believe in and reinforce the "myth of maternal omnipotence" (29). Like Anne, they see one of their utmost tasks to be protecting their children from any and all harm. "Bad" nannies like Laura allow children to be put in danger and fulfill a similar role in the mother-employer/nanny dyad as the step-mother does in the archetypal mother/step-mother dyad, according to Suleiman, in that they permit children to "keep the good image uncontaminated" while displacing fantasies of maternal hatred or ambivalence on another woman (27). Mothers, both in the novels and as readers, participate in this construction, shifting feelings of maternal ambivalence or worse on the shoulders of the nanny. This, of course, is empathy's mirror opposite.

Anne's feelings while remaining "unbearable" do not simply disappear and she shuffles away her discomfort by asserting her dominance and protecting her physical and emotional space from Laura's purview. Gordon adeptly identifies the simple difficulties of sharing one's space, especially one's home, with an employee regardless of the verbal cloak of 'family' that is often

³⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, my interest has been piqued regarding the prevalence of poor marriages in novels concerning mother-employers and nannies. In fact, in the majority of the novels that comprise the research in this dissertation, mother-employers are more apt to have a positive relationship with their nannies at the conclusion of the novel than with their husbands.

used. Anne admits that it is a "luxury" to be able to leave the house while the children were sleeping, but she also uses the same term to describe the pleasure she derives from being able to "enjoy any of the rooms in her house" during one of Laura's few absences (60, 67). Anne begrudges herself these feelings, though, recognizing that Laura "had done nothing to earn dislike" and "had been careful, punctual, dutiful," even going "out of her way to make the children happy" (67). She concedes, therefore, that "it was her fault" (67). Her admittance serves to not only ingratiate herself to readers but also drives the feeling that Anne is flagellating herself while she is actually being duped. Anne also chastises herself for not being the employer she feels she ought to be. For instance, she instructs Laura to lock the doors to the house even though she herself rarely did and questions if she does this because "Laura was younger, a stranger" or "not connected to the house life by necessity or blood" (67). In the end, she concludes she is proving the point "this is my house; it is not yours" (67). Her self-analysis and willingness to admit fault earns her the favor of readers despite the negative traits she exhibits.

Interestingly, while Sarah does not enforce the same sense of ownership over her house, Tassie's earlier comment regarding the "Upstairs/Downstairs" quality to her arrangement draws readers' attention to the idea that her employers' home is not one in which she has any sense of proprietorship either. Moore and Gordon suggest the inherent power dynamics of the relationship prevent a different outcome. It is important to note that the nannies' living arrangements also *affect* the power dynamics that exist between the mother-employers and themselves. Tassie has her own residence because she and her family can afford to support the additional rent. Laura, on the other hand, receives no support (emotional or financial) from her working-class parents and has scant material means of her own. After leaving her home, Laura's lack of material means places her in a situation in which live-in work is required despite the fact that most nannies

consider live-in positions to be the least desirable for reasons of privacy, inadequate pay, and insufficient time off (see Rollins, Romero, and Sotelo). Consequently, Laura consistently relies on the 'kindness' of strangers (who often took advantage of her) to meet her most basic requirements of shelter and nourishment. Her relationship with Anne offers another permutation of this. It is clear Anne finds Laura to be a nuisance in every way other than the labor associated with her children. She does not make any concerted effort to bridge the space between them, and, despite her surname, she is not at ease 'foster'ing Laura.

Tassie, on the other hand, is there to help Sarah, but when Sarah is no longer in need of her Tassie leaves her place of work/Sarah's home. Her (and her parents') financial stability provides her with a sanctuary that is not where her work takes place and therefore she can escape both the gaze and the wanton requests of her employer. Due to this ownership of space, Tassie has the ability to create a more egalitarian relationship with Sarah, which in turn encourages the development of an environment in which Tassie is not viewed as a necessity but as a partner in parenting. Moreover, because Sarah works outside of the home, they are seldom together except when Sarah wants them to be. This creates a more amiable situation as well as a general sense of Tassie's presence being appreciated rather than taxing. More importantly, Tassie is a companion who can be dismissed or summoned upon Sarah's whim depending on her personal needs for emotional support, childcare, or preference for solitude. If Sarah desires privacy she knows that Tassie has another place -- a place she may even prefer -- to go to instead. As a result, Sarah does not feel the same sense of wanting to partition her life off from Tassie, while Anne seems to view Laura as a necessary evil that must remain in place, despite the drawbacks, in order for her to achieve her personal goals. This is not unusual according to Wrigley, who explains that the "ideal personality for a class peer differs from the ideal personality for a class subordinate, as

parents have different degrees of interaction with them: unobtrusiveness is valued in subordinates but not in peers" (69). Unfortunately, few nannies find themselves in situations that mirror Tassie's. One book reviewer in *The Atlantic* went so far as to call the situation Moore had created as "contrived," asking: "what prospective adoptive mother would want her prospective college-girl nanny to accompany her on interviews with birth mothers?" (theatlantic.com). And, indeed, both Moore and Gordon create atypical situations that bring unusual levels of drama to the proverbial 'kitchen table'. It is important to note, however, that the relationships in which nannies and mothers engage are often intense even in the most ordinary of circumstances. As Flanagan warns: "The precise intersection of many women's most passionate impulses -- their profound, almost physical love for their children and their ardent wish to make something of themselves beyond their own doorstep -- is the exact spot where nannies show up for work each day" (www.theatlantic.com). Therefore, this relationship and the ways in which a woman finds herself interacting with the person who is caring for her child(ren) can resonate in profound ways.

Anne, especially, attempts to shield herself from the shortcomings she begins to see in herself by blithely ignoring the role that class plays in the construction of her own life and her assessment of those with whom she interacts, particularly Laura. Gordon brings this to the forefront by creating two situations in which Anne must purchase new footwear. In the first situation, Anne is about to take her children on a hiking trip, but, if Laura is to join, Anne feels that she will need to outfit her with more appropriate shoes. Once they are in the store, she realizes that Laura does not see the same need that she does and proceeds to attribute this to the fact that "she was curiously impervious to her own physical comfort" (70). Unwilling to take Laura in less-than-appropriate attire, Anne purchases the boots for her but only after feeling

annoyed by Laura's indecisiveness. According to Wrigley, this is not unusual because "[e]mployers tend to be more resentful when class subordinates take time than when they take money" since "[t]hey hire caregivers to reduce their load and become angry when they add to it" (90). Laura, in her narration of the same situation wants to be accommodating by not being finicky about the boots Anne gets for her, but Anne reads her lack of input as haughty and seethes to herself: "This is a favor to *you*. I am doing *you* a kindness. I get nothing out of this. I'm giving you my time, my money for your comfort. How dare you suggest that you're accommodating me?" (70). In her aggravation, she blindly signs the charge slip, demonstrating not only that Anne has the financial resources to be unbothered by the tally that the receipt shows, but that her concerns about money are less significant than they are for Laura.

This scene is brought into starker relief when it is contrasted with Anne's own shoe-buying experience. In this second scenario, Anne is lured into a shoe store by a pair of boots she "wouldn't wear in the snow" (188). Once inside, she describes the salespeople as "tired, grumbly, overworked" and asserts that one saleslady looks as if her "feet hurt all the time" (187). Unempathetic to the woman's discomfort, Anne simply identifies that she was "[s]ure that was bad for business" while quickly noting her good fortune for wearing an unpopular shoe size (187). Contrary to the emotional strife of shopping with Laura, Anne simply quips:

What a nice thing money was. It said, you can have this, and this, and this, this you can put against your skin, that in your mouth, and on your feet boots that make you swoon with pleasure. This book is yours, it said, that record. You have all the time in the world, it whispered. Don't rush, don't be worried. She hated to say it, she hadn't believed it, ever in her life, but at this moment she knew it to be true: money made a difference. (188)

In this epiphany, Anne again acknowledges her good fortune and is aware of the benefits of money without necessarily recognizing how a lack of material wealth affects those around her. For instance, she asks herself what "exalted past" the saleslady who is serving her had "dropped down from, to be kneeling here, her hair the color of face powder, writing a bill out on her lap" (188). She is unaware that, in all likelihood, the woman did not have a romantic life previously filled with riches. Her fairy tale version of the woman shows readers that Anne is both sheltered and unwilling to broaden her perspective, refusing to see that those around her have not been given access to the same social and material capital that she has.

Furthermore, while Anne recognizes some of the ways her financial stability has permitted her to pursue her academic interests, she is not particularly aware of the ways in which the lightening of her own "burden" leads to sparing her "children from some elements of mistreatment" (Kuebrich 297). As a woman who subscribes to the logic of intensive mothering, Anne is quite concerned about her children's well-being and fears she is "abandoning [her] children" as she questions whether the sacrifices she is making are worthwhile (28). She fails to see the toll enforced motherhood can have on children despite being the daughter of a reluctant mother. Even though motherhood was not an easy fit for her, Anne's own mother did not have the same opportunities as Anne does and was only able to pursue her college education after Anne was much older. Anne is, instead, in a place where motherhood, or at least the physical labor of motherhood, is optional. For many women, particularly those of a lower class than Anne's, outsourcing their own labor is financially impossible, especially in order to procure employment that may not cover the expenses of childcare.³⁶ In Anne's case, her husband's salary permits her to take on work in which the "pay would be small" (190). This is clearly an issue of class; Anne's affiliation with her white, cultured husband permits her access to social benefits

³⁶ MacDonald offers a solid argument against using solely the woman's salary as a rationale for hiring a nanny (193-94).

that are rare for those who have not had the opportunity to cultivate advantageous contacts. Her mothering, by extension, is entirely shaped by her class position.

Like Sarah, however, choice becomes bedfellows with ambivalence. MacDonald argues that the "kinds of guilt women feel when away from their children, what outcomes they worry their absence might cause, what aspects of their mothering responsibilities they prioritize -- all vary by class" (202). She adds:

mothers whose incomes are necessary for putting food on the family table have a socially acceptable excuse for their absence from the home. There is no such cultural pass for the 'Volvo-class' working mothers. [...] *How* intensive mothering is expressed is cued by class. The kinds of guilt women feel when away from their children, what outcomes they worry their absence might cause, what aspects of their mothering responsibilities they prioritize -- all vary by class. Similarly, the kinds of mothering practices that women value are class specific" (MacDonald 201-202).

Her findings suggest that, culturally speaking, women who are more affluent and educated are judged more harshly for not bestowing their presence upon their own children, while children of women who are economically disadvantaged are believed to be better off in group childcare. Anne's concerns extend beyond this. She questions if her enthusiasm for art history and her research on Caroline Watson can, or should, match her passion for motherhood, as evidenced when the omniscient narrator voices Anne's musings. "If she were really gifted, really meant to do distinguished work, she wouldn't be missing her children. [...] But for her it was impossible. Having thought of the children, having desired them, she couldn't now go back" (46). As Anne delves deeper into Caroline Watson's work, she mulls over the artist's abandonment of her son in order to pursue painting in Europe. Here Anne asks: "What was that hard shining thing in the

center of Caroline Watson that had never lodged" in herself (25). She not only seems to admire Caroline's ambition but also seems to believe that a woman must have a *driving* passion for something other than her children in order to pursue a career -- not recognizing that many women simply do not have the option of whether or not to work or that her ambivalence is likely due to the societal pressure women receive to find motherhood more rewarding than all other aspects of life. She does, however, see that Caroline's situation would be quite different if she were male, just as her own life would be. This leads Anne to indignantly chastise her own interest in the painter's personal life and lack of interest in mothering by stating: "Nobody gives a shit if Monet was a bad father" (171). Here, as in other cases, Anne seems adept at recognizing the impediments placed on women by virtue of their gender and seeks to dismantle the essentialist arguments that surround a woman's biological positioning in motherhood. She is unable to extend this awareness to the impediments that result from limited cultural and material capital, however. As the daughter of a successful lawyer, Anne does not sufficiently identify the ways in which her upper-middle-class upbringing, elite education (with the cultural connections that ensued), and subsequent marriage to an academic influence the contours of her life.

With many middle- and upper-middle-class women relieving some of the guilt for 'abandoning' their child(ren) by hiring an individual proxy in their absence, it is not surprising that these mother-employers feel a conflicted sense of indebtedness to the woman they hire in their stead. For Anne, this aspect of the relationship comes to light when she states: "The truth is I need her. I can't get this work done without her" (158). In the article "Dual-Career Couples and the American Dream: Self-Sufficiency and Achievement," Rosanna Hertz asserts that in the early 1990s it became more imperative to both men and women in a relationship to "want achievement and self-sufficiency" and, despite both parents working, parenting duties have not been dispersed

equally, which has thus required parenting couples to "find ways to replace the 'missing wife'" (247). Hertz, who established that for most of these couples self-sufficiency included not requiring government or public assistance, found that many parents felt that they must secure a private solution to their childcare needs in order to maintain a sense of independence. While there is a stronger sense of autonomy in securing privatized care, the inherent dependency to an individual provider can still prove threatening. Sarah's more contemporary critique of privatization and relative comfort in remaining loyal to her career as a chef permits a situation in which she is less troubled by the labor Tassie provides Mary-Emma even as she remains obtuse to the degree of emotional labor she expects from Tassie or the ways in which her own class placement permits her to secure the labor that she does. Anne's feelings of powerless are more profound and surface as a need to 'protect' herself from Laura's gaze and presumably her critical judgment.

Anne is aware that she watches how Laura interacts with her children, but she does not feel comfortable when a reciprocal gaze is placed upon her. For instance, when she and Laura are alone in the kitchen after Michael returns from France and triggers Anne's suspicions that he has been having an affair while abroad, Anne wants to experience her fear, anger, shame, and jealousy alone. She claims that she wants to "shout at Laura as if she were a voyeur at the window. She wanted to scream; You have no right; this is not your place; this is my life. Your understanding of it, what you think of as your understanding, is a theft, a lie, you will never know anything about me" (137). In this situation, she uses the word 'place' to mean both the house and Laura's station within the family. She bristles at showing Laura her vulnerability and jeopardizing the dominance she has secured -- largely as a direct and indirect result of her class. It is her adherence to the conventions of her class, however, that also leads the narrator to

conclude: "But that was out of the question; it was something she would never do or say" (137). Instead, Anne masks her feelings, even thanks Laura for her help, but in classic Freudian transference feels she must "protect Michael from something" and moves toward him so she could "put her arm around his waist" (137). It is likely that this is what she wants Michael to do for her, but she also feels that she must guard her husband and herself in order to maintain their privacy. It is too late, though. Anne knows that Laura has been "a witness to Anne's suspicions about Michael, and as long as she saw Laura, Anne couldn't bury her thoughts about her husband" (138). This, of course, only intensifies her resentment of Laura as an intruder who has been witness to a pivotal moment in her marriage. Despite sharing close physical space and the care of Anne's children, neither seeks honesty and openness with the other. It is unclear if Laura purposely intrudes upon Anne's space or if she is simply ignorant of rules that Anne felt "everyone agreed about" but are often class-specific. At one point, Anne attributes Laura's high level of sensitivity to the fact that she "was homeless," and therefore "had that sharp or, rather limpid, understanding of the thoroughly displaced who earn their place by knowing what will be the next thing to occur" (41). This observation alludes to a sense of empathy in Laura, which bolsters her belief that Laura purposely intrudes in order to antagonize Anne, but she proceeds to explain that she sees Laura's poverty and ensuing homelessness as an "ignorable congenital disease, a slight deformation of the spine" (71). This conflation of one's class with a biologically based impediment is revealing especially in her use of 'congenital,' which insinuates a sense of being passed on from one's parents. In this way, it seems Laura cannot be saved from her 'disease' in Anne's estimation.

Anne seems unable to accept Laura's differences and remains pointedly condescending in the process until she, her children, and Laura spend Thanksgiving at the daughter-in-law of

Caroline Watson. In Jane's home, Anne feels that she must defend Laura because "Laura was no match for [Jane], and Anne didn't want to see Laura hurt," despite the fact that she shares many of her peer's unfavorable sentiments regarding Laura (99). Oddly, when Jane reaches a similar conclusion regarding Laura's intrinsic unlikability, Anne "suspect[s] Jane of snobbery, of class or of religion, she couldn't be sure which" and fails to see the ways in which her own sense of class inhibits her from forming a stronger attachment to Laura (133). Interestingly, Anne herself feels inadequate at Jane's house, finding when she sits down to dinner the "table she had dreamed of setting but didn't have the money for" that was "all that Anne felt she had not been born to" (101). She is envious and suggests that she, too, has been riddled at birth with disadvantages. One would predict that this sense of envy and inadequacy Anne experiences would encourage an easier pathway toward understanding how Laura may feel in Anne's home, but she remains resistant to this.

It is worth noting that Anne views Laura's working-class status in a markedly different light than she views the poverty of Ed Corcoran, the electrician for whom she develops a romantic interest. Unlike her view of Laura's reproductive labor, which had been her own until very recently, she sees Ed as a "victim of tragedy" who is "unlike the spare heroes of the Greeks" because he "had to live on day to day, looking after things: the house, the children, medicines and doctors" (186). Ed, she claims, "always has to worry about money," which makes him "one of the most admirable people she'd ever known" (186). This romanticizing of a working-class man permits Anne to believe that she is kind-hearted and unbothered by class, while simultaneously not truly seeing Ed's humanity or the ways in which gender shades her perspective. Moreover, despite Ed's pedestrian opinions of art, Anne believes that Ed has fine instincts because he "understands about art, about the primacy of the image" (169). She

concludes that his tastes could easily be refined if he could accrue more formal education and she engages in a fantasy in which Ed attends night school part time. He, unlike Laura it seems, "clearly has a good mind" and, Anne concludes, "it would be a shame if he didn't get to cultivate it" (169). Anne does not see that Ed is content with his life or see the ways in which she is imposing her own agenda upon him.

Moreover, while Anne admits that she hates "to think that the people she did business with had less enjoyable lives than she did," she does not recognize the ways in which she actively petitions these same people to fill the lacunae in her life (58). Ed, too, seems blind to the selfishness in Anne, whom he tells after watching her make the birthday cake for Laura: "Almost nobody would do that. People treat people who work for them like things" (111). Readers, of course, know the truth, which will be addressed momentarily, and feel Anne has gotten away with something that she should not have. Later, Anne decides that she wants a closer relationship with Ed. The narrator suggests Anne is used to men approaching her, but in this instance she believes she must be forward about her intentions because, she believes, Ed "would never make the first move [...] for reasons of class" (131). Anne cannot tempt Ed away from his disabled wife, though, despite her unconcealed advance toward him. When Ed rebukes this romantic advance Anne quickly steps away from her shame and rejection and instead blames Laura, justifying to herself that this "thing she had allowed herself to feel for Ed was a result of the intolerable pressure of living with Laura" (196). Not only does Anne not see Laura in the same light she sees Ed, she cannot seem to apply the more benevolent feelings she has for him toward her. In this regard, it is unclear if gender is the driving factor or if she is more interested in fulfilling the role of savior via her sexuality than through female mentorship. She suggests the latter toward the end of the novel when she explains that she and Ed could not be platonic friends

because "Without desire, all their differences were bared" (222). She replaces her desire with pity.

Anne is not alone in ostracizing Laura or in capitalizing her labor. Anne's friend, Adrian, instructs Anne not to fret over whether to fire Laura because he believes it is not Anne's responsibility to make her happy. He tells Anne: "Listen, you're not her mother. You're her employer. Your responsibility is to pay her a fair wage and not to overwork her. You don't have to save her life. Look, you've got to do your work, raise your children, vote in the local elections, and be faithful to your husband. You don't have to take in strays" (113). Adrian's advice seems particularly detached in light of his recent sexual fling with the young woman. Like Sarah's husband, Edward, he assumes that a nanny's labor is available whenever and to whomever without consequences.³⁷ When Anne complains that she wants to replace Laura, Adrian asserts: "Now, don't start that. She does a good job for you. That's all you have to worry about. The kids are doing fine with her, the house is spotless. She never goes out; she's not freaked out on drugs or screwing her boyfriend in the living room. Just don't expect too much from the relationship and you'll be fine" (113). In other words, Adrian tells Anne she should be emotionally detached; Laura should not consume Anne's thoughts through attachment or annoyance. Anne should not 'know' Laura any more than necessary but manage the relationship as she would any other labor relationship despite the inherent differences that have already been discussed.³⁸

Unlike Anne and Adrian, Anne's children are quite concerned about Laura, even petitioning their mother to make her a birthday cake as she does for them and excitedly working together to surprise Laura. Meanwhile, Anne begrudgingly acknowledges the pettiness of her

³⁷ There is a long history of female domestic workers engaging in sexual encounters with the males (both boys and men) in the home. These are often against the woman's will. There remains a complicated connection between dirt and physicality as Judith Rollins, among others, notes. I hope to explore this topic more intensively in future research.

³⁸ Some research shows that a more austere relationship model could be beneficial between mother-employers and nannies. (See MacDonald's *Shadow Mothers*). This would need to meet both women's needs, however, and is clearly not what Laura desires.

"resentment" and argues to herself that she should "give up a day's work" since it "would mean so much to this girl who had so little" (72-73). By not even using Laura's name Anne again demonstrates Wrigley's findings regarding the sanctity of time outweighing the importance of money as she begrudgingly relinquishes the former in order to make the cake. Lest this be perceived by readers as an act of good will or even playing the martyr, Gordon suggests that Anne is only doing the tasks related to birthday planning for her own children's pleasure rather than for Laura's. Moreover, as she executes the tasks, Anne permits herself to believe that she is the young woman's benefactress, seemingly agreeing with her children's perception of Laura as "mysterious and exciting," not as a result of her personal attributes, but because they identified the "scent of deprivation that hung on her" (106). For Anne's children, and even Anne, poverty is a novelty, but while they want to examine the difference like an animal at a zoo, Anne wants to quarantine any connection that it may have to her.

Gordon more directly interrogates how class relates to mothering, including the ways in which it shapes morality and prosocial behavior, when Anne converses with her neighbor, Barbara, after they attend a documentary on women's roles in the labor movement of the early twentieth century. Instead of feeling inspired, Anne finds the women in the film to be "naïve" and admires them only because they "still had the luxury of believing" in the Russian Revolution (171). This blithe dismissal of their commitment is applied to mothers specifically when Barbara acknowledges that she is unsure how she feels about the actions of a Weatherwoman, who she believes was courageous in her quest for reform but whom she finds simultaneously delinquent since her involvement in the organization led to incommensurate risk as a mother of a young child. Barbara concludes: "Maybe I'll have a moral life when I get older. When my kids are gone" (171). Anne does not oppose her friend's viewpoint with much conviction. As Kuebrich

notes, "Anne's failure, despite her well developed sense of personal morality, to be more attentive to class injustice does not stem from a lack of familiarity with ideologies of class conflict, [...] but from her comfortable existence and preoccupation with the well-being of her children" (299). Gordon's characters insinuate that empathy can be fine tuned via mothering, particularly when children are preverbal, but also suggest that mothers should, at times, define themselves *against* prosocial behavior. This is evident when Barbara asserts, "When you're a mother, you think with your claws" (171). She defends her prerogative to protect her own children over the needs and safety of others but overlooks how prosocial behavior affects the greater world in which they live. The enemy, she suggests, is specific and immediate rather than hegemonic in nature.

When Anne eventually fires Laura, she relies on a similar logic of self-protection, defending her choice as one that rests on her responsibility as a mother. Acknowledging that her decision may pain Laura, Anne argues that when the young woman's "troubles became a danger to the children, she had to be got rid of. It was as simple as that. [...] Whatever moral consideration Anne owed to the rest of humankind was dwarfed by her first duty: to keep her children safe" (211). Gordon's use of passive voice in the statement ('she had to be got rid of') highlights Anne's unwillingness to claim liability for the relationship or for Laura. She suggests that it is not her own impulses that are the cause Laura's termination, rather it is a universal known that Laura's behavior would lead to a predetermined consequence. It is "simple" after all. Ultimately, Anne is again given reassurance regarding her behavior from her peers who are members of the middle- and upper-middle-class.

Ironically, it is only after Laura's suicide that Anne's maternal feelings are bestowed upon Laura. While Anne and the children are gone, Laura slits her wrists and drowns herself in the

tub. The water overruns and seeps down the walls of rooms below. The children see Laura's body before Anne can shield them. With the threat now dissipated, Anne tends to Laura's lifeless body. The narrator explains that Anne now "felt that Laura's body, having met death in her house, became her child" and therefore she was compelled to "protect it from the violations of the outside world as she protected her own children" (214). Until this point, Anne resisted feeling obligated to Laura and remained angry about the ways she felt coerced into tending to her needs. Her perspective changes almost immediately after Laura's death.

Anne cannot wholly extinguish her judgment of Laura, however. After removing Laura from the tub and laying her body on her own bed, she surveys the items in Laura's wardrobe and decides none seemed right. Anne then covers her with her own robe, thereby putting to rest her own misgivings while merging ever more closely with Caroline Watson, whose own son had committed suicide, presumably as a result of his despair regarding his estranged mother. While momentarily tender, Anne does not want any trace of Laura to remain and spends the following days scouring Laura's blood from the items in her home that reify her class and education. She discards all soiled goods. In the process she removes not only the blood but also Laura's 'mark,' which had been left when she completed a thorough cleaning of Anne's house. Like Mrs. Post, Laura's housekeeping efforts had bothered Anne, who felt Laura had somehow sullied her personal items by touching them. And, like the nannies in MacDonald's research who were expected "[e]ven in their leave-taking [...] to leave no footprints," Anne wants to remove all traces of the young woman's time with them (118). As before, she maintains her proprietorship of her home claiming, "It was their house; it did not belong to Laura's death" (222). Her friends and neighbors help her in the process.

There are alternatives, according to Kuebrich, who contends that Gordon's novel shows that in today's socio-political climate of "pervasive injustice and complex interdependency, parents must not contract their field of ethical concern but instead develop a more comprehensive political analysis that includes attention to class injustice at both national and global levels" (300). In other words, class, and the psychological comfort that results from having physical needs met, may discourage empathy and 'world'-travel in a similar way that being white restricts 'world'-travel according to María Lugones. Moreover, readers see how distance can ease the restraints toward developing empathy. It is only when Laura is no longer a physical or emotional threat that Anne can lower her guard.

I have argued that novels can act in a similar way, permitting insight due to a sense of relative safety in comparison to real life interactions. While Sarah attempted to experience empathy by projecting herself upon Tassie, thereby creating safety in similarity, Anne divorces herself from any sense of similarity at all. As highlighted in the first chapter, Diana Tietjens Meyers posits that "empathy is premised on concern for the other" (115). Neither Anne nor Sarah achieves this more altruistic embodiment of empathy. For readers, this becomes most clear in Anne's situation when she makes the journey to Laura's childhood home, a place that could offer a more complete understanding of Laura.³⁹ With Anne as the sole observer, readers no longer have a counter-narrative to Anne's perspective, which is sharply critical before she even arrives at Laura's house. At a diner Anne orders eggs after she remembers her father telling to do so if she found herself at a suspicious establishment. "You always knew an egg is fresh [...]; if it weren't, they wouldn't be able to fool you," he told her as a child (223). The underlying claim is that she wants to avoid being duped by people, specifically those who are lower-class, who will trick her if she is not careful. She believes she must be more guarded of her safety.

³⁹ The impact that physical travel can have on the development of empathy will be examined in detail in chapter 4.

As she approaches Laura's childhood home she notices that the houses "bore the shame of providing more room than the shrinking families they held could use" and "flinched under the monthly curses that the oil bills produced" (224). This town stands in stark contrast to her idyllic college-town -- even "spring was late here" (224). Like the F. Scott Fitzgerald's Valley of Ashes, Laura's town is a place no one would stop in without cause. With even the certain rebirth offered by spring withheld, Anne observes: "It was the bleak testimony of a place down on its luck, of bad times, no jobs and no money" (224). Throughout the novel, Anne attributes her success and comfort to good fortune; here, readers witness the inverse: the unfortunate. Anne does not probe the reasons for the stark difference; there is no reason when she can instead blame or credit the fates accordingly. Anne is not simply blind to the misfortunes of those around her or the comfort that her material means provide her, and Gordon manages to work into Anne's character a sense of gratefulness that is complex in its inadequacy.

When Anne finally meets Laura's parents, she turns her artist's eye upon their physical appearance. She notices, for instance, that Mrs. Post's "trim, well-cared-for body" has "been won away from every natural process," which stands in contrast to Anne's more organic beauty (225). Her assessment of Mr. Post is just as acerbic as she calls out his "newly false teeth" and a neck that is "too long for his body" (225). When she sees the gold chain around his neck, she further diminishes his attempt to show material wealth. Anne's view of their internal shortcomings is no less harsh. Gordon avoids the conventional 'hooker with a heart of gold' in Mrs. Post, who shows little remorse regarding her daughter's death. Readers are again given a pass on experiencing easy pity or earned empathy as they stand next to Anne in her perch built from social capital. It is easy to chastise Laura's father who feels his most important responsibility is making sure that Anne knows he will pay for any expenses for the funeral rather than express grief at the personal

loss of his daughter. Neither parent suggests that they will attend a funeral if one is arranged and both parents seem intent on displaying wealth they do not have, which only emphasizes the material and cultural capital that they lack.

The harsh characterization of Laura's parents seems unrealistic but because of Anne's narrow understanding, readers cannot discern if the situation is misinterpreted. It is clear that Anne is eager for her meeting with them to end and she exerts little effort beyond the formalities, allowing herself to believe that she is altruistic for doing even that much. Kuebrich points out that Anne is unable to see that despite being a woman of a nearly identical age her life took a radically different direction from Mrs. Post's primarily as a result of the comforts that her class has afforded her. Mrs. Post seems more aware, however, and directs Anne to "get in [her] fancy foreign car and get out of here" (227). Laura's mother does not want her 'world' exposed to Anne for critique and rather than sympathize with the difficulty of the situation that Mrs. Post is experiencing, Anne leaves the house thinking: "The woman was a monster" (228). Again motherhood is conflated with morality when she claims, "Motherhood was a place where hate could not enter" (228). Anne cannot 'world'-travel to this place in which motherhood is more of a struggle than it has been for her since, if she did, her sense of identity would be threatened and her view of Laura reformatted.

Without seeing shadows of her own behavior in that of Mrs. Post's, Anne claims she will "mourn" Laura and "fill her heart with grief" in order to acknowledge that life had been "cruel" to Laura" (229). She now feels required to show the grace that is often affiliated with the upper-class in order to differentiate herself from those she chastises. Delgado contends that empathy is quite rare, and that "we think we [...] have much more empathy for the downtrodden than we, in fact, do" (11). Indeed, empathy is still absent in Anne. She only offers pity. As Kuebrich points

out, Anne is "better at deconstructing the tastes of the working class than at identifying with their misery" (307). Anne's sense of pity is enough to allow her to feel morally superior to the Post family and maintain her identity of one who is inherently different from the Posts. Delgado warns specifically against this when he explains that false empathy "encourages the possessor to believe he is beyond approach" (18). In the end, like Sarah, Anne does not grow significantly or come to a Joycean epiphany. She remains "Consistent with her middle-class background and intellectual training" by being a "perceptive observer of the moral foibles and unsophisticated (as well as less affluent) tastes of the working class" (Kuebrich 307). Her excursion, which Kuebrich accurately calls a "harrowing journey into the culture of the working class," shows that, for Anne, even literal travel cannot cultivate 'world'-travel (307). While she departs physically from her home, but she is unable to leave the mindset established by the class to which she belongs.

Anne is thus able to return to her sphere of comfort and regain her proprietorship over her children untouched. She fears, however, that her children will be forever damaged. Even while recognizing that childhood is a "middle-class invention, a luxury the poor knew better than to try to hold too long," she muses unhappily that her children will now "grow up like children of the poor," who will not readily accept stories in which "dangers would be vanquished and the bleeding hero makes his way back home" (237). Now, Anne pities her children for losing the "safety they could wear into the world like a gold ring, a sign" (238). She believes her children, had it not been for Laura, would have been protected. She craves this security for them, rather than question the hegemonic structures that, if Anne is right, diminish hope in poor children. Instead, Anne asks: "Would kindness replace safety, like a richer cloak, or would they have to wear the bloody skins of the impossible-to-think-of poor, or would they go half-naked, like the freezing Lear, with no fate for them but an animal's bad luck?" (238). Anne identifies in her

assertion that kindness (and perhaps empathy) is not only opposed to safety but superior to safety, too. However, the reference to Lear presents rich references to the power of nature, political machinations, and motherless figures lost without love. While she is musing about her children, it is impossible not to think of how these themes in Lear connect to the injustices in Laura's life and interrogate the meaning of justice as well. The "impossible-to-think-of poor" have no other option than primordial survival, Anne suggests, but only because no one will help promulgate equality. Good fortune remains Anne's crutch, and, being endowed with it, she prefers to remain safe rather than kind, protecting her family rather than looking beyond it.

Conclusion

Certainly, Moore and Gordon both examine the ways in which class affects how one mothers and the ways in which the mother-employer/nanny relationship gets shaped. Neither author is prone to glorify the mother-employer and instead shows readers negative examples of behavior that should be avoided and the consequences of failed relationships. Their novels reflect sociological research that contends that class affects how and why a caregiver is chosen, how the relationship between that person gets shaped, and what benefits are offered to those who more closely match the socio-economic class of the mother-employer, which is often securely middle-class or upper-middle class. Moore achieves subtlety in her reliance on class as a structural element to the novel in part by balancing significant attention on issues of race. Moore places the novel during the period shortly following the 9/11 attacks, which many argue were predicated on injustices that result from unregulated capitalism and the United States' perceived greed. In this way, her effort to show how material wealth can obfuscate, but not eradicate, the wrongs one has done in the past contributes to one of the grand narratives of our time. She then creates a distilled

version of a mirror issue in the lives of Sarah and her husband. At its most basic, Moore depicts a rather good relationship between Sarah and Tassie. The strength of the relationship is based on both women's emotional investment in the other, their recognition of the ways in which they mirror each other, and their interest in forming a mentor/protégée dyad. There are certainly difficulties, the primary of which are Sarah's egotism and ideological nature. Concealment and communication are also key barriers to a more successful relationship.

In *Men and Angels*, Anne, like Sarah, is well-to-do, politically liberal (although significantly less ideological than Sarah), egocentric, and often unmindful of the ways in which class structures her life. When she hires Laura, a nanny of a substantially lower class than her own, however, the results are markedly different. Anne does not see Laura as her peer, nor does she see her as someone complex enough to warrant further examination. Unlike Tassie and Sarah, there are few similarities between the women, which Anne sees as a defect rather than as an opportunity to learn more about Laura. Anne surrounds herself with like-minded peers who are accustomed to the privileges she enjoys by virtue of her class. Even when Anne is placed in a position in which she had less material and cultural capital than Jane, a person she hopes to impress, she does not explore her fledgling appreciation for Laura's situation. Her loyalty to her position as a mother to her biological children informs her decision to protect her own children despite the harm that it may cause Laura. When Anne physically travels to Laura's home, her journey leaves her no more enlightened than when she left and she therefore fails to yield a deeper sense of empathy for Laura. She instead relies on the beatific images of mothering to form the bedrock of her identity. She opts out of pursuing prosocial action by privileging her children's needs above anyone else's. Ultimately, lack of affection, from both her mother and from Anne, contributes to Laura's decision to commit suicide. From this perspective, it is critical

to again bring forward the ways in which knowing, or more specifically empathic knowing as Lugones describes it, is critical for the characters. Sarah's and Anne's lack of empathy caused the respective young women they hired emotional difficulty, and in the latter's case, led to the Laura's suicide. Both novels outline a rather far-fetched series of events, but there are realistic depictions of the women's emotional landscape in both too. Moore and Gordon depict mother-employers who, because they resist 'world'-traveling, limit their personal growth. In both cases, their children seem worse off as a result and the nannies feel excluded and betrayed. This is not to suggest that the mother-employers hold more power, but it does suggest successful 'world'-traveling requires both women in the mother-employer/nanny dyad to be invested in the relationship.

Moore and Gordon successfully solicit different levels of empathy from readers for their respective mothers over the course of the novel with Anne often seeming more relatable, particularly because the omniscient narrator allows her to explain herself. Sarah does not have this opportunity. Instead, Tassie relates the conversation as she has perceived it with direct access to the readers. Tassie depicts Sarah as a woman who experiences little self-doubt about mothering -- choosing to interpret the act of mothering as a political one in which there will always be stone throwers. Her tendency to put her political ideologies over the feelings of those around her earns her less sympathy with readers, even after readers glean that her confidence may be bravado to cover the errors she committed in the past. Sarah's dogged effort to monitor equality creates in readers a sense of avoidance, in the way a disciplinarian often incites anticonformity.

Tassie is hired for a role that Sarah believes to be exceptionally important based Sarah's sense of 'knowing' her. Sarah's immediate sense of familiarity with Tassie is one based on shared

cultural experiences that in turn reflects a shared sense of class and by extension a relationship in which both women have many of their needs met. While Sarah immediately feels that Tassie is a kindred spirit, she does not *know* the young woman in a profound way and I contend that this happens because the women share a joint sense of identification. Self-delusion regarding the depth of one's understanding of the other curtails the investment of labor and time. It is the sense of comfort and trust that encourages Sarah to fill in the blanks with sanguine expectations or insert her own feelings and experiences as those of Tassie. Sarah knows enough to feel she does not need to know more. She does not challenge the aspects of Tassie that remain foreign or less penetrable, but that prohibits her ability to empathize with Tassie. Similarly, she harms Tassie in a profound way when she does not fight harder to keep Mary-Emma in her family, as Tassie believes that she herself would do, and by disappearing without any notification. Tassie, aware of the consequences of asserting herself in a way that would oppose Sarah's conception of her, often plays along. In some ways, she even allows Sarah to mold her into her image via her interest in certain foods and wine, for instance. In return, she keeps her position with the family until she her job is rendered void after Mary-Emma's removal.

As argued earlier, the ways in which characters express empathy for other characters ultimately affects the degree of empathy they receive from readers. Both authors likely claim a similar type of reader as their primary audience and these are women who can likely relate to both Sarah's and Anne's lifestyles and challenges. Both mother-employers make choices that negate their ethical responsibilities as employers but in doing so remain relatable even when readers do not want to acknowledge the similarities. Like the scores of sociologists who write about domestic labor, Kuebrich argues that many middle-class parents in the United States find themselves in a "precarious position of being impelled to choose between striving for greater

wealth in pursuit of an increasingly hard-to-obtain security for their children or seeking to develop effective political alliances with the less affluent so as to work for a more equitable social order" (311-12). Gordon hones in on this point more than Moore, but both authors trouble the ethical issue of employer responsibility. As suggested earlier in this chapter, their readers are asked to analyze (and likely find wanting) their own relationships with childcare providers. Interestingly, while readers leave both novels with a sense that the mother-employers are not necessarily entitled to compassion, they remain characters that garner empathy.

This is achieved in both cases by Moore's and Gordon's constructions of mother-employers who mistreat their sensitive nannies, albeit in ways that can be understood in the context of the novel and within the dogma of intensive mothering, and therefore promote identification. This point is particularly salient in *Men and Angels* when Anne fiercely reprimands and then fires Laura for not preventing her children from playing on thin ice knowing that Laura will be deeply hurt by her actions. Anne justifies her choice via the narrator, stating, "Whatever moral consideration Anne owed to the rest of humankind was dwarfed by her first duty: to keep her children safe" (211). She claims that people without children could be the ones who take Laura in and help her. She fails to recognize a place between the opposing options she has established. In this place she would not be required to keep her children in Laura's care but could still assist in finding her the help that she needs. As Kuebrich points out, *Men and Angels* (and I would argue *A Gate at the Stairs* as well) "demonstrates both immorality and the futility of affluent parents seeking sanctuary for their children in a manner that ignores the suffering of others and the demands of social justice" (312). According to Kuebrich, Anne failed largely for two reasons: first, because her brand of "middle-class feminism [...] demands gender equality but is prone to ignore the inequities of class" and second, because her compliance with a

"middle-class style of parenting that privileges one's own children while ignoring the larger issues of social justice" (295). Although Gordon's decision to have Laura commit suicide seems sensational, if one removes the melodramatic aspects of the events, the interior space described by Anne is one that many of Gordon's readers can likely understand.

Moore's mother-employer is also flawed as a mother. She failed to protect her son in the most profound way and carries the guilt of his death with her. Interestingly, the courts did not agree with her self-flagellation. The judge's verdict suggests that she should not expect omnipotence from herself, yet still reinforces the logic of intensive mothering by claiming that the loss of her child is more punishment than the courts could inflict. Sarah, however, attributes her 'light' sentence to her financial capital and ability to line the justice system with silk. She believes in the myth of maternal omnipotence, which she displays to Tassie when she reprimands her for teaching Mary-Emma a song with improper grammar because it is an "issue when raising kids of color. A simple grammatical matter can hold them back in life" (222). She does not permit Mary-Emma to have agency in this process. Paradoxically, she later fails to protect Mary-Emma in a profound way, in Tassie's opinion, by allowing the adoption agency to remove her from Sarah's relatively stable home. Again, the dogma of intensive mothering haunts her. Sarah cannot claim the status of a 'good' mother because she has hired substitute care and retained her position as a restaurant owner despite not needing the income. Her rationale for relinquishing Mary-Emma, while partly based on her ego-centric guilt, also privileges racial identification, intensive mothering, and, she claims, puts Mary-Emma's needs above her own. She views her act as one of selflessness even if Tassie disagrees. Readers who most likely have not experienced such dramatic events in their own lives can still identify with the sense that mothering offers few easy answers even as it incurs significant judgment.

In some ways both authors suggest that the characters (and perhaps readers too) are not judgmental enough, at least when it comes to hegemonic structures that influence our behavior and way of thinking. Both authors challenge readers to examine the ways in which the neoliberal mother is required to fend for herself (and her children) alone, the ways that class can mitigate that struggle, and the ways in which outside forces impact intimate aspects of family life. Kuebrich argues that the "pervasive climate of injustice, human frustration, and social instability gives rise [...] to local problems whose ramifications radiate outward in myriad unpredictable ways, ranging from revolutionary conflicts and refugee flows to reduced funding for the arts and psychologically disturbed au pairs" (311). Gordon's effort to have readers identify with Anne, and not Laura, thereby situates them in a place in which her fallacious ideas regarding class and neoliberalism must be accepted as rational and fair or else be challenged for their resistance to empathy and political examination. Gordon prompts readers toward the latter. Unlike some less-nuanced novels, *Men and Angels*, does not depict the characters in a simple "rich/bad" and "working-class/good" dichotomy. Anne's ambivalence about work and Laura's emotional wounds lead to a design in which both women require support, but their inability to see outside of their own 'world' prevents either from helping the other, despite both women having life experiences that would fill the fissures of the other. In this way Gordon is quite insightful about the confluence of tenebrous emotions that are intrinsic in nearly all mother/nanny relationships. With that said, neither woman successfully 'world'-travels to the place of the other and examines the structures that have influenced the positions in which they find themselves. Readers are left witnessing examples of what not to do rather than what to do.

Artisan potatoes aside, it is sometimes unclear the level of satire Moore intends to infuse in *A Gate at the Stairs*, or even why she chooses to be satirical. Rachel M. Brownstein claims

satire is "traditionally the weapon of the party out of power," but Moore, as a writer, is well-regarded and the harshest moments of satire are ones directed at her own peer group (119). In *Rhys, Stead, Lessing and the Politics of Empathy*, Judith Kegan Gardiner argues, "If empathy is 'marked' as especially important to women, a woman writer may play the role of the unempathic or rejecting mother rather than that of the maternal nurturer to reader or text. Because of cultural attitudes expecting nurturance from women, this position is particularly powerful" (166). In this way, Moore can better affect readers' interactions with Sarah. At times, Moore presents Sarah as a caricature of a middle-aged, liberal, educated woman, and, as a result, readers resist entering an empathetic space with her. Via Sarah, Moore seems to mock the progressive, educated elite and their false sense of righteousness regarding race and class, particularly by highlighting the hypocrisy that occurs when these members participate in the systems of oppression they criticize. While more dogmatic, Sarah could be accused, like Anne, of endorsing a brand of middle-class feminism that "demands gender equality but is prone to ignore the inequities of class" (Kuebrich 295). While more aware than Anne, Tassie presents Sarah as someone who is not fully cognizant of the ways in which she enacts *noblesse oblige*. Sarah can often pantomime the linguistic stylings of liberal frameworks but fails to see how her commitment to the ensuing action falls short. This is most salient in her failure to acknowledge Tassie's emotional support (either verbally or financially), her betrayal of the kin status she professes Tassie possesses, and her unwillingness to enter the difficult terrain of legal code regarding adoption in order to preserve her obligation to Mary-Emma. She chooses instead to abdicate her attachment to Tassie as well as to her foster daughter. Sarah is presented as having more bark than bite, even though it is the 'bite' that Mary-Emma needs most in order to terminate the revolving door of foster homes she has experienced. Like Anne, Sarah does not question the ways in which she is a neoliberal

subject with few community or government resources available to lessen difficulties for either Mary-Emma or herself. Moore only briefly touches on the increased difficulty women of less means experience via Mary-Emma's biological mother, her foster mother, and Amber.

This lack of interrogation occurs, in part, because both mother-employer protagonists are also strongly limited by their drive to establish their identities as mothers. Kuebrich extends an argument that is fitting to both novels when he states that Gordon's

depiction of parenting and class, in particular of more affluent parents' obligation to the well-being of poor families, placed as it is within a larger narrative context that calls attention to class injustice at home and abroad, gives her novel a special relevance to the present historical moment in which the imposition of neo-liberal economic politics on a near-global scale creates increased economic insecurity, intensifies sharp class division, and further impoverishes the poor majority of the world's children. (311)

The illusion of choice, which laces conversations about mothers who work outside the home, is often taken for granted by media sources and even middle-class women themselves. Both Sarah and Anne trouble their positions by assuming labor roles outside of motherhood despite not requiring the income their jobs provide. With absent husbands, both mothers choose to hire nannies, not recognizing the ways that class shapes this predilection or even the ways that class shapes the relationships they form with the women who tend their children. Instead they see this option as one that will provide them with the flexibility they require and the personal attention they want to offer their children despite their own absence. Not only do they focus on their children's safety, although this is a concern of both Anne and Sarah, but they want to ensure that their children are being adequately groomed for the challenges ahead. This choice is one that has the power to further exacerbate divisions of class.

The mother/nanny relationships Moore and Gordon depict, while sensational at times, remain quite relatable and showcase the tension caused by feelings of judgment, jealousy, anger, resentment, maternalism, wariness, and even benevolence. The nannies as well as the mother-employers who hire them are flawed despite intentions that often derive from a place that seeks the greater good. They also attempt to establish employer/employee relationships that are mutually beneficial. These characters permit readers to see the ways that their theories, unformed or ardent as they may be, regarding childcare providers, play out, and, at times, should be challenged. *A Gate at the Stairs* and *Men and Angels* are complicated stories that do not whitewash the concept of alliance building, and both authors put the onus for developing ethical labor relationships on the shoulders of the mother-employers. While these mother-employers do not question the ways that their choices connect to globalization or even social capital, both authors do point their readers in this direction by encouraging reflection on the why's and what if's. As I will maintain throughout this work, this type of reflection does not necessarily guarantee prosocial behavior, but it can foster the thinking that will lead to it.

Does Membership Have Its Privileges?: Traveling Toward Understanding Race as an Outsider-Within

Introduction

Race has remained a central issue in several lines of feminist philosophy despite some contentions that the United States has entered a post-racial era with the (re-)election of President Obama. Race theory often continues to be a point of departure for feminists. Some feminists, such as María Lugones, recommend bridging differences, even when that is difficult, but many global and multicultural feminists agree with Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who attempts to dismantle the "assumption that all women across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis" even while recognizing that this is an "assumption that characterizes much feminist discourse" (22). This framework is based on the belief that all women "are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression," often related to reproductive labor among other issues (22). Other feminists, such as Rosemarie Putnam Tong, argue for unity among women of color positing that women of different ethnicities and races do not often have identical concerns but ones that resonate "well enough" with the concerns of other U.S. minority women "to constitute a major challenge to 'white' feminism" (216). Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak have all advocated for a form of global feminism that does not merge too deeply with feminist causes that overly benefit white, middle-class women in the Global North.

Marilyn Frye, a white feminist, acknowledges the need for this challenge when she highlights the ways in which white women have aligned themselves and profited from the privilege of white men. Other difference feminists include Audre Lorde, who states: "Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those

differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all" (115). Whether or not to pursue alliance building between feminists of color and white feminists in the quest to dismantle the master's house, as Lorde called it, is a frequent issue. In *Black Feminist Thought* Patricia Hill Collins posits that race restricts alliance building between women because the difference in oppression that women of color face means that the causes white feminists have championed are not necessarily ones that are priorities for women of color.

Another key issue that Collins advocates as critical to a theoretical understanding of women of color and their place in contemporary cultures is that class, race, and gender work together to form a powerful trifecta of oppression. She, along with Deborah K. King and Elsa Barkley Brown, claim that examining any single marker in isolation weakens one's understanding of the larger workings of interlocking systems. Margaret L. Andersen and Collins argue for a "focus on structural systems of power and inequality" and contend that race, class, and gender "involve more than either comparing and adding up oppressions or privileges or appreciating cultural diversity" (*Race, Class, and Gender* 11). This argument highlights the complexity of the ways in which the matrix of domination permits oppression to exist at multiple levels. Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that when theorists only examine social reproduction from the lens of gender they "imply that all women have the same relationship to it and that it is therefore a universal female experience" (2). In the context of this research, it can be inferred that mothering -- and the ways in which women are encouraged to mother -- is impacted by more than just gender but by class and race as well, which the previous chapter began to illustrate. Moreover, the common racial- and class-based differences that exist between mother-employers and nannies, particularly as it is depicted in contemporary U.S. literature, serve to support Collins' argument.

The matrix of domination is interwoven into nearly every aspect of daily life and can be particularly salient in labor relationships, but that does not mean that it is easy to isolate the ways in which class, race, and gender affect these relationships. Often it is difficult to understand even one of these factors in isolation since the machinations that influence power can be clandestine, historically and culturally entrenched, and multifaceted. Lorde contends, "To allow women of Color to step out of stereotypes is too guilt provoking [for white women], for it threatens the complacency of those women who view oppression only in terms of sex" (118). There is also a resistance to name the power structures for what they are. In the early-1980s, when Judith Rollins completed her research, she found that it was difficult to obtain full candor on the topic of race. "Ethnic and racial preferences were, not unexpectedly hardest to get at" in part because

it may be assumed that those who would volunteer to be interviewed would be women whose perception of their behavior as employers was positive, who felt no shame about their treatment of their servants, and who would thus not be risking embarrassment or discomfort by answering probing questions about their experiences. (Rollins 127, 118)

While one may be prone to dismiss her work due to the temporal distance of the research, Katherine van Wormer, David W. Jackson III, and Charletta Sudduth, whose research was published in 2012, found a similar situation when they collected oral narratives from white men and women whose families had employed African American domestic servants in the middle of the twentieth century. They write: "In general, people do not like to remember their unkindness, nor do they like to talk about privileges that were bestowed upon them at the expense of others" (255). This personal resistance can limit cultural understanding, however, and, as Rollins states, "While the domestic service relationship is between two individual women, the kind of dynamic they create in the dyad is greatly influenced by the ideas and customs they have inherited from

the larger society" (92). My hope is that literature can provide some insight into the ways in which the ideas and customs that Rollins targets as culpable function in U.S. society in part by focusing specifically on the ways that the mother-employer/nanny relationship affects cultural membership. The researchers above, while not citing the benefit of novels, provide support for fiction's role in research about race and more specifically about mother-employers and nannies. Novelists are not bound by truth, yet they often are observers of truth. Many readers are drawn in by their ability to depict truths about human nature. Importantly, as I pointed out in the first chapter, novels also offer a safe terrain to examine feelings that a reader may feel should be ignored or hidden. Novels can provide the space to explore these feelings and may potentially provide insight that could lead to changes in outlook that impact prosocial behavior.

Cameron MacDonald's work, which was published twenty-five years after Rollins', supports the idea that mother-employers still rely "on their own vague ideas concerning the 'type' of person they wan[t] to hire," despite revealing little cognizance of this as they search for what they "imagine to be an ideal maternal substitute" (69). Moreover, unlike Rollins, MacDonald found "[w]hen racial/ethnic characteristics enter childcare hiring decisions, it is generally not to establish a hierarchy, since in this market an employer-employee hierarchy already exists" (70).⁴⁰ Rather, "mother-employers strategically translate ethnic stereotypes into tangible caregiving skills, such as language, education, or nurturance, and then further equate those skills with less tangible characteristics, such as the ability to transmit culture or class" (71). Ultimately, according to MacDonald, "hiring decisions frequently have very little to do with caregivers' objective qualifications" (71). Cultural critic Caitlin Flanagan contends that mother-employers are often quite aware of race in the hiring process. She notes: "Most employers had a specific set

⁴⁰ This may reflect changes in cultural conceptions of race since the 1980s and fits into the notion that families use the racial capital a nanny can offer as social capital for their own child(ren).

of ethnic 'markers' in mind when they were recruiting caregivers" and "used race, ethnicity, and immigration status strategically to select qualities they wanted to impart to their children" (69,70). However, she points out that the mother-employers "were as likely to seek 'otherness' in their nannies as they were to seek similarity" (70). Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo posits that employers may indicate a language preference in order to secure an employee that fits the image she has in mind and that the "profit motive" at most agencies "enables racial preferences and discrimination for both employers and employees" (101). Nannies that speak high-demand languages such as Spanish or Mandarin can be well-compensated for this skill set in the domestic labor market. In other words, race marks an individual who is seeking a domestic service position, but it is a marker that can be either an advantage or a detriment based on the market, the individual seeking help, or trends in racial preference.⁴¹ Wrigley's research, presented in the previous chapter, highlighted a similar point regarding class.

White mother-employers are not the only ones racial profiling to find the 'perfect' match; racial profiling is widespread amongst nannies as well with many claiming that they will not work for certain ethnic groups. Hondagneu-Sotelo, for instance, cites domestic workers who hold explicit ideas about the physical characteristics and ethnic heritage of their ideal employer, which originate, she claims, on the biases of the community to which they immigrate (57-60).

Moreover, recent research has indicated that professional African American mother-employers have a difficult time securing nannies for their children even when the nannies themselves are

⁴¹In "Wanted: Tibetan Nannies," Katherine Zoepf includes an interview in which one respondent claims: "There's kind of a mutually agreed unspoken agreement among mothers that all the normal rules about racism are off when you're talking about nannies," said one book editor in her early 30's who asked not to be identified because her Filipina nanny is illegal. "People talk about ethnicity in a way they never would at any other time. Even people who are very aware of not making racial stereotypes will put that on hold when talking to other mothers." "Part of it is just a shorthand way of saying what you're looking for, and what qualities you'd like to instill in your children," the book editor continued. "Before I knew that Tibetan nannies were a status thing, a friend's friend was telling me that they were the very best. You hear that Filipina nannies are the best because they have a history of being caretakers in the Philippines. You hear that Caribbean nannies are a bit tough, so they're good if you have an unruly child with discipline issues" ("Wanted: Tibetan Nanny").

African American. *New York Times* columnist Jodi Kantor charges that in several U.S. cities "nanny agencies decline to serve certain geographic areas -- not because of redlining [...] but because the nannies, who decide which jobs to take, do not want to work there" ("Nanny Hunt"). This does not undermine Glenn, however, who asserts that the "racial division of reproductive labor has been a missing piece of the picture" in that it is "key to the distinct exploitation of women of color and is a source of both hierarchy and interdependence among white women and women of color" (3). Money drives the domestic labor market in ways that are similar to other markets, but as argued heretofore this relationship is unique and the ways in which race is constructed therein is distinctive as well.

Studying the mother-employer/nanny relationship can prove illuminating particularly in the ways in which concepts of class and race are simultaneously encouraged via the construction of domestic service, as Rollins highlights, as well as in the ways in which it is interrupted via acts of mothering that cross boundaries that could otherwise exist based on issues of class and race. When looking beyond more formulaic 'chick lit' novels, recent works of fiction such as *The Love Wife* by Gish Jen, which will be a key novel in this chapter's work, show a trend toward being more nuanced, less politically righteous, and less reliant on overt themes of consciousness-raising that were present in novels published in the U.S. during the early years of second-wave feminism. *My Hollywood* by Mona Simpson and *All the Finest Girls* by Alexandra Styron, which will be explicated in the following chapter, bolster this claim. Unlike Berenice Brown in Carson McCuller's *A Member of the Wedding*, who remains a peripheral character with few speaking lines other than to stress the inequity of her social position; Lutie Johnson in Ann Petry's *The Street*, who is punished for pursuing her desire to secure more materially secure membership in society; and Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, who is deemed inferior to the

white children her mother watches over as a housekeeper, the novels analyzed in this chapter depict racism in a way that I contend is less explicit but equally potent as they move closer to our current temporal position. *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid will serve as an example of a novel that offers a less nuanced political message alongside *The Love Wife*, which addresses race in a more multifaceted way.

While race remains a marker of difference in both of these novels, they also show mother-employers who seek to 'normalize' interracial relationships without possessing the tools and framework to do so. Although different, both women's interactions with the nannies in the corresponding novels are challenged by issues of racial differences and the respective authors examine the ways in which they wield their racial privilege. Mariah in *Lucy* shows a guilt-driven, savior-based form of engagement while simultaneously becoming a voyeur to Lucy's struggles. Blondie in *The Love Wife* experiences race as an issue that contributes to an adversarial distrust between herself and her nanny, which undermines her self-perception as a multiculturalist and peacemaker. She disciplines herself and ultimately restricts her own role in her family as a result of feeling ineffective and redundant. Aside from these tenuous similarities, these novels are quite different in tone, structure, and political framing in ways that support my claim that mother-employer/nanny novels are generally moving toward more informed empathy with novelists increasingly depicting characters who struggle with race in more nuanced and complex ways. When one looks at more recent mother-employer/nanny novels, principally *The Love Wife*, the changes in the ways that race is socially constructed is clear -- particularly when set in contrast to novels like *The Street*, which, although excellent in its own right, is significantly more binary in its presentation of race and provides women of color nearly no agency whatsoever. *Lucy* and *The Street* have some similarities in terms of how each brings to light the protagonist's righteous

political anger, the ways in which race and spatiotemporality affect standpoint, and the incorporation of good/bad binaries albeit to a lesser degree. *The Love Wife* sidesteps these motifs almost entirely, which is not unexpected in that it reflects the author's likely exposure to the vigorous work of race scholars and social justice activists in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century as well as amendments to legal code and changes in the way race is thought about in contemporary U.S. society.

What is less expected, however, and which takes me to my central argument, is that interwoven into the increasing complexity of these novels is an indication that mother-employers, who are all well-to-do and white once again, fear that *they* are becoming the outsiders-within, a status typically associated with African American maids who maintained intimate relationships with the family members for whom they worked yet were never completely accepted as full members. Each of the novels in this chapter shows a marked increase in this anxiety. When one follows the trajectory of white mother-employers in these novels it is also clear that mother-employers are increasingly ambivalent about the ways in which they enact their authority, which in turn creates fissures in the traditional power structure associated with labor relationships. This ambivalence can be magnified when mixed with racial tension, particularly in mother-employers who fear being labeled politically incorrect. I will argue that this trend is a result of mother-employers' insecurity rooted in gender norms that inform femininity, the ideology of intensive mothering, and the evolution of race dynamics and multiculturalism.

For evidence, this argument will also rely on *Lucy* and *The Love Wife*, as already mentioned, as well as *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, which as a novel confirms the ambivalence that U.S. society has with changing roles by removing the mother-employer altogether and

effectively punishing her for her choice to hire help. I argue that fear of power and the perceived standpoint of being an outsider-within coalesce ways that problematically remove the mother-employer almost entirely from this novel with the baton of equality and labor relations being handed to the daughter instead. While this novel is arguably the weakest from a literary perspective among those selected for analysis, it has yielded the greatest number of readers, a point worth considering in and of itself. This novel, although the most current, also returns to the binaries described earlier as well as the political consciousness-raising that was abandoned by *The Love Wife* and most other recent novels. The underlying message of *The Help* is not an angry rejection of racism like *The Street* or *The Bluest Eye* or a nuanced view of multiculturalism like *The Love Wife*. Rather, it tells readers that despite our differences women of dissimilar races can get along, fill the voids in one another's lives, and symbiotically help one another. Most importantly, Stockett problematically advocates that white women should not be cast as antagonists by African American women but seen, when warranted, as compatriots. In effect, it blatantly pushes an agenda of empathy. Stockett advocates for sisterhood (rather than alliance building) and suggests via her story that learning about one another and seeing from another perspective is enough to build loving, beneficial partnerships among disparate groups of women. Throughout the explications, I will draw attention to how membership status is constructed while highlighting the ways in which the authors promote and restrict reader empathy.

With the first point in mind, it is important to examine how standpoint theory pertains to novels that focus on nannies and the mother-employers who hire them, with particular attention given to the ways in which the outsider-within position has evolved and how power relations impact its development. Brooke Lenz summarizes standpoint as it has been established by Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, and Collins as a concept that "refers not to

perspective or experience but to an understanding of perspective and experience as part of a larger social setting" (98). She clarifies that the term does not refer to a "rigid or permanent stabilization of perspective, but rather to a fluid and dynamic negotiation of experience and point of view that can be temporarily stabilized in order to interrogate dominant ideologies" (98). She proceeds to highlight a series of questions that trouble the "tension between individual and group knowledge, the problematic poles of epistemic relativism and universalism, that complicate (and often frustrate) both standpoint theory in particular and feminist theory more generally" (99). Indeed, part of the inherent difficulty of this line of scholarship is that generalizations are often made from particulars and particulars are developed from a simplistic understanding of generalizations. Collins, in her critique of Susan Hekman's theoretical work on standpoint theory, addresses this point in depth and attempts to isolate the ways in which both unique individuals' perspective and unifying group perspectives can have merit. She ultimately asks: "But can the individual stand as proxy for the group and the group for the individual?" (379). This chapter will function under the problematic premise that an individual experience can stand for a group, particularly when the individual in question has been intentionally developed by an author who is likely attempting to synthesize the experiences of many individuals into a single character. Collins also argues that standpoint can exist at the level of gender but can be further spliced into standpoint that is rooted in the female African American experience as well as standpoints that originate from differences in class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers.

At the heart of this work is Lenz's claim that standpoint theory can "encourage the interrogation of rigid categorizations by confronting and questioning highly individualistic and broadly essentialist claims, both of which discourage communication and solidarity among women who are differently situated" (100). While it would certainly be fruitful to use this theory

in the examination of racial-ethnic mother-employers, this cannot be done until more authors and publishers generate novels that engage with this topic in a substantial way. In the meantime, it remains productive to examine the ways in which standpoint theory can help analyze the relationship white mother-employers have with nannies of color. As Collins points out in "Comments on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Where's the Power?"

Within hierarchical power relations, it seems reasonable that groups disadvantaged by systems of power might see their strength in solidarity and collective responses to their common location and subjugation. In contrast, it seems equally plausible that those privileged by these types of group placements might want to do away with notions of the group altogether, in effect obscuring the privileges they gain from group membership.

(380)

It could be argued that mother-employers who do not see themselves as part of an oppressed group and instead identify with positions of social power do not fully consider the ways in which their own experiences as employers of nannies and as working mothers can be (and perhaps is) a collective experience that could share similar standpoints. The postmodern and neoliberal emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual and individual's experience further encourages this approach.

Domestic servants, on the other hand, particularly African American housekeepers, have often been deemed to have a common standpoint. Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, posits that African American women's cloistering from mainstream white society has permitted concentrations of like-minded individuals to develop and foster "the solidification of a distinctive ethos in Black civil society regarding language, religion, family structure, and community

politics (13). As highlighted earlier, the outsider-within position is often associated with African American housekeepers, particularly of the mid-twentieth century. Lenz similarly argues that domestic servants, particularly nannies, have a distinct perspective, which, "[d]espite mutual affection, and often because of the discomfort with which the invited intimacy of the servant's involvement with the family is received by the master, the master-servant dynamic invariably reaffirms, and even solidifies, the outsider position of the servant" (103). Collins adds that the outsider-within status has benefits, specifically in that their work "allowed African American women to see White elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men" (*Black Feminist Thought* 13). Collins concedes that in some respects this "insider relationship" was "satisfying" to the African American women who worked as domestics in the sense that close relationships were formed with the children and because these women also experienced a "sense of self-affirmation [...] at seeing racist ideology demystified" (13). For many domestics of varying ethnic backgrounds, the position of domestic servant, which both permitted (and permits) personal intimacy but sanctioned (and sanctions) authentic relationships, creates an "outsider-within" status (Collins 13). This status permitted women of color to bear witness to some of the most intimate aspects of a white family's daily life while never being truly enmeshed in the fabric of the relationships therein.

While the 'one of the family' terminology has been used for at least a century, with roots in a feudal-based society, it does not suggest that because surface-level interactions and relationships are associated with kinship that deep currents of racism, insecurity, and exploitation are not perpetuated. Rather, the 'one of the family' designation is semantic subterfuge that insinuates membership where there is none, often so that an increase in work output and loyalty can be obtained. Van Wormer and her colleagues' interviewees certainly bring this to light.

Additionally, Sau-lin Wong draws attention to the fact that "in a society undergoing radical demographic and economic changes, the figure of the person of color patiently mothering white folks serves to allay racial anxieties: those who fear the erosion of their dominance and the vengeance of the oppressed can exorcise their dread in displaced forms" (69). The outsider is brought in under controlled circumstances in which the white employer has power to define the contours of the relationship and terminate the relationship. The outsider-within depiction was rampant in the years following the Civil War and remains in popular culture today via figures such as Aunt Jemima, Nell in *Gimme A Break!* (1981-87), and even Hoke Colburn in *Driving Miss Daisy* (Beresford 1989). The image of the African American mammy has morphed in recent decades and has become reified in different brown bodies, primarily in other 'threatening' ethnicities that are prevalent in the U.S. labor force due to globalization, including women of Latina and Filipina ancestry. The example that appeared in *Spanglish*, which was offered in the opening chapter, supports this.⁴² A new series called *Devious Maids* (2013) resurrects this figure via Hispanic maids. Early reviews suggest that the comedy-drama will focus more on the ways in which the outsider-within has the necessary collateral to betray the trust of the employer thereby nourishing cultural fears of disloyalty.

Historically, while white women and children have exerted their racial privilege by knowing only as much as they cared to know about the women who worked in their house every day, domestic servants often witnessed the intimacies of their employers' lives whether they wanted to or not.⁴³ The power in this relationship still resides with the employer for all the reasons asserted in the first chapter; however, changes in social and political dynamics have upended some of this and information accrued on individuals and families can disrupt the flow of

⁴² Others include Amelia, played by Adriana Barraza, in *Babel* and Aurelia, played by Lucia Moniz, in *Love Actually*.

⁴³ See *The Maid Narratives: Black Domesticity and White Families in the Jim Crow South* by Katherine Van Wormer for more information.

power. Journalist Joanna Weiss claims individuals who have served as domestic servants, nursemaids, and governesses often function a "snide Greek chorus" (www.boston.com). Nannies who engage in sexual affairs with the child(ren)'s father, for instance, can wield considerable social power, regardless of their race, in comparison to the women who were sexually harassed and assaulted, particularly in the Deep South, half a century ago.⁴⁴ These women can claim greater ownership of the power that is inherent in the gaze with which they observe (and monitor) their employers as well as their own sexuality.⁴⁵ While this is more apparent with celebrities, social media outlets permit information to cross social circles more porously than ever for 'average' people and celebrities alike. This is not a rebuttal against scholarship that details the ways in which gender, racial, and class privilege coalesce and thereby permit nannies' labor to be exploited; it should be understood as suggesting movement rather than radical change.

The nanny-of-color/Madonna figure can be a powerful trope even when placed as an outsider-within. Linda Bosniak in *The Citizen and The Alien: Dilemmas of Contemporary Membership* argues that membership plays a critical role in communities and posits that women in the global North secure their own membership as citizens via paid work. She states, "women's work in the paid market now relies significantly on the commodification of domestic carework, and carework has itself become a significant commodified sector of the labor market for women" (107-08). In *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labor*, Bridget Anderson similarly argues: "Migrant domestic workers enable women citizens to fulfill the political duty of motherhood at the same time as participating in the labour market" (190). Despite this role, these workers are "often formally denied citizenship rights" (Anderson 191). Therefore, the low wages

⁴⁴ Jude Law, Ethan Hawke, and Arnold Schwarzenegger all experienced public shaming and disruptions to their primary romantic relationships as a result of their affairs with their respective nannies.

⁴⁵ See Fiona Neill's British novel *What the Nanny Saw* as a recent literary example.

that are often designated to domestic service is not the only drawback to the position. Due to the fact that many domestic servants work within the informal economy, they are not able to demonstrate their viability as citizens via their income either.⁴⁶ In light of this, nannies who are unauthorized to be in the United States become outsiders-within at the level of the employer's family as well as at the national level while simultaneously helping female employers secure enhanced citizen-based membership. (This mirroring certainly warrants more analysis but will not be addressed specifically in this chapter.) The outsider-within standpoint is one that is simultaneously disenfranchised yet powerful in its own right.

Social membership is powerful, but the inverse is not necessarily precisely false. The outsider-within can hold a distinct form of power, particularly when the individual is portrayed or perceived as the adversary of the mother-employer. This may be unanticipated when one considers work done on race and domestic labor. Consider, as mentioned previously, that in literature the nanny often enters the family when the mother is absent as a result of illness or death.⁴⁷ In these instances, she may transcend the outsider-within status and can be granted temporary 'mother' status along with the cultural power therein. Particularly in instances in which the mother has passed away, the female nanny is often presumed to 'save' the befuddled father from the 'mysterious' task of caring for children. Numerous romance novels use this situation to permit a woman who is of a different race and/or class to initiate a sexual relationship with the father of the children. Even when she has been hired because the mother works outside the home (again absent and typically chastised for her 'masculine' drive for success) or to fill in for a supposedly uncaring, self-centered woman who is unwilling to endure the demands of

⁴⁶ There are, of course, situations in which cash payment is preferred so that essential entitlements are not lost as well as for myriad other reasons.

⁴⁷ As highlighted in chapter two, according to Susan Rubin Suleiman, object relations psychologists contend that this figure is depicted in literature in order to fulfill the need to safely work through anger against one's own biological mother.

mothering, the nanny maintains her position as both an outsider-within *and* a powerful force in the family. One common point of friction results when the child welcomes the nanny as kin while the mother-employer does not or when the mother-employer feels threatened by her child(ren)'s acceptance of the nanny who has been hired.

With fear spurred on by intensive mothering's goading, which warns that any degree of absence may lead to her replacement, mother-employers may seek a woman of another race who, while temporarily filling the duties of mothering, will not be mistakenly perceived as holding biological proprietorship. In these instances, the child(ren)'s physical differences from the nanny alter the way the nanny/child dyad is consumed by the public's gaze but does not always affect the way the dyad is perceived within the more intimate milieu of the home. (This point will be revisited in the following chapter.) The mother-employer may feel that her public position is maintained but insecurities may remain regarding her child(ren)'s affection and loyalty, her fulfillment of cultural notions of femininity and mothering, and her importance in the family. It is this place of insecurity that informs my argument regarding mother-employers sense that they are at risk of being outsiders-within their own families.

It may seem strange to posit that mother-employers are the ones now cast in novels as the outsiders-within, particularly in light of the social, financial, and racial privileges they possess. I contend that these privileges do not counteract many women's personal insecurity, however, and may result from the criticism they receive culturally and socially. Wong posits as a means of explaining: "white mothers are on view, [and] their mothering is often portrayed as inadequate, at least temporarily" (69). In this sense mother-employers are judged harshly for not fulfilling their biological, social, cultural, and feminine destiny by adhering to the norms laid out by intensive mothering. Mother-employers who have *chosen* to work outside the home are most apt

to be judged in this way just as they are the ones who have the resources to secure individual care. Paradoxically, despite this social placement, mother-employers, at least in the fiction produced thus far, still do not have access to the subverted power of outsider-within status for two reasons. First, the mother-employer already has more power through her class, marriage, and race than she could access via the position of outsider-within, and therefore it is not a place that could be used subversively. Second, the outsider-within status is only a *perception* rooted in fear; there is no power to be gained by adopting the illusion of outsider-within status. Novels (and movies) also suggest that mother-employers who seek help should fear replacement or remain hypervigilant that they have put their children in harm's way via inadequate care (or at times even both, as seen in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*). There is seldom middle ground. It is this dynamic that permits mothers to not only perceive their demoted role as one in which they are now outsiders but to also feel responsible, guilty, and anxious in the process.

The outsider-within nanny of color serves another function as a result of mother-employers' complex emotions regarding their involvement in the dynamic. After joining Wong's findings regarding ameliorating fear of the Other via her position as a caregiver and my argument regarding a mother-employers' sense of becoming outsiders-within themselves, it becomes worthwhile to examine work by Anderson, who argues the "generic 'foreignness' of migrants, the image that they come from impoverished lands, assists with the idea that there is little one can do to remedy the injustices of the world, but employing a desperate migrant is a small contribution" (255). This is one way that the savior complex can be alluring. In these cases, employers, who are typically white, construct a false belief that they do not have a role in the perpetuation of racial biases because they are permitting a woman of color to tend to their children, while, in truth, economic and racially-based hegemonic structures remain unchallenged.

Moreover, the children of the home are taught that racial privilege continues to exist. Ultimately, a mother-employer can reassert (even if it is only mentally) her own racial and class-based privilege by permitting herself to believe that she is a benefactress. Mariana Ortega, while not addressing domestic service directly, highlights the ways in which women of color are still exploited despite a framework that suggests open-mindedness and benevolence largely because women of color are valued theoretically but not in the context of actual experience. It seems plausible that mother-employers who feel as if they are outsiders-within use the identity of savior to help mitigate feelings of rejection, insecurity, and disempowerment, even masking feelings of anger, which women are culturally discouraged from expressing.

Lucy, *The Love Wife*, and *The Help* serve as the foundation of the analysis regarding how race impacts the mother-employer/nanny dyad, particularly via the examination of the ways in which white mother-employers express increasing ambivalence about utilizing the power that they have as a result of race, class, and kinship norms. This chapter will also explore the ways in which multiculturalism and intensive mothering contribute to mother-employers' fear that they have become outsiders-within their own families and, as a result, promotes some women to stabilize their position by claiming the identity of savior. Lugones' theory of 'world'-travel and empathy will be utilized when appropriate to examine how and why authors promote readers' compassion for specific characters while also maintaining an eye on developing more productive and egalitarian relationships between mother-employers and nannies.

***Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid**

In *Lucy*, which was published in 1990, Jamaica Kincaid relates her semi-autobiographical story of coming to New York City from Antigua to work as a nanny for an affluent couple. Set in

the late 1960s, the narrator, who is also the protagonist and identifies as a Caribbean with both African and Indian ancestry, experiences the changing tide of the ways in which white privilege is performed. While Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* and Berenice in *A Member of the Wedding* were peripheral characters, Lucy is front and center in this slim novel, telling her story with both bravado and bitterness, melancholy and pragmatism. Lucy is nineteen when she achieves her goal of escaping the confines of her family and provincial life and arrives in her new home on a cold January evening, admitting that she "could not see anything clearly" (3). Her ability to travel easily is hindered and she is clearly in a different climate than her tropical home. Her physical discomfort warns readers of the cognitive dissonance that will shape the story ahead. It is this evolving sense of vision that Lenz argues offers a productive place of exploration in that Lucy's "analyses of the interaction between the powerful and the powerless and of the social and political realities" as well as her "development of her standpoint [...] changes in relation to her negotiation of her experiences and identity" (102). Power informs much of Lucy and Mariah's relationship, as it often does between mother-employers and nannies. In this case, however, both women intermittently seek membership or at least an affiliation with the other's 'world.' Lucy's physical and metaphorical travel into (and out of) Mariah's life and her family not only helps Lucy learn how to see more clearly, but the story that ensues invites readers to travel exclusively with her as the sole narrator. The impact that Lucy has upon Mariah's life is profound, too, which shapes Lucy's own trajectory toward independence. In this way, they travel together -- one toward a goal and another into a life that was not expected.

Even in the early moments of the novel, Lucy displays a clear awareness of her gender, low socio-economic status, and ethnicity in relationship to the global North as well as the way this matrix of oppression affects her social standing. She refuses to accept conventional

stereotypes even as she recognizes the limitations and psychological angst that results from these disadvantages. Lucy describes herself as a "young woman from the fringes of the world" who, when she left her home, had "wrapped around [her] shoulders the mantle of a servant" (95). Despite her humble description, Lucy is full of vim and vigor, contentedly adopting an association with her namesake Lucifer and in the process rejecting the name her mother bestowed upon her. After her mother proceeded to have four sons long after she was born, Lucy became disenchanted with her mother's acquiescence to bondage via her marriage to a much older man as well as the couple's elevated hopes for her brothers based, seemingly, solely on their gender. Jennifer Nichols aptly describes the novel as one that "metaphorically represents a challenge to the authority of western feminism" while Lucy "performs mobility as a source of resistance against authority -- familial, patriarchal, racial, and national" (190). Kincaid achieves this, she argues, by developing "parallel relationships" between Lucy's "two mothers, the real and the surrogate," which in turn "echo[es] Lucy's relationships with two cultures, Antigua and the U.S." (191). Lucy's attempts to navigate her evolving sense of self as well as how she presents this image of herself to the world around her (as well as her family back home) is at the center of the novel, specifically as she endeavors to establish an identity that is separate from her mother. Her complex relationship with Mariah, the well-to-do white mother for whom she works, offers her a force to rebel against who is both a mother figure yet not her actual mother. Similarly, Mariah cares for Lucy as she would a child who is now a young adult by showing love and offering guidance, but her role as employer, particularly an employer of a privileged race, makes this relationship difficult.

Despite Lucy's sense of physical displacement, she does not yield to a sense of emotional vulnerability. This is shown clearly when Mariah and her husband, Lewis, offer her a bedroom to

live in. Lucy describes it as "a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped" and immediately and confidently counters: "But I was not cargo" (7). Instead, she explains, "I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room, and I was not even the maid. I was the young girl who watches over the children and goes to school at night" (7). In this statement, Lucy not only removes herself from the position of maid, replacing it with the slightly more esteemed one of nanny, but also stresses her efforts to improve her cultural capital by pursuing formal education. Moreover, while she was "used to a small room," she knows that this one is different in that she is perceived as merchandise that can be purchased (7). While her labor may be commodified, Lucy refuses to see her position within the family as a defining aspect of her personality. She recognizes that her family, her own culture, and U.S. society may view women like her as powerless, but she does not internalize this perspective.

In the broader sense, Lucy's concept of Mariah's family and her place in it registers in deep ways for her. Early in the novel she states: "How nice everyone was to me, though, saying that I should regard them as my family and make myself at home" (7). (They are not aware of the contentious relationship she has with own family.) Despite their pleas for her to consider herself among kin, during one of the first dinners with the family they tell her that she seemed "not to be a part of things, as if [she] didn't live in their house with them, as if they weren't like a family to [her], as if [she] were just passing through" (13). Mariah, it may be presumed, sees herself as the one being visited; she sees herself as part of her family's structure, not outside of it, as Lucy is. Lewis and Mariah seek to dismantle the awkward outsider-within position that Lucy holds in their household but undermine the effort by calling her the Visitor, which is also the title of the opening chapter, with Lewis saying to Lucy, "'Poor Visitor, poor visitor' over and over, a sympathetic tone to his voice" (14). What makes Kincaid's word choice interesting here is that

while it is presumed from the context that Lewis intends the word 'poor' to mean pitiful, it may well reference the class difference between her and their family as well.

Mariah and Lewis are bothered by what they see as Lucy's unwillingness to accept their affection and a place in their family. Examine momentarily Lucy's description of Mariah's table that she had shipped back from one of their trips to Scandinavia: "it amazed me," she explains, "to think that someone could find an old piece of kitchen furniture at one end of the world and like it so much they would go to so much trouble to make sure it was always in their possession" (58-59). While it would be understandable if Lucy declined their overtures out of fear that they wanted her to belong *to* them (like the table), particularly in light of the British colonial past she has experienced, Lucy describes the situation quite differently and is equally dismayed that Mariah and Lewis did not see that she "had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were very important to me had ever shown up in my dreams" (15). Lucy desires membership to Mariah's family, but this conversation is truncated and Mariah and Lucy remain in their own 'worlds.' Lewis' comment also highlights another motif that resonates in *The Love Wife* and *The Help*, primarily the question of who belongs to a community. This can be conceived nationally, locally, or, as in this case, familially. In many ways, membership is linked to identification. Mariah wants to welcome Lucy and have her be part of their family, but Lucy, perceptive as she is, draws attention to the fissures in this. Lucy comments: "How nice everyone was to me, though, saying that I should regard them as my family and make myself at home. I believed them to be sincere, for I knew that such a thing would not be said to a member of their real family" (7-8). One can be a member and not identify as belonging to a group, and one can base one's identity on belonging to a group that does not welcome the individual. Mariah sees herself as part of the family and feels she is in the position

to welcome Lucy into her family. She is not threatened by the young woman's presence, but, as will be shown later, she does envy the social cache that Lucy has as a result of her past.

For Lucy, there is an inherent liminality to her membership particularly in reference to her relationship with Mariah. Unlike when Lucy tells Mariah how much she "enjoyed going to the museum" and was subsequently offered her "own card of membership," membership to Mariah's social class is less permeable or tangible. It is in this realm that she is an outsider-within. Lucy is ambivalent about her feelings for Mariah, but recognizes that the "times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" and the "times that I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother" (58). She believes Mariah to be "the kindest person I had ever known" and "realized again and again how lucky I was to have met her and to work for her and not, for instance, some of her friends" (73, 110). In this way, while Lucy has a general disdain for the well-to-do, she sees Mariah as an individual rather than only a member of a collective group. She still questions Mariah for locating herself in a society that Lucy finds pretentious and closed-minded. Her knowledge of Mariah's 'world,' which includes Mariah's psychological motivations, permits Lucy a more nuanced collection of feelings, even if she is judgmental of some of her actions. For instance, she remarks upon Mariah's membership in a conservation group: "Like her, all the members of this organization were well off but they made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them" (72). In this way Mariah is like her peers, and it is Lucy, as the outsider-within, who can recognize the hypocrisy of the situation.

Mariah's maternalism offers a layer of complexity that is not easily resolved or dismissed. Lucy respects Mariah, but Kincaid makes it clear that Lucy also associates her own colonized past with Mariah's efforts to mother her. For instance, Lucy comments on the "yellow light" that

streamed in through the window of the family's home and "fell on the pale-yellow linoleum tiles" and on the "pale yellow" walls, and even upon Mariah with her "pale yellow skin and yellow hair" (27). This color mirrors the yellow of the daffodils that represent power and domination and here it is not only biologically linked to Mariah but is one that the mother-employer chooses to bring into her home. Yet Lucy also states that Mariah "looked so beautiful standing there" (27). Lucy's feelings about being the receiver of her benevolent guidance remains ambivalent. Mariah tells Lucy that she loves her "clearly and sincerely without confidence or doubt" and Lucy explains that she "believe[s] her, for if anyone could love a young woman who had come from halfway around the world to help her take care of her children, it was Mariah" (27). In this statement Lucy reinforces the idea of Mariah as a benefactress/savior. While Lucy may not see herself as someone unworthy of love, and in fact is confident of herself in many ways, she interprets the social view of those in both the global North and global South as one in which individuals from the global South are less valuable. In this regard, Lucy's ambivalence about establishing clearer boundaries in their relationship allows Mariah to believe that Lucy seeks membership in her family and social group in a way that she may not. With that said, Lucy herself seems both drawn to the comfort and pride of acceptance while maintaining a deep yearning for independence. She remains ambivalent about identifying with Mariah as well. She claims that the "trouble with Mariah [is that] she smells pleasant. By then I already knew that I wanted to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense" (27). Like Lugones, Lucy does not want to emulate her biological mother or Mariah, but instead seeks to define her identity as one that is separate from both women. While she sees Mariah's attributes, Lucy decides that membership for her would not be defined the same way it is for Mariah.

Of course, membership for Lucy also carries significant baggage. Her outsider-within status is a well-worn standpoint as a citizen of a colonized nation. This national and personal sense of belonging collide in one of the most oft-cited scenes of the novel in which Lucy describes an occasion in which she was forced to memorize and recite a Wordsworth poem about yellow daffodils. She earned tremendous praise for her pronunciation, but, for Lucy, these flowers represent the "sorrow and bitterness" associated with the colonial rule that profoundly impacted her living conditions and sense of identity as a child (30). Mariah, however, sees the flowers and proclaims that they make her feel "so glad to be alive" (17). She has not been burdened by the effects of colonialism and her breezy way of making her way in the world reflects this. It is this breeziness that troubles Lucy and her confusion takes shape in a question she repeats in similar forms throughout the novel: "How does a person get to be that way?" (17). Unlike Frye's "loving eye," which she describes as the "eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination," Mariah wields an eye of power and her gaze 'whitewashes' the world she sees (75). Lucy, on the other hand, has had to 'world'-travel in deeply negative ways as a result of colonization. She could not thrive by considering only her perspective and the perspectives of those she *wanted* to know better. Instead, the British colonial influence created an environment in which she was forced to consider what those outside of her 'world' thought of her and her way of life. Well-versed in these skills, Lucy can *see* Mariah's 'world,' but she cannot empathize with the perspective that permits the naiveté that some people are entitled to by virtue of race and class.

Mariah, meanwhile, does not understand Lucy's violent reaction to the flowers or the poem. Rather than empathize she states, "What a history you have" with what Lucy detects as a

"little bit of envy in her voice" (19). In this regard, Mariah wishes she could see the world as Lucy does and acquire what she imagines to be a more sophisticated understanding of global interactions. She desires to have the complexity of character that she believes results from difficult circumstances. Mariah is not an outsider-within the power structures that shape U.S. culture and craves the bragging rights she associates with experiences she considers exotic. Her desire to travel to Lucy's 'world,' a place that Lucy is still working hard to establish as independent of the actual community and family she left, is there, but in a way that is based more on self-involvement than a desire to see from a new perspective. In this way, she is an outsider to the 'world' that Lucy claims as her own, and Lucy, sensing Mariah's desire for membership (or perhaps ownership), restricts entree. As a result, Mariah remains an outsider to Lucy's 'world,' which she wants to enter. Unlike most places, Mariah's social capital is not only ineffectual but actually impedes assimilation. Moreover, Lucy is not one to play the martyr or be pitied and responds to Mariah's envy by quipping: "You are welcome to it if you like" (19). She is not opening her life to voyeurism or shared travel, but seeks to shed the more difficult aspects of her life altogether rather than be admired for them. The impossibility of transferring her experiences to Mariah makes it a safe offer. In this exchange Kincaid demonstrates how Mariah's status casts her simultaneously as a guilty conqueror and a jealous victor. Mariah recognizes at some level that her whiteness conflates her with innumerable vanquishers, but she also pines for a past that is less stained with the abuses of privilege as well as acceptance into a group that, from her vantage point, seems more interesting and perhaps more pure. Lenz posits that in this exchange, "Lucy is not merely exposing Mariah's lack of political and social consciousness; she is objecting to a history of cultural imperialism in which her own culture has been erased and written over in the hand of the colonizer" (113). In other words, she will not permit Mariah to own the crown of

'saving' a backward culture without simultaneously indentifying with a role that she sees as objectionable.

Later, Mariah attempts to rescue Lucy from her experience with daffodils by showing her a field of the flowers, which causes Lucy, who is aware of Mariah's intention, to balk.

Immediately Lucy feels "sorry" that she had placed Mariah's "beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests," adding, "[t]his woman who hardly knew me loved me, and she wanted me to love this thing" (30). Lucy's inability to experience a similar sense of joy causes Mariah's eyes to sink "back in her head as if they were protecting themselves" (30). In *Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy and the Aesthetics of Disidentification*, Veronica Majerol writes:

Mariah seeks to gloss over cultural differences by imposing a universal model of aesthetics. From Mariah's perspective, the natural and timeless beauty of the daffodils can overcome social distinctions and place Lucy in a position from which she can see the world in the same light as her employer. Mariah, in effect, insists upon an apolitical view of the world that ignores hierarchies and inequalities that have been established in the past. (26-27)

While Mariah attempts to save Lucy, she does not travel to the 'world' that Lucy occupies, but instead travels to the 'world' she *wants* Lucy to live in. Her empathy only extends to what she believes she would desire were she in Lucy's position rather than consider what Lucy as an individual desires. Lucy sees this, and asserts, "Mariah wanted all of us, the children and me to see things the way she did" (35-36). Mariah wants to replace Lucy's problematic past with an experience that is lovelier and seeks to bring Lucy into her 'world' to accomplish this. She uses her privilege to expose Lucy to what she perceives as a better experience, but in the process

exerts her power in a way that she sees as unproblematic because of the benevolence in her intentions.

Lucy upsets the traditional power differentials after Mariah offers the opportunity to do so by apologizing for Lucy's past experience with the poem, but, as Lucy explains, "It wasn't her fault. It wasn't my fault" (30). Lucy feels remorse for tarnishing Mariah's joy and using Mariah's emotional investment in her against her. This does not change her sense of guilt, guilt that is based on being unable to share Mariah's 'world' with her. She states: "nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness. [...] The same thing could cause us to shed tears, but those tears would not taste the same" (30). While Mariah is not an outsider in her family, she remains an outsider to Lucy's 'world' -- which she sees as a community to which she wants belong. This desire derives partly from an impetus to 'fix' it, which would validate her generosity and garner recognition, and partly so that she may belong to something she believes is authentic. She sees, to some extent, the ways in which her privilege shields her from difficulty and she views herself as less interesting as a result. While many critics aptly highlight the role of colonization in Lucy's life and Mariah's naiveté in this scene, it is also important to explore the ways in which Lucy realizes her own power here. She does not acquiesce to Mariah's desire to merge 'worlds,' nor does she avoid the difficult journey altogether. Instead, she remains resolute, putting onus where it belongs, remaining independent but not malicious in the process.

Lucy also exhibits the limits to her 'world'-traveling, however, which influences the way she constructs racial identification. As a result, her empathy can seem finite and self-serving. When Lucy accompanies Mariah and her children on a train ride to Michigan where Mariah holds some family land with a house, Lucy observes that the "other people sitting down to eat

dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives" while "the people waiting on them all looked like mine" (32). She states: "On closer observation, they were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always gave backchat" (32). In this observation, Lucy again shows her unwillingness to identify with African American workers just as she had in an exchange with Mariah's housekeeper. She neither sympathizes nor empathizes with these workers despite racial similarities and shared membership in the working class. Her identity is already too commonly conflated with theirs and her goal is to be recognized for her individuality. In this instance, Lucy is more willing to travel to the privileged 'world' Mariah inhabits and parse out what similarities and differences exist between them than initiate similar exploration with those she views as subordinates. Unlike Mariah, she does not see this other 'world' of class peers as exotic or one that would offer social benefits if she accrued an increased knowledge of it. Echoes of Ortega's work again reverberate here. Moreover, her colonized past has trained her to 'study up,' as sociologists call it, and examine the ways that colonial power influences her life rather than seek identification with her own national heritage. While she rejects being casually grouped with the workers on the train, she still sees more commonality with them than with Mariah, basing her assessment seemingly exclusively on race.

Immediately after Lucy parses out the differences between her cultural identity and those of the workers on the train she points out Mariah's lack of awareness regarding race. "Mariah did not seem to notice what she had in common with the other diners," Lucy states, "or what I had in common with the waiters. She acted in her usual way, which was that the world was round and we all agreed on that, when I knew that the world was flat and if I went to the edge I would fall off" (32). For Lucy, even the most elemental aspects of life on Earth are not givens for her and she is astounded that Mariah not only does not recognize this as a key aspect of her life as a

colonial subject but that Mariah does not have to consider these aspects as they relate to her own life either. Nichols interprets this as showing how "Mariah erases difference by ignoring it" and thereby enacts what Allison Bailey calls a "privilege-evasive whitely script," which is a

form of white liberal discourse on racism that chooses not to recognize race in order to avoid having to confront the ways white individuals, even when supposedly anti-racist, benefit from white privilege. This pretend colorblindness also works to colonize people of color into a universality of whiteness by denying the presence of any other color. (293, 200)

Like the daffodils, Mariah chooses to ignore the oppression around her and in the process invalidates Lucy's experiences, whereas Lucy asserts a position of authority via the cultural power her standpoint provides her in her relationship with Mariah. While she criticizes Mariah's willful ignorance, she recognizes that those who belong to power structures by virtue of their class and/or race frequently have the authority to define membership. Mariah's effort to erase difference would therefore, in theory, permit her to become an insider to Lucy's desired past. Her power is finite, however, and she cannot remove what exists simply by wishing it so.

Like Lucy, Mariah constructs a fluid racial identity for herself, a right she feels entitled to based on "loving, knowing ignorance" as Lugones describes it. In an effort to connect with Lucy, Mariah proudly flaunts the fact that she has Indian blood after she catches fish for their dinner, and, in the process, flippantly associates her achievement with stock traits of an identity with which she shares few to no experiences. While she claims she was initially "looking forward to telling" Lucy this information, she then hesitates: "I don't know why, I feel I shouldn't tell you that. I feel you will take it the wrong way" (40). She demonstrates here an interest in being admired for a racial identity that not only is solely biological but nearly meaningless to Lucy.

Moreover, she puts the onus of interpretation upon Lucy rather than analyzing her own agenda in privileging this information. In this regard, her 'empathy' is again ego-centric; she perceives empathy as a trait that requires mirroring the other rather than experiencing the other's 'world' as it stands, independent of her. Literature scholar Diane Simmons argues that Mariah has "so thoroughly internalized her right to have what she wants that she feels perfectly innocent, and so can easily afford the exotic luxury of identifying with those at whose expense her privilege has been bought" (84). Mariah believes that she is 'world'-traveling in a benevolent way, empathizing with those that lack social capital, but her intention is to insert herself into the territory of the other rather than accept difference neutrally, comfortably, or with appreciation. Ortega warns against this approach to race when she argues that the "result of the ignorance" that she has outlined

is that women of color continue to be misunderstood, underrepresented, homogenized, disrespected, or subsumed under the experience of "universal sisterhood" while "knowledge" about them is being encouraged and disseminated and white feminists claim to be more concerned and more enlightened about the relations of white women and women of color. (62)

In other words, Mariah attempts to claim membership to a disenfranchised group of people in an effort to put herself on the same plane of power as Lucy, which she sees as substantial as a result of the cultural cache she possesses by virtue of her life as a colonial subject in an 'exotic' part of the world. In the process, however, she disqualifies the experiences of those who have none of the privileges she possesses. Moreover, Mariah's admission reveals that she has not yet been able to see Lucy for more than the sum of her parts and instead relates to her based on tangible facts that Lucy refuses to accept as criteria that could determine one's identity.

Mariah's effort fails; Lucy is insulted by Mariah's dishonesty about her position of power, even if it is unintentional, and is disconcerted by Mariah's attempt to garner admiration for her exotic heritage. Lucy points out that she does not "go around saying that I have some Indian blood in me" and recognizes that even though Indians were thought to be "good sailors" she does not even "like to be on the sea" (40). She argues against conflating racial bloodlines and racial experience while also recognizing Mariah's claim for what it is: a boast. "I could swear she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy," to which she adds: "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (40, 41). In other words, Mariah wants to claim ownership of a blighted past in the hope that it will purge her of some of her ancestors' responsibility for the domination of other cultures while simultaneously retaining her sense of status and ability to help Lucy find her way. Lucy notes that Mariah "looked at me in a pleading way, as if asking for relief, and I looked back, my face and my eyes hard; no matter what, I would not give it" (41).

This is an important moment because, like the scene with the daffodils, the motif regarding transference of power that I argue moves through these texts becomes more evident. Unlike Tassie in Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs*, Lucy chooses not to fulfill the role Mariah wants. Meanwhile, Mariah is aware of her inherent authority but does not want to claim ownership of it. As Aarti Dua writes:

There is a profound ambivalence about power within feminist theory. On one hand, feminists have often relied upon a characterization of power as something evil, dangerous, and corrupting -- a male activity or preoccupation with control and domination which results in violence, rape, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons and the

destruction of the planet. 'Power' here clearly carries negative connotations: it is not something any self-respecting feminist would want to get involved with.

This ambivalence extends beyond gender and applies to race as well to the extent that utilizing power based on racial privilege -- particularly racial privilege that is steeped in colonialism, violence, and hatred -- becomes difficult to 'own,' as Mariah demonstrates. Mariah remains an insider both in the power structures that value her race and class as well as in her family, but she seeks something else; something that only Lucy can provide. She seeks acceptance from the Other as well as forgiveness and friendship. She attempts to ingratiate herself to Lucy to achieve this objective. As a result of this desire, which is both culturally sanctioned and individually gratifying, she is willing to relinquish her position of power in order to gain a different type of cultural affiliation. It is this action, which Mariah petitions, that changes the power dynamics so thoroughly.

This conflation, perhaps even reversal, of the roles of savior and victim opens an opportunity for 'world'-travel in that both women are experiencing shades of the role with which the other initially identified. Mariah, while not a victim per se, performs helplessness and ignorance, which are designed to solicit help from Lucy. This dance of inverted roles may be hazardous in that it welcomes a less arduous means of creating empathy and thus can become a slippery slope toward a sloppy form of empathy in which one simply superimposes one's own experiences and emotions onto the other rather than working to empathize with the perspective of the other. In this case, Mariah seems unable to synthesize the fullness of colonialism's impact upon her nanny despite her eager effort to identify with Lucy's past and in the process casts herself as someone to be pitied. She feels that she is in a situation that she does not know how to transgress, but Lucy is not ready or willing to accept her overtures based on effort alone.

Regardless of the inaccuracy of the roles, Mariah still upends the opening nomenclature for Lucy of 'poor visitor' in the opening chapter. It is Lucy's 'world' that requires membership privileges that Mariah does not have. Lucy does not yield to the emotional pressure applied by Mariah, but she does recognize that Mariah's guilt regarding racial privilege permits her to be in a position to forgive the "victor." Her subsequent refusal to offer absolution allows a claim to power, but Lucy realizes "[i]t was hollow, my triumph, I could feel that, but I held on to it just the same" (41). Coming from a country where she felt little was within her control due to conceptions of gender, colonial rule, and economics, Lucy wants to experience a modicum of the power that Mariah instinctively accepts as her daily reality. As she suggests, however, this power is empty in the sense that Mariah must *offer* the required vulnerability and can reclaim her position of power whenever she chooses. In this regard readers see the ways in which both women are navigating the outsider-within standpoint.

Due to Kincaid's use of limited omniscience, it is unclear the degree of insight Mariah gains from this experience and how she might see her own role differently as a 'world'-traveler. She sees herself as a woman who wants to empathize, but it is difficult to tell if she recognizes the ways that this desire is motivated from self-interest. Rollins found that for many mother-employers "their contact with the domestic is the closest relationship they have with a lower-class or Third World person. Talking with the domestic is a chance to explore what they assume is a very different lifestyle" (164). This certainly seems to be the case for Mariah. She exhibits what Ortega calls "loving, knowing ignorance" in that she "continue[s] to perceive arrogantly" and "distort" her "object[t] of perception, all while thinking" she is a "loving perceive[r]" (60). In this sense, while it is tempting to frame her effort to 'world'-travel as one that is kindhearted, Ortega argues that her shortcomings remain harmful. Lucy remains patient with Mariah though.

As Lenz argues, "Lucy admires Mariah's compassion" even when she criticizes it and "understands that Mariah's gifts, extra wages, and other kindnesses are attempts to alleviate her discomfort with the master-servant relationship" (109). Lucy accepts these gestures, thereby placating Mariah and reaping some benefits for her alluring past. In this way, she participates in the false reversal of power.

Lucy also circumvents Mariah's position of inherent authority by utilizing facets of power her position as a nanny permits her. For instance, Lucy continues to tell one of the children fairy tales, even those in which women are saved by men, against Mariah's direction not to do so. Mariah, she explains, "thought that with children sincerity and straightforwardness, the truth as unvarnished as possible, was the best way" (45). This "truth," however, is not the same truth that Lucy sees and she considers Mariah's sense of feminism as naive. She finds Mariah's political construction of gender farcical "because I had in my head a long list of things that contributed to wrong expectations in the world and somehow fairy tales did not make an appearance on it" (45). Again, Mariah's ideologically-based political theorizing contrasts sharply with the lived experience of Lucy, whose brothers were expected to achieve more than her despite her keen intellect and strong desire to succeed. Lucy is aware of her method of resistance, her purpose for doing so, and the ways it changes her relationship with her charges. She is also aware of what lines not to cross in order to retain employment. She is not against making her own job easier, even when it undermines Mariah. "I was not Miriam's mother," Lucy explains, "in fact, whenever I fed her and told her these stories, a sort of bribe to get her to do things my way, I always did it in a low voice, so that Mariah would not overhear" (45). Whether true or not, Lucy believes her subterfuge would have negative consequences and recognizes that Mariah has considerable, if not ultimate, power to control the terms of their relationship. It is unclear if Lucy

is concerned that she will be fired, if she does not want to tarnish her good standing, or if she is afraid of hurting Mariah's feelings. What is shown here are the ways in which a mother's place in the family changes with the addition of a nanny and how the power dynamics in the mother-employer/nanny relationship can be unstable.

While Mariah does not want her daughters to feel that a man might be a woman's savior, she does not mind projecting herself in the role of Lucy's savior, a role she has assumed based on class, race, and age. She views her role as one of mother-substitute while simultaneously relying on notions of sisterhood as it was described in chapter one. Mariah can understand issues related to gender (simplified as they may be in Lucy's opinion), but not in regard to race. Like Anne and Sarah in chapter two, Mariah can see where someone near her assuming the role of savior is unappealing as a woman, but she cannot, or does not, transfer this knowledge to race or class. Her power permits her to be the person who defines both the relationship as well as her moments of powerlessness. As Ortega points out,

loving, knowing ignorance is arrogant perception that involves self-deception and the quest for more knowledge about the object of perception -- the perceiver believes himself or herself to be perceiving lovingly even though this is not the case, and the perceiver wishes to make knowledge claims about the object of perception, even though such claims are not checked or questioned. (63)

Mariah has not moved past her own scope of understanding nor has she committed herself to truly traveling to a place in which the advantages she possesses based on marital status and ethnicity would not permit her to maintain theoretical ideas without being challenged in systemic and complex ways.

Despite the differences that these women experience in their interactions with one another, Lucy still seeks to reciprocate the close relationship that Mariah strives to develop largely as a way to heal the wounds that she has experienced with her mother. While domestic labor activists warn against maternalism, the age difference between the women and, more importantly, Lucy's desire to work through her own conflicts with her mother via Mariah creates a situation in which Lucy actively seeks Mariah's guidance and tests the meaning of love. Lucy knows, for instance, that her relationship with Peggy, another nanny, drives Mariah "crazy," but Lucy flaunts the fact that Mariah "couldn't tell me what to do, exactly, because she wasn't my parent" (63). Her own mother would not have permitted this friendship to continue, but Mariah honors Lucy's independence, unwilling to exert her power. Mariah also offers Lucy information on birth control, which Lucy believes her own mother would never do, and here again Mariah demonstrates that she can respond empathetically on the level of gender.

It could be argued, however, that these moments of maternalism are based on consumption. Mariah fetishizes some aspects of Lucy's difference in order to validate her own vision of herself as compassionate and accepting. Romero's research confirms that some white middle-class women develop personal relationships with the women of color whom they employ in order to "affirm their self-image as nonracist" (*Maid* 141). Mariah sees Lucy as a woman of the future: global, unencumbered by marriage and children, and able to exert agency in a way that she may no longer be able to or even want to since, as she tells Lucy, "I have always wanted four children, four girl children" (26). It seems that Mariah uses Lucy both as a window to the exotic and as a way to shape second-wave feminism by making efforts to influence Lucy's political standpoint. Mariah may even hope to live vicariously through Lucy's placement in history. However, Lucy is able to identify that, for her, "western feminist agendas do not give

much cause for hope" and therefore she, as a member of the "marginalized[,] must find ways outside of such institutionalized agendas to create [her] own new visio[n] of the future" (Nichols 205). She plays out this quest for awareness with a woman who both fills the role of loving mother while simultaneously allowing her to rework the dynamics she has with her own mother. Mariah's position also permits Lucy to rework her role as an outsider-within the family -- a dynamic that resonates with her position as a member of a colonized nation and as a daughter in a male-centric family. In short, both women receive something that they need from the other, which disperses the power between them.

Lucy becomes increasingly disenchanted with the notion that she is remaining a subject rather than an actor in her new life but retains her position with Mariah and is still involved with the family when Lewis' affair with Dinah is discovered. Lenz highlights that Mariah's failed marriage shows Lucy that "Mariah, while privileged in various ways, is simultaneously troubled by and trapped within structures beyond her understanding or control" (110). She adds: "Mariah's unhappiness ultimately bonds her to Lucy; though their circumstances are quite different the effects of those circumstances are shared" (110). The nascent parity that develops between the women when Lucy helps support Mariah emotionally through the separation with her husband is shown again when Lucy decides to send her savings to her mother and Mariah matches the money. While it is likely that Mariah could afford much more and likely wanted to offer more she chooses not to overshadow Lucy's own efforts. Mariah, while still a novice, is learning to see Lucy's 'world' and allows her to discern Lucy's needs from what she wants her needs to be. This sense of shared support permits a more equilateral relationship to develop, but Mariah upends this balance when she feels rebuffed after Lucy informs her of her intention to resign. Despite Mariah's outward efforts to promote independence, Lucy feels as if she is a "dog on a leash" and

recognizes that she will never feel independent with Mariah acting as her savior (110). She concedes that Mariah is "like a mother to [her], a good mother," but still a force from which she must extricate herself in order to find her own way unencumbered (110). She knows that "Mariah wanted to rescue me" in light of how she "spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere," but she also sees the difference between what a group experiences and what an individual experiences, adding: "I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether" (131-32). Lucy has to 'world'-travel to her own new 'world' that she is trying to build rather than rest on the memorized roads from where she had come.

Mariah tries to prevent Lucy from leaving her post, reminding her that she had committed to a full year even though Lucy is only a few weeks shy of completing her commitment. Lucy, more worldly and confident now, knows that it is "always hard for the person who is left behind" (141). Lucy's departure signifies her ability to claim power in the relationship despite the barriers that are inherent in a mother-employer/nanny relationship. As Lucy concludes her final weeks, she explains that Mariah spoke to her "harshly" and would "make up rules which she insisted" Lucy follow -- a desperate attempt to hide her hurt via her position of dominance (143). Lucy blithely notes that the "master business did not become her at all" and comments that it made her "sad to see [Mariah] that way" (143). This moment shows another shift toward the depiction in novels of mother-employers' diminishing power. Lucy's rational and even-tempered response proves her maturity and ability to travel to Mariah's 'world' in a way that permits her to understand that the woman's claims are a result of her pain and vulnerability. Lucy no longer seeks membership; she has accrued what she needs and is willing to move forward with just that. Lenz argues that Lucy's choice to leave Mariah is "neither simple nor easy, but rather reflects

Lucy's deliberate attempts to reaffirm her outsider-within status, aligning herself with neither her subjugated past identity nor with her present opportunities to internalize dominant ideologies" (110). The final chapter's title, "Lucy," highlights this in its contrast with the title of the first: "Poor Visitor." Lucy is secure in her own 'world' -- a world that others can visit if they so choose as long as it is on her terms. Lucy moves into a modest apartment with Peggy, a woman whose hair smelled of "artificial lemons" (154-155). The yellow that had rankled her emotionally remains but holds less influence as she becomes more aware of its source, which she now believes is "made up in a laboratory" (155). Power, in other words, is manufactured. In her new apartment she has items Mariah has given her and she still makes coffee as she was taught by her, but she is now independent. She can keep what she wants of her time with her and discard the rest.

Mariah not only tolerates Lucy's acts of resistance in their closing days but continues to make efforts to ingratiate herself to her. She seeks to be the sacrificial lamb that will cleanse the racial wrongs that have been done. While Lucy could arguably be pitied at the start of the novel, it is now Mariah who readers likely pity. When they meet again months after she had moved out, Lucy describes Mariah as "even more thin than usual" and "lonely" (162). She lost her husband and best friend and is depicted as fighting to retain a relationship with a former employee she had paid to provide emotional labor. She is the 'old guard' and has been cast aside; the power she can claim by virtue of race and class has been deemed ineffectual, unnecessary, and unwanted by Lucy, the visitor, and she cannot claim membership to a community she sees as more ideal nor is she invited to try to join. As a result, Mariah decides to travel far away and "live in a place of uncommon natural beauty" where inhabitants are "filled with love and trust" (162). She, like Lucy, must create the 'world' she wants to reside in independently.

Ultimately, it is Lucy's "position within and outside the family" that allows her to "observe and pass judgment on Lewis and Mariah, their political and economic affiliations, and their social interactions," according to Lenz (103). Nichols extends this argument when she posits that Kincaid has created in Lucy a "spy in the house of American liberalism" in that Lucy is an "ever vigilant observer of her employers' lives and philosophies" (205). As a result, Nichols argues, "the reader benefits from her critique by seeing things through a narrative that shifts the dominant perspective out of the limelight" (205). While these scholars correctly highlight that few nannies are front and center in the novels in which they appear, they also seem to presume the readers are in need of 'world'-travel themselves and are not subalterns who identify closely with Lucy's story. They also suggest that Mariah's story is unimportant both in her own right and in relation to Lucy's, casting her as a placeholder, just as nannies often are in novels. But both stories are important. Lucy's story permits readers to travel to a 'world' of an immigrant nanny while Mariah's story demonstrates how even the best intentions can be misguided when they are not rooted in deep knowledge. Moreover, when one takes the time to examine Mariah's story, it is evident that she, too, is both interesting in her own right and is an outsider to the group with which she seeks to affiliate. As Mariah watches from the outside, her power is (a)voided by her nanny, Lucy. This has within it potential, too. As Bailey contends: "By learning about lives on the margins, members of dominant groups come to discover the nature of oppression, the extent of their privileges, and the relations between them. Making visible the nature of privilege, enables members of dominant groups to generate liberatory knowledge" (286). Mariah's insecurity, unwillingness to claim power she sees as masculine, and her investment in multiculturalism surpasses even pride in her own identity and permits a situation to develop in

which Lucy can upset the traditional power dynamics described by Rollins and gain footing as an independent woman.

While Kincaid's novel may seem heavy-handed in its attempt to raise readers' consciousness, Lucy's outsider-within status likely entices readers to reflect upon their own biases, misinterpretations, and ignorance while offering subalterns a character who is vastly different than the proper (albeit plucky) Jane Eyre. When these stories are told, readers are left feeling that Lucy has achieved the liberation she had been seeking, but Mariah's trajectory is less clear. Via Lucy, Kincaid belittles and chastises Mariah through the course of the novel for the privileges society has bestowed upon her. She is judged as both blind to these privileges and inept at removing herself from the hegemonic power structures that provide her with these privileges. Kincaid punishes Mariah harshly: her husband cheats on her, she is betrayed by her best friend, she cannot earn her nanny's approval despite her best efforts, and she does not find comfort even with her beloved daughters. She must work to redefine for herself what it is to be a mother and a woman, just as Lucy redefined her location as a female colonial subject. Mariah has made herself an outsider to her own 'world' and Lucy's voyage may provide her with the roadmap to attempt a similar journey.

***The Love Wife* by Gish Jen**

Published in 2004, nearly fifteen years after *Lucy*, Jen's *The Love Wife* is a novel that resists easy answers, unfounded hope, or simple versions of right and wrong. In fact, one of the primary characters, Blondie, often begins conversations with her children by saying: "In this family, we ...," which highlights that there are few universally good or bad choices even while there is a choice that suits their own family's moral code best. The story is told in a style similar

to the television show *Modern Family* in the sense that every character (other than preverbal Bailey) has the opportunity to talk in first person with varying degrees of self-awareness and empathy. Characters cut one another off, repeat one another, quote one another, and muse inwardly. In this novel, time is not chronological, but follows the whim of memory. In effect, Jen utilizes nearly every device Keen claims restricts reader empathy. While the reader is never addressed directly, characters express an awareness that they are telling a story to someone, as if in a family therapy session that transcends time. Lacking poetic prose or an omniscient narrator to provide insight into the grander meaning of the events, Jen allows her characters to remain unadorned thereby offering readers the opportunity to easily fall into step with this rather typical middle-class, American family. (Although quite comfortable financially, their wealth is not portrayed as that of Mariah and Lewis'.) Indeed, the narrative is one that speaks to some of Jen's own family's experiences as a daughter of Chinese immigrants and as a woman who later married a white man and has two children -- one who is often read as Chinese and one who is often read as Caucasian.

The primary characters in *The Love Wife* are forty-five-year-old Janie "Blondie" Bailey, who is American and of Scottish-German ancestry; her husband, thirty-nine-year-old Carnegie Wong, who is Chinese; his domineering mother, Mama Wong, who is Chinese and wants her cultural history to be passed on to her grandchildren; sixteen-year-old Lizzy, an adopted daughter of uncertain Asian ancestry who was found abandoned on church steps in Carnegie's college town; nine-year-old Wendy, who was adopted in China by the couple after they married; and one-year-old Bailey, the couple's son who was conceived against the odds and whose physical features read as European; and forty-six-year-old Lan (called Lanlan by the children), who is believed to be a distant cousin sent at Mama Wong's bequest in her will to live with the Wong

family and ensure that the children are exposed to Chinese culture and traditions. Blondie opens the novel with a description of the politically sensitive and racially harmonious calm her biracial family has structured for itself in 1999. Echoing Tolstoy, Blondie explains: "Every happy family has its innocence. I suppose, looking back, this was ours" (4). Blondie references her "beautiful Asian" daughters and, lest anyone think she believes them any less worthy, her more prosaically described "bio son," Bailey (3). Deemed the "new American family" by their neighbor and "unnatural" by Mama Wong, the Wong family challenges convention (3).

Blondie's story is arguably at the center of Jen's novel. She is anxious to prove to her audience that she is racially sensitive, citing that her family had hosted exchange students when she was younger and that she chose to study in Hong Kong during college. To circumvent being grouped with those who use the experiences in the global South to bolster their own status, Blondie qualifies that a "summer was not a long time. Still, I did learn a little, about how the Chinese in general prized the cultured. The cultivated" (6). It is this aesthetic of being cultivated that Blondie believes contrasts against her beloved sunflowers that "should have been sterile" -- just as she presumed she was -- and "yet how authentic" in that they were "blissfully undeterred; full of the triumph of having become, from the seed of themselves, themselves" (5). Blondie, too, seeks to claim these attributes; attributes many would describe as distinctively American. She is also the family member who is most fluent in Mandarin, but it is a skill she has little use for since her husband does not speak the language and Mama Wong is in the late stages of Alzheimer's. She also outwardly dislikes Blondie as well as her attempts to foster a relationship by speaking Mandarin. Mama Wong is disdainful of Blondie working outside the home since the family does not require her income and perceives this decision to be selfish. (Mama Wong, who was a single mother, claims she had to work but clearly takes great pride in her achievements.)

In the opening pages of the novel, Blondie claims that her travels in China taught her that "Mainlanders were different than Hong Kongers. The younger generations were different than the older. The less educated were different than the more" (6). She adds, "Lan herself could be different" (6). In this regard, Blondie's actual world travel has heightened her awareness, but she follows this observation about difference with the claim that in "my heart of hearts, I wished that this Lan would never come to behold" her sunflowers, because "I wished not to have to explain their beauty" (6). Quickly she chastens herself, pleading to her audience, "please understand," then justifying (and undermining) her claim by adding that she recognizes the "importance of cultural exchange, especially what with the globalization and whatnot" (6). This couches her framing as one of political and economic necessity rather than personal preference, which is bolstered when she states: "Yet if I could add a word to our language, it would be a word for this: the peace a grown woman feels on the days -- the rare days -- when she needs to consider no view but her own" (6). While Blondie is a world-traveler in the physical sense, she is not a 'world'-traveler -- a point that becomes a motif in the novel and will be elaborated on shortly. The novel then shifts to the perspective of her daughter, Wendy, which adds even more weight to this powerful precursor to the relationship she will have with Lan. Indeed, unlike the opening chapter of *Lucy* titled "The Visitor," this novel's first chapter is "Lan Arrives." The Other no longer enters the fray nameless in Jen's novel.

Wendy chimes in to describe the fog that makes it difficult for the family to make their way to the airport. Mirroring the unwelcoming weather in the opening pages of *Lucy*, the family's vision is obscured, as is their ability to travel. Carnegie has faith that the plane will arrive safely since there are instruments, and, therefore, "no one has to be able to see anything" (6). When Lan arrives, the pattern of personal dynamics is set quickly: Blondie welcomes the

woman in Mandarin but questions her word choice and Chinese etiquette while Lan recedes only offering "[t]hat half smile" that will soon grate on Blondie (14). Blondie is the one who seeks to ingratiate herself, not knowing how to divorce herself from the power associated with her whiteness, class, and membership to a country in the global North. Lan remains opaque. Meanwhile, Carnegie immediately defends Lan, explaining to the unnamed listener that Lan may have been thrown off by a Caucasian women speaking to her in Mandarin. For him, the discomfort is rooted in cultural differences and perhaps his own discomfort with his inability to categorize his wife neatly. Blondie, on the other hand, couches her reticence as an issue of power, claiming, "Lan might have wondered too whether she was a family member exactly -- if by 'nanny' we didn't mean *ayi*. A servant. And what did it signify that she was being brought over on a student visa when she wasn't a student per se?" (15). Lan later admits that she, too, is unsure of how she should frame this arrangement. Like Kincaid's Lucy, Lan considers herself to be a "visitor" despite her kin status (Jen 55). The situation could easily permit Lan to be painted as a victim or object of pity, but Jen resists easy sympathy. This is bestowed on Blondie instead, who feels that her effort to welcome Lan had been rebuffed. "It was impossible not to like her" she states, but adds: "Yet still, as the luggage snaked around, I remained outside the circle of her charm" (16). Even at the airport, she senses the ways in which Lan intensifies her position as an outsider. Her luggage takes the shape of the snake in Eden and carries the weight of Blondie's suspicion.

Rather than curry Blondie's favor, Lan charms the children by commiserating with what they find difficult. She asks Lizzy and Wendy: "Why everybody talk to baby instead of talk to big girls?" (16). She also tells Wendy, "How clever you are. I can see by your eyes, clever," adding: "People should listen to you" (16). While innocuous statements individually, Jen raises

the question of Lan's sincerity and in the process makes quick work of casting her as the unknown threat to Blondie's content life. Her status as an outsider heightens her ability to be empathetic, as Lugones posits, but like Laura in *Men and Angels*, readers are left wondering how this skill will be used. The scene concludes when Carnegie is able to procure reimbursement from the airlines for Lan's damaged suitcase, thereby yielding "her first full, true smile" that is "a completely sweet, open, girlish smile, so guileless and lovely that Carnegie" blushes (17). Lan sees Carnegie as the one she must endear herself to in order to secure her place in the family, and she makes quick work of intuiting that he relishes his role as her savior. It is clear that Lan will be a difficult antagonist for Blondie. Although she is permitted less space in the novel than the Wong family members (as is the case for nearly all nannies in novels that are not told from their exclusive perspective), Lan, based on her own narrative alone as well as the (mis)interpretations of those around her, is complex. Moreover, she keeps her insecurities private along with what gives her pleasure. This is magnified by an agenda that remains unclear, which in turns keeps readers from feeling comfortable with her. It is easy to read Lan as passive-aggressive, defensive, and resentful. She is quick to see unintentional 'injustices' and views Blondie as an adversary in her assimilation into the Wong family, which is simultaneously true and not true. With Blondie being the primary protagonist, and an ingratiating one at that, Lan's dislike of Blondie casts her as less appealing.

In other ways, however, Lan is very sympathetic, particularly in light of her difficult life circumstances. Lan has reason to remain guarded; her position in the family is ambiguous. She is supposedly a distant relative, but she is a stranger to the family. She is brought to live with them as childcare help, but help that has a cultural component wished for by Carnegie's mother, all

under the guise of a student visa. Her experience with the Cultural Revolution also reveals an earned sense of personal injustice. She tells her audience:

I should have grown up writing poetry and practicing calligraphy by the pond. That our pavilion should have been full of musicians and opera singers instead of laundry. That I should have had a cook to cook all the Suzhou specialties. That I should have hardly known what the kitchen looked like. That I should have been married to someone very rich. (293)

Similarly, when she admits she is "*embarrassed*" by her new, less revered social standing she shows a vulnerability that she often keeps hidden (294). It is easy for observers to commiserate with her disappointment, shame, misfortune, and unfulfilled longings, and Jen doles out all of these upon Lan with zeal. While this bad luck and resulting vulnerability softens Lan's character, her more opportunistic nature makes Blondie's distrust of her seem reasonable. This is particularly true when Lan jockeys for the children's affection by granting them privileges Blondie does not ordinarily permit as well as when she fails to dissuade Carnegie from pursuing a physical relationship with her, especially since it is ambiguous if she is pursuing a closer relationship with him only so that she can secure a better future for herself regardless of the harm it will cause the Wong children, Blondie, and even Carnegie.

Carnegie does have sexual fantasies about Lan and his blushing at their first meeting suggests that he was interested in her from the start without her provocations. Carnegie envisions her as the subservient domestic who can fulfill both mother and whore personas. After he sees Lan on her hands and knees cleaning the kitchen floor, he has an erotic dream about her. He explains: "Having never had children, she was tighter than Blondie, also easier. It was natural. She was 24/7. She never had a meeting in the morning; I was her morning meeting" (226). He

confesses this via a lengthy description of his curiosity about her style of lovemaking as he tutors Lan on the basics of the stock market. Comparing her to his wife, he explains: "Blondie, in short, required a consciousness I imagined smooth Lan did not. I had no data to support this. And Lan was, not to forget, a year older than Blondie. Probably this notion was racist" (229). The work of empathy would be negligible, he suggests, based on their shared ethnicity and her willingness to acquiesce to him. After remembering how enamored he had been with Blondie's pale skin, light hair, and blue eyes, he questions if he now belongs with a woman like Lan, who understands him (and he her) even in silence. Lan unromantically reports after their tutoring session: "*Of course, I knew what was on his mind. Men are men*" (229). Rather than dissuade his advances, however, she relishes them. Previously, in the kitchen, for instance, she delighted in his interest, musing inwardly, "*Finally I was in the house. Everyone knows in America, girls have no morals. How can you expect the men to be better?*" (146). She is aware of his intentions and purposely encourages him in order to secure her place in the family, which she believes will yield the financial support she needs to subsist as well as pay for her schooling.

Lan's insecurity with her position in the family has negative consequences and shades her view of many of the family's interactions with her. For instance, she remains unconvinced that Blondie's effort to leave food for her on the staircase to her apartment is an act of altruism and instead views the offer as one designed to mark her inferior status since she equates "leftovers" with something given to a servant (135). Blondie, however, claims that they "served [Lan] as if we were at a banquet. We heaped her plate with food while she protested. We treated her as if she were an honored guest, with that exaggerated politeness the Chinese love" (136). This is where an author's choice to highlight both the mother-employer's and the nanny's perspective is valuable. Neither woman is successfully 'world'-travelling as the opposing reactions to the act of

food-sharing shows. Blondie is annoyed that Lan refuses to set a place for herself at the dinner table, but Lan tells Wendy that she does not do so because "it isn't fitting," asking the girl, "since when does a servant belong at the table?" (135). She admits that Blondie is kind to her, but feels "*that her smile hid a knife*" (136). Lan sees Blondie's actions as "*fake*" since she "*never saw them treat anybody else that way*" (136). There is an inherent lack of trust between the women, largely rooted in both women's insecurity regarding the stability of their membership to the family, and neither has the freedom to terminate their labor relationship in light of the family connections they share via Carnegie. Lan makes every effort to charm the Wong children (and Carnegie) into liking her. This would not be perceived as poorly if it were not done at Blondie's expense, but, unlike some novels (e.g., *Jane Eyre*), it is unlikely that many readers want to see Carnegie choose Lan over Blondie despite the deft hand Jen uses to depict both characters.

Blondie also participates in constructing the strained relationship that exists between the two women. She is ambivalent about her commitment to multiculturalism, unlike Mariah in *Lucy*, due in part to the larger impact the emotional and political ramifications of multiculturalism have on her daily life. For Mariah, belief in a multicultural utopia has few real world consequences. Blondie must walk the talk. This comes forward clearly in various references to Chinese culture. She admits, for instance, "I loved Lan's simplicity, but some things drove me crazy" (88). Even Lan's self-proclaimed allegiance to simplicity and eating bitter grates on Blondie, who takes to passive-aggressively singing "*Noth-ing's plenty for me*" (92-93). Later, Blondie emails her friend Gabriela:

Honestly, we are just too busy for this nonsense. It is too much to spend the day running from meeting to meeting to meeting to meeting to meeting -- for half of which I am

underprepared -- only to have to psychoanalyze our nanny when I come home. Does not our attention at the end of the day rightly belong to our children? (141)

Bolstering her claim with the dogma of intensive mothering, Blondie feels she must conduct triage as she struggles to attend to her children's needs, her own needs, and Lan's needs -- a situation sociological research has shown to be common. Blondie wants to honor the needs of everyone who is involved and blames herself for not being able to achieve this impossible task.

Jen also insinuates that Blondie may hold her own misconceptions about what to expect from Lan, with some of these misconceptions being based on race. When Carnegie petitions Blondie to permit him to honor his mother's will and allow Lan to live with them, the unknown woman renders their current nanny redundant. Blondie is open to replacing their nanny who has had sketchy attendance and Blondie is intrigued by the stories she has heard about live-in help. She relates how a friend of hers "hadn't cooked a thing since her dear Lucy came" and attributes positive qualities to Lan based solely on her ethnicity (194). Blondie reminisces briefly about their "absolutely perfect Chinese sitter" who helped "when the girls were young" and how their "friends said how present she was" (194). Blondie goes on to relate stories of friends' nannies who "stole the baby's clothes," had an ex-boyfriend stalking her, or pilfered alcohol (194). Blondie insinuates that the loyalty associated with kin is preferable to the unknown qualities of a nanny she would hire through other outlets. While comforted by the perhaps false security of kin, it is also important to recognize that Blondie also seems comforted by the idea that she can obtain more labor from Lan than she is able to obtain from her current sitter. She bases some of these beliefs on kinship norms as well as on preconceived ideas she holds regarding Asian caregivers. On this front, Blondie is of two minds about stereotyping based on race. Her ambivalence extends to feeling threatened by having another woman assume childcare

responsibilities and seeking a replacement that can be ever-present and fully responsible for the maintenance of the home and family.

This is not to suggest that the women would have an easy camaraderie if issues of race and culture were not present, but certainly these issues serve as tent poles of confusion, dissatisfaction, and misunderstanding between them. Often Lan seems to exploit her difference in a way that sets Blondie up to fail. Blondie, meanwhile, fears appearing insensitive or politically incorrect if she identifies Lan's ruse of marginalizing herself for what it is -- an attempt to play the martyr. Blondie resists confronting these motives especially when Lan uses the cloak of culture as a means to boost her status. This dynamic takes shape when Lan teaches Blondie how to prepare Chinese meals and sees Blondie's interest as disingenuous. Carnegie, who witnesses some of their work, claims that Blondie "seemed bent on normalizing her relationship with Lan through foodstuffs" and adds that "[h]er enthusiasm was real -- Blondie was never not real -- and yet she seemed to have turned herself up, as if on a cooking show" (240). He also notes that when Blondie cooks with Lan "she did things Lan's way" (242). Lan, however, claims that Blondie is "*a person like Ye Gong, who makes a big fuss about how much he loves dragons but does not actually love dragons at all*" (241). While Blondie purposefully places herself in a situation in which Lan can be her superior in an attempt to create a more egalitarian relationship and dissipate some of her power, Lan remains guarded and is unwilling to see Blondie's intention as forthright. She senses the aspect of staging that is inherent in the request as well as the futility of pretending that their power differentials can be negated so simply. This scene again demonstrates the advantage readers have when they can witness multiple perspectives in the mother-employer/nanny relationship.

Lan's discomfort with her position in the family threatens the harmony Blondie has worked to achieve. Lan's belief that she does not receive the benefits of being a full-fledged family member, which, for various reasons is true, amplifies this. Blondie's ambivalence regarding Lan's role in the family only reinforces Lan's own feelings of not knowing how she fits in. She reacts to her ambiguous status with suspicion, even asking herself: "*Why was I brought here? Because Carnegie's mother wanted me to come, they said. But I wondered, what was the real reason? What did they want from me?*" (49). She remains cautious and feels excluded. When Blondie considers arranging for her to return to China, Blondie asks Carnegie: "Does she even want to stay?" which Lan (showcasing an odd omniscience) follows by saying: "*A good question, which no one did ask me*" (280). The lack of communication regarding Lan's role in the family, along with the power differentials that are both entrenched and treated as if they do not exist, at least by Blondie, creates a more difficult situation. Neither woman can successfully 'world'-travel largely because neither is honest about her own needs or what she wants from the other woman. Without a solid starting point, empathy becomes a blundering effort at best -- like looking for a destination when one does not know where one started.

Lan uses her outsider-within and kin statuses as a means of withholding from Blondie her desire to have her multicultural family function well without undue conflict. Whereas many mother-employers purposely ostracize nannies from the intimacy of family life, Blondie often wants to feel that there is unity in her family, particularly in light of Lan's presumed ancestral connection to her husband. This aspiration conflicts with her competing desire to be the sole caregiver in the family and the only woman her husband desires sexually. Lan accurately discerns and then exploits Blondie's guilt for wanting to maintain some separation, her insecurity about having authority over Lan, as well as her desire for cultural harmony. Lan achieves this by

remaining intentionally austere with Blondie (and not the children or Carnegie) and by performing the role of excluded servant despite Blondie's seemingly sincere efforts to circumvent this type of dynamic. Lan is entitled to restrict the amount of emotional labor that she extends on Blondie's behalf, but in the instances described previously she is also undermining Blondie's authority -- authority that Blondie feels ambivalent about and therefore wields inconsistently.

Meanwhile, Lan feels she has few options to express her dissatisfaction. Her employers are her family and are providing her with nearly all of her basic necessities. In these regards, she is nearly powerless to create the change she wants. Although she never admits it, Lan knowingly aggravates Blondie in ways that are difficult to confront even though both women are aware of the dynamic that is being played out. Blondie explains:

I could not even get her to talk to me in a regular way. If I asked, Are you hot? Lan would answer, Not too hot. If I asked, Do you have something you need to do? Lan would answer, I can do it now or do it later. If I asked, Would you like to go shopping?

Lan would answer, If you are go out shopping, I am happy to accompany you. (219)

Lan's passive-aggressive attitude and exaggerated subservience chafes Blondie. When she vents her frustration to Carnegie, he demeans Blondie and her relatively deep understanding of Chinese culture by claiming the role of cultural expert by virtue of ethnicity, similar to Mariah's effort to claim ownership of Indian ancestry. He tells her: "She treats you like her superior [...]. Which, dearest, you are. And think how the Chinese write, traditionally: top to bottom. Think how they talk about time, even time runs top to bottom, with events above or below each other. Lan has that ladder-like outlook" (219). With her exposure to Chinese culture, it is likely Blondie knows all of this and more. Also, it is evident from her professional position that Blondie is both

ambitious and has the ability wield her power well. (She both founded and operates a socially responsible investment firm.) Blondie does not address Carnegie's condescending tone or mention her own deep knowledge of Chinese culture. Her shame for being the only Caucasian in her family leaves her little ground to stand on other than to point out that he is defending Lan again rather than herself.

Lan never offers an explanation for what spurred her dislike of Blondie, but some of her animosity results from her sense of superiority that is rooted in a deep pride of Chinese culture. She also remains dissatisfied with a role that contrasts sharply with what she perceives her status ought to be. The children then become the target of her attempt at reprisal. Lan values both cultures but believes that many aspects of Chinese culture remain superior to the United States', particularly in ways that pertain to parenting. For instance, Lan does not understand how the girls can develop into decent people without possessing engrained notions of sacrifice, duty, and the ability to "eat bitter" (49). Later, when the girls tell Lan that their parents do not force them to attend religious services, Lan thinks: *"How could the parents let the child choose something so important? I could not understand it. Didn't American parents care enough to control their children?"* (44). In this way, she judges Blondie in particular as the person who has deviated from what Lan sees as ideal childrearing, viewing her as generically American rather than as an individual with a solid rationale for her choices.

Both Lizzy and Wendy know that Lan hopes that they will not grow up to be "one hundred percent American," and because they view her as a connection to a country that marks them yet they know little about, her opinion carries weight (46). As Lan develops a closer relationship with the girls, it is unclear if her motive is to impart cultural understanding (as Mama Wong had hoped), to spur friction in the family in order to secure her own standing, or to

relieve her loneliness via what she sees as the closest opportunity for a kin-based bond. It is likely that all come into play. Due to Blondie's discomfort with challenging another person's beliefs or actions, particularly if it will be construed as undermining multiculturalism, she relinquishes substantial power in the relationship. This upending of power creates friction for the children in that they, particularly Wendy, know that securing Lan's affection means offering their loyalty to both her and Chinese culture. It is understood that Lan sees her role and Blondie's approach to parenting as mutually exclusive. Blondie is threatened by Lan's tactics to win her children's affection and feels a profound vulnerability in light of the fact that Lizzy and Wendy were adopted. This vulnerability resides in part as a result of her doubt regarding the difference between the love a child offers an adopted mother versus a biological mother.

The girls also experience a vulnerability as they seek to fill in the missing pieces of their identity that Blondie cannot provide, or at least *feels* she cannot provide. Lan manipulates her cultural connection with the girls to boost her standing with them and coaxes them into believing that she knows a deeper (and more favorable) truth about them as a result of this bond. For instance, Lan tells Wendy: "You are a real Chinese girl [...]. See not only with your eyes but with your heart" (90). Predictably, these compliments are well-received by the girls in part because they have sheltered lives in a comfortable and loving suburban home and therefore possess a naiveté that encourages them to overlook the ways in which Lan may be preying upon their desire to find a place where they feel they belong. Neither girl has the requisite experience to travel to Lan's 'world' in a way that would allow them to understand her level of desperation or see how they would fit into her agenda. As a result, while Blondie is initially enamored by Lan's stories of China and the infusion of Chinese culture into their home, she quickly feels Lan is stealing her children from her and using her identity as a Chinese woman as a means of

connecting with them in a way that threatens her own non-biological and cross-cultural relationship with her daughters. Lan's method of subverting Blondie's power strikes at an aspect of her identity that Blondie has difficulty accepting or justifying.

Similar to Mariah in *Lucy*, Blondie, who also hails from the Midwest, recognizes her Americanism but wants to be worldly and shed the skin she believes is too prosaic. Blondie accomplishes this by attaching herself via marriage, motherhood, and travel with the 'exotic other' of China and marking herself as the one who is exceedingly open to cultural differences. In a lengthy passage Blondie divulges some of her priorities:

When I strolled Wendy through town now I was reminded of the days when having a child of another race was simply a matter of fending off ignorance. How simple that was -- how easy to know what was right. When people asked, *Is she yours?* or, *Where did you get her?* I could laugh and feel proud of myself, of my family. It was a species of vanity. I had struggled against it when Lizzy was a baby. But now, I sometimes brought Wendy out into the world to feel that challenge, and my own fine resistance. I had always drawn strength from the fact that my hair next to Lizzy's should be a picture that challenged the heart. Now I drew on it purposefully, the way other women drew on the knowledge that they were intelligent or thin. I had had the heart to take these children in, after all. Had I not loved them deeply and well, as if they were from the beginning my own? (132-33)

It is important to see that Blondie's 'declaration' of love is phrased as a question indicating Blondie herself is not entirely sure. Moreover, she admits to a shallow usury -- an exploiting of racial difference and white privilege for her own gains and personal satisfaction. In other words, she has positioned herself so that she can rightfully accept the love of a mother while also garnering public praise for her physical performance of multiculturalism and her presumed open

mind and heart. She acknowledges the shallow pride she takes in this too. It is a guilty pleasure that yields self-interrogation and punishment though.

Lan's physical resemblance to her daughters heightens Blondie's apprehension. She explains: "Any passerby would have thought that Lan and Carnegie were the husband and wife of the family, and that I was visiting with my son, Bailey" (245). Again, she is left with a question: "What did it matter how a family looked?" (246). She seems to question the cultural attachment to physical resemblance as well as her own abiding faith in it. While she admits some unsanitized truths regarding her feelings about race, there is also an aspect of her that does not have an answer to the riddles that reside in the space where race, love, and family overlap. Like Anne in *Men and Angels*, she blames Lan, claiming: "I had not felt this way when the family was just Carnegie and Lizzy and Wendy and me. But Bailey had changed things a little, and Lan [...] had changed things more" (247). Blondie, in this case, is the one who is self-conscious of her race and European physical features. Bailey, who could pass as Caucasian, had forced her to question how a child who looks biologically similar might alter the way she is perceived and even how she might feel. For Blondie, it is not a matter of white privilege and the access she has to power outside the home but the value she places on looking like the people in her family. While Blondie has literally world traveled, she has a difficult time making peace with how those around her may perceive her place in the world as well as the traveling (both literal and metaphorical) that she has done. While she expresses a desire to 'world'-travel in Lugones' sense of the word - experiencing people's cultures from the inside-- she also shows increasing angst about feeling like it is she who is the outsider-within in her own family. 'World'-traveling, for her, has not been fully achieved through her physical travels and the level of threat she experiences as a result of Lan's role in the family restricts her from feeling capable of 'world'-

traveling to the place from which Lan comes. It seems that her quest to 'world'-travel supersedes her quest to identify what is important to her and why, which ultimately limits her ability to 'world'-travel well.

Blondie and Carnegie's children also have difficulty making peace with issues regarding ethnicity, particularly with their physical markers of difference. Lizzy and Wendy both feel threatened by the addition of Bailey, especially in light of the fact that he inherited Blondie's features. Lizzy demonstrates this discomfort visually by dying her hair blond and telling her mother, "*Why shouldn't I bleach my hair, it's no different than you highlighting yours, and besides why shouldn't I be blond when my mother is blond?*" (7). Her vulnerability becomes more evident when she insists to her sister that Blondie was "never that close to us, even when we were babies. Not like she was to Bailey. Face facts, it was different" (11). Wendy does not seem to disagree entirely, but does, optimistically, claim: "Though maybe Mom is going to be exactly the same with Bailey as us when he grows up, that's what I think" (11). Her answer does not reflect a buoyant hope that her mother loves her, only that her love for Bailey will diminish to match what she feels is her smaller share. Like Moore, Jen deftly questions the altruism involved in adopting children, in this case from abroad, while also troubling the notions of multiculturalism that makes this act one of defiance. While Blondie takes subversive pride in her choices, which masks her own insecurity, the girls experience insecurity and have not developed a set of coping skills to alleviate the discomfort therein. It is this willingness to explore the nuances of human experience, without attaching labels of right and wrong, that permits a complexity in *The Love Wife* that is not present in *Lucy*.

With Lan's introduction to the family, the girls gain a mother figure whose ethnic features read more like their own. Both the daughters project upon Lan their needs regarding ethnic

identity, and Lan uses these vulnerabilities to her advantage. Lizzy, who desperately seeks independence and attention, accomplishes this by adopting unresearched dogmatic stances on capitalism, fashion, and American culture. She dyes her hair back to black "so she could look like Lan," according to Blondie, and uses Lan's permissiveness to shore up her arguments with Blondie. What Lizzy, who has specific obstacles in her identity development as a result of her unknown heritage, does not understand is that many of the difficulties she experiences are typical of adolescent development. Lan, however, offers her an easy prop against her mother and does not make any clear attempts to dissuade Lizzy from doing so. Hurt and confused, Lizzy ultimately yells at Blondie: "If you were my real mother, you would understand! If you were my real mother, you wouldn't be this brick wall! If you were my real mother, you'd be like Lanlan!" (214). Despite her zealous interest in defining what is fake and real, often deeming Blondie to be the former, Lizzy does not see how superficial Lan's support is. Blondie is left resignedly telling Lizzy, "I am your real mother," but she knows that her lack of a biological connection calls all of this into question for Lizzy, who feels she was abandoned and unwanted, and even in herself at times (214). She does not ask her children to examine Lan's behavior and refrains from competing for her children's exclusive love.

It is Wendy who develops the closest relationship with Lan. As Wendy learns Mandarin she brags that she "can speak better [Mandarin] than Lizzy and Mom" but does not seem to notice the hurt she causes Blondie when she claims that her mother "can't even understand what Lanlan and me are laughing about" (210). Wendy does recognize Lizzy's jealousy though and points out that her sister often yells, "No speaking Chinese!" (210). She also notes that she and Lan do not "even have to talk," claiming: "It's like Lanlan knows what I'm thinking anyway, and like I can feel how she's feeling too, especially if she's feeling sad" (210). Empathy is not visiting

another person's 'world' in Lizzy's description; it instead involves becoming a permanent resident. For Wendy, there is a cleaving rather than an act of reflecting that results from this experience. At this point, Lan likely spends more time with the girls than Blondie, who works full-time, and she uses this to her advantage. Wendy claims the Chinese food Lan prepares "tastes better when Lanlan gives it to us" than when Blondie does and considers if this is because "liking her food is like is liking Lanlan" or because Lan is "not like Mom, who takes it out of the refrigerator and then checks it to make sure there's no mold or anything on it, and then puts it on a plate" (222). Ever in the search for tangible proof, food becomes an indication of love and, in this case, Blondie loses the battle of who loves the children more as a result of her limited time.

Lan not only encourages the children to feel neglected by Blondie but seemingly identifies with this feeling, perhaps projecting her own grief at being abandoned by her mother when she was a child. Lan insinuates that she is motivated by insecurity and highlights her ambiguous role in the family when she claims the "*only people who really wanted me were little Wendy and Lizzy -- girls with no mothers, like me*" (136). This comes to the fore again when Wendy explains that Lizzy had told her "Mom never cared about us enough to bake brownies," which stemmed from Lan's comment, "that's what it means to have a mother who works" (223). Her effort to have the girls view their mother's employment as an affront against them places Blondie in a difficult place -- one that echoes the dissent working mothers hear from media sources and other cultural outlets regarding the gaps in their child(ren)'s lives as a result of their own career pursuits. It also encourages the girls to view their mother's efforts as insufficient against the demands of intensive mothering. Like Moore's handling of Sarah, Jen highlights Lan's vulnerability and neediness, too, and thereby incites readers' sympathy and antipathy. This is perhaps most notable when Lan tells the girls, "I am like you, have no real mother. Have no

real family" (223). Her status as motherless is one that fosters compassion, although less for the adult Lan that is depicted in the novel than her younger self she occasionally recalls, while simultaneously triggering distaste at the depth of her effort to undermine Blondie. Compassion resurrects, however, if and when one considers the emotional damage Lan has likely experienced to be so conniving. While some of Lan's plaintive comments sound more sincere, these remarks come across as manipulative, an effort to accrue pity and play the martyr. Readers who doubt Lan's motives receive confirmation when Lan finds a man she believes will provide for her financially and perhaps help her become pregnant (despite the fact that he is already married and physically abusive). Almost immediately she distances herself from Lizzy and Wendy, leaving them hurt and confused. She also becomes increasingly remiss in her care for Bailey. Blondie witnesses her yelling and shaking the young child, forgetting to diaper him, preparing a bath that is too hot, and co-sleeping with him despite specific requests against this. Blondie's ensuing lack of leadership in the house and with her family causes everyone anxiety.

Past exchanges with Blondie indicate that Lan, who now has access to an alternate source of income and sponsorship for citizenship, is willing to be more confrontational in her effort to undermine Blondie. She sees Blondie's role as one that must be usurped if she is going to create a secure position for herself in the family, which is a back-up plan for her budding romance. She accomplishes this in part by maximizing the discord between Carnegie and Blondie, who have significantly different interpretations of the value of Lan's role in their girls' lives. Carnegie and Blondie see the influences Lan has on their children based on their individual feelings about Lan personally. Carnegie, for instance, believes "Lan was bringing [Wendy] out" and is "happy to see Wendy so ebullient," while Blondie feels that the "girls are no longer quite mine" and believes Lan is emotionally bribing the girls in order to win their favor (and literally bribing Bailey by

plying him with candy to appease him) (144, 202). Sensing Carnegie's difficulty with Blondie's professional success, particularly as his own career is floundering, Lan curries Carnegie's favor by fostering his sexual fantasizes about what he perceives as a simpler relationship.

Ironically, while Blondie is the one who seems the target of unfair psychological warfare, she also plays the largest role in allowing Lan to be perceived as a sympathetic character as she continues to bring to the fore plausible rationales for Lan's inappropriate behavior. Rather than assert her own rights as a member of the family, Blondie's fear of appearing rigid or ethnocentric becomes her fatal flaw. When Blondie emails her best friend Gabriela about Lan's antics, for example, Gabriela quips, "you know what she is? chopsticks" (134). This echoes a method of categorization that Blondie developed while she studied in China in which tourists were either chopsticks, assimilating with the culture they visited, or forks, rigidly attempting to adhere to the food, customs, and manners with which they were most familiar. When she and Carnegie travel to China to adopt Wendy, Blondie recollects that on her initial trip to China, as a college student, "I had proved a fork -- truly. I wasn't as bad as the Clarks, who produced PB&J at every meal. But I was, unmistakably, a fork. Now, though -- how I hoped to prove better. How I hoped to prove, finally, truly, chopsticks" (112). On this second trip, Carnegie remarks on how adventurous of an eater Blondie is. Her effort to reform herself could be what Lan interprets as inauthentic and highlights one of the many obstacles to 'world'-travel. Blondie values something that she does not inherently possess and Jen draws attention to the process and limits of change. Blondie cannot see this in herself at this point and only blames herself for her own needs and perceived rigidity. Blondie, who is clearly frustrated with Lan, responds to Gabriela: "Isn't it more understandable, though. For her to be chopsticks than for us to be forks? I think it is more

understandable" (135). She does not explain why. Gabriela seems to endorse the same line of thinking.

Blondie's philosophy has consequences, however, particularly when she encounters Bailey screaming after Lan attempts to force him to eat scalding soup and rationalizes the error in judgment as one related to a gap in cultural understanding. Blondie tells Lan, "potatoes are not like rice. You may not have realized. Rice doesn't hold heat the way potatoes do" (307). Her reluctance to staunchly reprimand a malicious act is an extension of cultural relativism gone awry. Lan unapologetically retorts: "If you like cooler, I will make it cooler" (307). Neither woman addresses the subterfuge enacted at Bailey's expense. Gabriela later endorses Blondie's approach and defends Lan's poor child-tending skills. "It's her inner child," according to Gabriela; "Inside she is still a motherless girl without enough food, clothes, heat, anything. It's hard for her to see your children grow up with so much. You can't blame her, in a way" (307). Blondie agrees with her friend. The issue may not be one of blame, however, which neither woman recognizes. Blondie's defense, steeped in a misappropriation of liberalism that erases Lan's responsibility, is an equally dangerous form of maternalism, according to Judith Rollins, who explains, "exploitation may be just as powerful when it is disguised [...] in tolerance for irresponsibility. It is the motivation for and the belief system behind such apparently benevolent gestures that make them, in fact, highly beneficial to the employer at the psychological expense of the domestic" (157). While Blondie allows herself to believe that she is compassionate in her attempt to empathize with Lan, she is retaining her arrogance as she does so. Mixed with Blondie's do-gooder nature and attraction to helping the world, her actions reveal a slippery selfishness and self-centeredness. She can continue to feel she is a better caregiver while claiming a misappropriated high ground via this approach.

Lan needles these feelings, ultimately causing Blondie to recall how she had questioned if she and Carnegie were "doing the right thing" by adopting Wendy from China (120). Even when they were in China, Blondie questioned "if the natural thing wasn't to leave her with the foster mother. Send money for her support, if we were so concerned about her welfare" (120). She recognizes that the adoption fills a need in her and she cannot discern these needs and Wendy's needs amidst the complicated politics surrounding the situation. Blondie finally wonders: "Were we adopting this child for her good or for ours?" (120-21). Like Sarah in *A Gate at the Stairs*, her polarized thinking does not permit a place in which both individual's needs are can be both met and unmet. Indeed, in several moments throughout the chapter covering the family's trip to China to adopt Wendy it is clear that Blondie sees the adventure as one that must be endured rather than one to be relished. She sees China as a country that is dirty, dangerous to their sensitive Western immune systems, and violent. She sees herself as a woman who is saving the young girl from a culture that will not value her and a country that will not permit her to flourish. She is, in effect, saving the girl from a dire fate. This does not mean, however, that Blondie is a 'bad' mother or that her children will not thrive as a result of their relationship with her.

This savior motif appears several times in *The Love Wife*: when Blondie blames herself for Mama Wong's death as a result of not being able to catch her fall because Bailey is strapped to her chest (thus permitting a subtle jab at attachment parenting, which is another term for intensive mothering); when Blondie believes she and Carnegie should send Lan to a therapist for a possible eating disorder; when Carnegie professes his desire for Blondie to return to work so that he could resign, adding, that to be "saved by Blondie [...] would have been worse!"; and most explicitly when the girls discuss whether they would attempt to save their mother or Lan first in a sinking boat (287). When Lizzy poses this hypothetical situation to Wendy she explains

there is only one life preserver and she must choose the recipient. Lizzy defers making a choice by claiming she would throw it to them both, suggesting the women could share. Lizzy will not permit this resolution and forces Wendy to choose. Becoming more clear on what is being asked, Wendy responds: "Dad would not choose Lanlan [...]. He would definitely choose Mom. And so would I. I would throw the life ring to Mom and then jump in to go save Lanlan" (281). Wendy refuses to believe that Lan is harming her parent's marriage, but reveals her comprehension that her father's affection for Lan is a source of contention. When Lizzy asks her what she would do if she were unable to save Lan having used the one life ring, Wendy adamantly holds the line that she would "still try" (281). Lizzy explains to her younger sister that their mother is upset because their father would also try to save Lan. When a confused Wendy, who is uncertain about her love for Lan, asks Lizzy if she believes their mother would try to save Lan, Lizzy points out to her: "It's one thing for her to try, and another thing for Dad" (281). The intricacy in the notion of who is the savior and why forces the characters to question Blondie's and Carnegie's motives as well as how, when the notion is taken to its most literal and ultimate point, the emotional investment can alter the relationship between a mother-employer and her spouse.

Lizzy's hypothetical situation also demonstrates the complicated change in dynamics that can occur when a nanny is no longer the 'outsider-within' and becomes a valued member of the family. What had started as irritation with Lan pinning handkerchiefs instead of bibs to Bailey's shirt grows into a general feeling in Blondie that she no longer fits in with her family. On Carnegie's fortieth birthday, she sees herself and her family around the dining table in the mirror and explains, "it seemed to me that the Wongs owned the space, and that you could see it in the way they gestured back and forth to one another. [...] And how Lan had relaxed!" (246). As she sees this, she questions: "What did it matter, how a family looked?" (246). She explains that she

does not see Asians sitting at the table, but members of her family, and, as if to justify her placement among them, she recalls how her college professor had deemed her "a natural" at learning Chinese (246). "Yet our reflection seemed to say something willful to deny. [...] How large my body! An inflatable compared to everyone else's" (247). She once more blames Lan for the change in family dynamics and the feelings she is experiencing. Later, in Lan's apartment above the garage, she feels threatened again after she is provoked to the point of screaming at her children as they take full advantage of Lan's permissiveness. She is then snubbed by Bailey, who "sidestepped my embrace, stomped over to the side table, and grabbed a piece of candy" (266). Her response: "I quit my job a week later" (266). Blondie resigns from her position at work in order to recreate the equilibrium she feels has been lost and to regain a sense of authority with her children. She believes her decision is an attempt to save her family, or perhaps more specifically preserve her role as a mother and wife. Blondie's anxiety about Lan's more prominent role in the family's daily life is exposed. Until Lan had come, Blondie was the one who presided over the family despite outsourcing some of the children's care. Carnegie admits Blondie "did far more of the juggling -- far more of the feeding and picking up and temperature taking;" however, he adds, with veiled envy, his wife still "managed, inexplicably; not only to avoid the demotion most moms took, but to substantively advance in her work. [...] She depressed many a fellow mother, in any case. A fact that depressed her" (287). He recognizes the feat of nature that Blondie is and what she accomplishes but may be intimidated, just as the fellow moms he mentions supposedly are. What enamors him about Lan is the subservience that Blondie does not exhibit.

Initially elated with the challenge of re-constructing her role as a stay-at-home mother, Blondie soon realizes that full-time motherhood is not something that will leave her fulfilled. She

admits: "*I would have had a nervous breakdown if I had stayed home. You can only drive so much car pool*" (310). After Blondie sees Lan co-sleeping with Bailey against her wishes, she complains to Carnegie, but he is unmoved. Threatened and desperate, Blondie warns Carnegie: "She already has the girls, she cannot have Bailey too [...]. I want my home back [...]. Where this is my house and these are my children. I get to decide what the rules are. I get to decide who sleeps with who" (280). The last statement, while in the context of Lan and Bailey, reveals her suspicion that Carnegie wants to have sex with Lan, if he has not already. Jen leaves this unanswered, but it is clear to readers that Lan has acquiesced to at least some of Carnegie's physical advances. Feeling vanquished, Blondie relinquishes the membership she has earned, privileging the filial (and racial) piety she believes exists between Carnegie and Lan above her marriage to him. In "Liminality, Anti-Liminality, and the Victorian Novel," Sarah Gilead claims liminal performances, such as Blondie's, are

no more than strategies ensuring their psychosocial survival. Initially they are threatened with simple [...] loss of power or prestige; they respond to this threat by dramatic, ritualistic gestures that place them firmly within the martyr-liminal pattern. They thereby enact an orderly withdrawal or retreat from the rosy realm of ordinary social structure (rather than submit to an outwardly imposed, humiliating loss of standing), and adopt compensatory, apparently permanent positions as liminal (thus privileged) outsiders. (192)

In her attempt to accept everything, she refuses to define anything. Blondie, feeling her efforts have been made in vain, moves out, taking only Bailey with her.

Even though it is clear that Blondie is leaving Carnegie specifically and not her children, she flies in the face of intensive mothering when she claims, "I'm done feeding the world" (362).

Jen glosses over the internal deliberations, but ultimately Blondie decides she must move out because she feels she no longer belongs in her home. She remarks: "How had I ended up the outsider in my own family? The person who could never admit how hard she herself had found China -- who had to be more careful than everyone else. Who felt, I suppose, a kind of guest" (132). In an interesting choice of words Blondie echoes Lan's sense that she is a visitor.

Ironically, it is now Blondie who feels like the outsider-within, watching her family function without her with Lan at the helm. She is not the only one that feels she does not belong though. Lizzy feels similarly, telling her sister, "I'm like a visitor, like Lanlan" (55). Blondie, Lizzy, and Lan recognize the power that this position grants; one can be part of the group without carrying the responsibility that often accompanies familial duty. Jen, like Kincaid, references the liminality that occurs when one is a visitor -- an observer who can participate but is not fully included. With Blondie, Lizzy, Lan, and even young Wendy claiming some ownership of this identity, Jen seems less interested in interrogating the outsider-within standpoint in isolation than examining what membership means in a family, particularly when physical resemblance, common ethnicity, and shared genetics are not in the mix. Jen encourages this debate by having Blondie take only Bailey with her to her new home, and answering Wendy's question regarding this choice by explaining, "Bailey is too little for joint custody" (356). While it could be argued that this is an issue related to adoption instead of race, Jen insinuates that for Blondie, a self-declared 'fork,' race matters, even if it means privileging the racial symmetry between Lan and Carnegie or Lan and her daughters.

Carnegie attempts to reconcile this schism. He offers to Blondie: "Lan will never take your place [...]. We all say that, you know. The girls too. How you're their real mother, their one and only mother" (364). Blondie, who reclaimed her original name Jane, quips back: "Of course

I'm still their mother. I am simply no longer your wife" (364). Blondie, as an outsider-within, shares some power with her liminal peers, according to Gilead, who contends that liminal characters'

reduced social responsibility earns them greater freedom to observe safely, to speak freely, to nourish purely personal relationships; they also, again with no risk to themselves express hostility toward social power structures and authorities conceived as having rejected them. The liminal gesture secures a new measure of autonomy not despite but because of a loss in social status, influence, and responsibility. Yet these gestures must be understood as taking place entirely within social structure, as part of the game of social strategy. (192)

Blondie relishes the autonomy that comes with being an outsider from her family and residing in a new home, but she refuses to forsake her insider position with her children. Blondie's levity does not mean she does not experience guilt, however. She questions if her "actions were selfish," but when she witnesses Lan "set a dish in front of Carnegie in so familiar a way I could cry" she becomes more resolute (367). Blondie views not only Lan as the catalyst for her separation from her husband, but insinuates as she describes the food she sets in front of him that their shared ethnicity somehow permits a deeper, more natural, understanding between them. Despite having soaked in the praise she had received for being so open to integrating her life with people of cultures that did not mirror her own, she feels that Bailey belongs to her in a different way than her daughters. Ironically, Lan, who undermined Blondie as a mother and as a wife throughout the novel, does not see it this way. She states: "*in one way [...] I knew his taste [and ...] could do everything he liked. But in another way, [...] you can know a person, and know his stomach, but not know his heart*" (368). She, too, still feels like an outsider-within and

insinuates that Blondie is the woman who knows him better. While Blondie believed Lan's effort to construct a dynamic in which racial similarity is more valuable than an improvised family, Lan reveals here that her act was a bluff.

The novel closes with Carnegie experiencing a heart attack after he discovers that Lan is Mama Wong's biological daughter and that he was adopted. With this revelation, Jen calls into question the possibility of Lan's opportunistic nature being an inherited trait-- a trait that Carnegie never demonstrated despite being raised by Mama Wong because, unbeknownst to him, he was not biologically related to her. Carnegie has an 'otherworldly' conversation with his deceased mother in which he defends his love for Blondie. The doctor suggests to the family in the waiting room that Carnegie will pull through, but Jen maintains the complexities she set out beforehand. In an interview with Marilyn Berlin Snell, editor of *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Jen claimed she prefers "understatement," adding: "People don't have to be hit over the head with the issue of prejudice. They understand" (59). Under this premise, Jen is free to construct a novel in which there is no clear villain. Jen creates in Lan a nuanced social climber who makes every effort to ensure that she will prosper (even in romantic relationships), but who also remains sympathetic in light of the fact that her life has not fulfilled her dreams of love and wealth that would have been taken for granted had she been born during a different time in Chinese history. Jen also upends stereotypes of the immigrant as an ideal entrepreneur or maligned freeloader. She replaces these images with a prudent female immigrant who feels she has little choice but to manipulate the unappealing options before her in order to yield a bearable semblance of the American Dream in a country that is simultaneously redefining the concept as well as in a family that is struggling to understand how race not only affects themselves but how it defines one's identity in an age of political correctness and supposed racial enlightenment. Lan wants

marriage, children, and education, and believes that aggressive acquisition is within her rights. She claims that even Carnegie fails to fully "know what America is," despite holding a name that reflects escaping the lot into which one has been born (361). While her actions are often a performance of Americanism at its worse, it is perhaps how she views it as an outsider-within. In the same interview cited previously, Jen insists, "Immigrants see American through different eyes: They see the potential, but they also see the shortcomings. They are the intimate outsider" (57).

Blondie is equally complex. She desires multiculturalism, or perhaps wants to desire multiculturalism, but her desire has become so muddled that she no longer can determine what her actual beliefs are. This becomes most evident when she is willing to relinquish her role in her family, a role she clearly cherishes, in order to hold onto her philosophical stake. While she values multiculturalism, she ultimately reveals her allegiance to a belief that racial difference can be perhaps too large a barrier to overcome. She thinks of the situation as a battle with winners and losers, telling Carnegie: "Mama Wong won, that's all there is to it. I quit. End of game" (355). In the home she moves into with Bailey, a home she knew was the place for her because it already had sunflowers, she becomes herself, relishing the 'world' she has created for herself. Here, she has a smaller garden, fewer things -- only adding when it seems right to do so -- and time to make the girls homemade brownies. Jen hints that she has become a better mother by leaving. Even the girls, who beg her to move back, admit: "[s]he loves us and loves us" now (362). When Lizzy tells Wendy that "Lanlan is in love with Dad," and therefore "maybe she wouldn't mind becoming our real mother," Wendy offers: "Except that she's not our real mother [...]. Mom's our real mother" (360). Lizzy agrees with her. When she lived in the house with the family, Blondie felt like more of an outsider than she when she lives in a separate home despite

the emotional turmoil that it causes everyone involved. Jen, as a result, questions what membership actually is, particularly in reference to multiracial families but also in reference to citizenship and national affiliation. The characters Jen creates are world-travelers -- every one of them -- but they are not 'world'-travelers. Moreover, their inability to understand even their own 'world' heightens their insecurity and curtails communication. As a result, while they all share a mutual space, none of them believe they are insiders, only outsiders-within.

***The Help* by Kathryn Stockett**

In the United States, the term 'race' has often been linked inexorably with the struggle African Americans have experienced to gain equality in a country that prides itself on the notion that any individual can succeed with enough moxie regardless of pedigree. Despite a steady trend since the 1950s of African Americans leaving domestic service positions, due largely to the connections it has with slavery, a small slew of contemporary U.S. novels return to the time and place in U.S. history when African American housekeepers were common. For many North Americans one of the most salient mammies/nannies in American literature appears in Margaret Mitchell's iconic *Gone with the Wind* (1936), but a host of other novels with African American nannies exist, including *The Good Nanny* by Benjamin Cheever, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dry Grass of August* by Anna Jean Mayhew, *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers, *The Street* by Ann Petry, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. More images abound in television and film including *Imitation of Life* (1934 and 1959), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Pinky* (1949), and *Gimme a Break* (1981-87) to name a few.

There are reasons for this. The ideal mammy, according to American Studies scholar Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, is "part of the lexicon of antebellum mythology that continues to have a provocative and tenacious hold on the American psyche" (2). She adds:

The mammy's stereotypical attributes -- her deeply sonorous and effortlessly soothing voice, her infinite patience, her raucous laugh, her self-deprecating wit, her implicit understanding and acceptance of her inferiority and her devotion to whites -- all point to a long-lasting and troubled marriage of racial and gender essentialism, mythology, and southern nostalgia. (2)

Many of these qualities are depicted even in contemporary novels as the following explication will show. Wallace-Sanders argues the Southern mammy of more recent memory still serves to "perpetuat[e] white supremacy through a blatant reification of the Confederacy and the most romantic revisionist history of slavery" (94). This echoes Wong's earlier argument regarding people of color in the role of caregiver soothing racial anxiety during radical demographic changes. The African American mammy is the definitive outsider-within for this time and place in U.S. history.

The Help by Kathryn Stockett takes readers back to Jackson, Mississippi and into the lives of three women, Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, Aibileen Clark, and Minny Jackson, whose paths cross as they assemble the stories of African American maids in their community. Aibileen and Minny, who are African American maids themselves, are spurred into action by the injustices that occur in their private lives as well as the more public stirrings of the early civil rights movement. Many readers have found the story to be uplifting and optimistic, but Ida E. Jones, the National Director of the Association of Black Women Historians, posits:

The Help's representation of these women is a disappointing resurrection of Mammy—a mythical stereotype of black women who were compelled, either by slavery or segregation, to serve white families. Portrayed as asexual, loyal, and contented caretakers of whites, the caricature of Mammy allowed mainstream America to ignore the systemic racism that bound black women to back-breaking, low paying jobs where employers routinely exploited them. The popularity of this most recent iteration is troubling because it reveals a contemporary nostalgia for the days when a black woman could only hope to clean the White House rather than reside in it. (www.clutchmagazine.com)

The novel has been criticized for the ways in which African American women rely on Skeeter, who is white, to convince them to publish their narratives, conduct and write the interviews, and secure the contract with a publisher. She, in effect, still controls their voices and their agency. These arguments did not prevent the sale of more than three million copies of the novel or the development of an Oscar™-winning film in 2011.

While Aibileen and Minny certainly do not embody all stereotypes of the conventional mammy, they often "acquiesce" to the "paternalistic and place-defined relationship between mistress and maid as it has been shaped by the attitudes and traditions of southern society" (despite the omniscient narration indicating their reticence to do so) (Harris 23). Moreover, both women have considerable personal troubles but are portrayed as "asexual, loyal, and contented caretakers of whites" (ibid). (Aibileen is a single mother of a deceased son and Minny is a wife subjected to domestic violence and a mother with little patience for her own children.) This is an identity that Jones, and others, want to dismantle. With her feistier spirit, Minny does resist this identity construction more than Aibileen, but often her rebellions are used as comic relief rather than as serious overtures toward upsetting power hierarchies. The more cautious Aibileen joins

Skeeter's effort to gather interviews first, agreeing to reveal the underbelly of the relationships she and her friends experience with the white Southern women who employ them. After a fellow housekeeper is unfairly sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence for stealing, Minny and several other housekeepers in Jackson agree to place themselves in jeopardy as well by sharing their own stories. Their goal is not only to highlight the injustices of racial inequality but to give voice to the women who have been silenced by racism.

Having just returned from completing her undergraduate degree and thus positioned as a relative outsider to her community, Skeeter re-evaluates the social mores of her family, friends, and hometown. When her close friend and chair of the Junior League, Hilly Holbrook, starts an initiative that encourages families to maintain separate washroom facilities in their house for their maids because, in part, she believes African Americans "carry different kinds of diseases," Skeeter's burgeoning sense of social justice is piqued (8). She stumbles upon an idea to publish a book that would offer their perspectives, and -- conveniently -- accelerate her writing career and allow her to move out of her parents' home. In her spare time, Skeeter attempts to find out what has become of her beloved housekeeper/nanny, Constantine Bates. Constantine had worked for the Phelan family for years and had promised Skeeter a surprise when she returned from college but disappeared without bidding Skeeter farewell.

The Help opens with Aibileen explaining: "Taking care of white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning. I done raised seventeen kids in my lifetime. I know how to get them babies to sleep, stop crying, and go in the toilet bowl before they mamas even get out of bed in the morning" (1). This is confirmed when Aibileen recounts Mae Mobley's colic and recollects Elizabeth Leefolt, the child's mother, asking her in terror on her first day of work,

"What am I doing wrong? Why can't I stop it?" (1). Aibileen immediately pacifies the baby.⁴⁸ Certainly, few would argue that there is not a learning curve involved for new parents or that experience can be a welcome salve to the anxiety of caring for an infant, but Aibileen does not offer Elizabeth this comfort nor do readers feel she deserves it. Aibileen has seen the pattern and knows that women like herself (i.e., black housekeepers) have the skills, disposition, and bodies for tending children. In contrast, according to Aibileen, Elizabeth's "whole body be so full of sharp knobs and corners, it's no wonder she can't soothe that baby. Babies like fat" (1, 2). In other words, Stockett presents a white mother who is more interested in meeting social standards of femininity that require self-maintenance, control, and self-denial than adhering to the ideology of intensive mothering.

As a result, readers of *The Help*, who likely value some aspects of intensive mothering, are encouraged to resist identifying with Elizabeth or extending the woman much sympathy let alone empathy. Conversely, Aibileen's round figure shows that she is more generous to herself and others and puts the needs of the children she tends above her own vanity. Lest readers momentarily fault Aibileen for her judgmental attitude and pride, Stockett makes it clear that Mae Mobley is in better hands since her own mother is not enthralled with the duties of mothering, even chastising Aibileen for not keeping Mae Mobley out of her sight when it is inconvenient for her.⁴⁹ As a result, readers who are also steeped in the ideology of intensive mothering likely agree with Aibileen's sentiment that she is the girl's protector against her cold and inept mother without questioning the stereotype that is preserved. Within the first pages of the novel, readers experience the punishing of a mother for her supposed desire to be outside the

⁴⁸ Nannies are often cast as childcare experts who can solve nearly any problem with the right mix of discipline, love, and know-how.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Stockett does not seem to challenge the ideology on intensive mothering at any point in the novel.

realm of the home and duties of mothering (although closer reader suggests Elizabeth may feel incompetent).

Readers also are privy from the start that Aibileen is not fond of her employer and has not (fully) adopted her oppressor's construction of her. She may be outside the social power structures of Jackson (and beyond), but she will not let this affect her sense of self. Her low opinion of Elizabeth is validated consistently by the woman's unappealing behavior, which also serves to increase her credibility as a narrator. In this way, Stockett permits Aibileen to secure readers' affinity for her, thus making her less of an outsider-within or perhaps demonstrating the accuracy of judgment that this position can permit. When Elizabeth notices that Mae Mobley has become attached to Aibileen, she "narrow[s] up her eyes" at Aibileen, clearly unhappy with the bond that she and her daughter share. Readers fault Elizabeth; it is easy to judge Elizabeth as a woman who wants all the benefits of mothering, namely unconditional, exclusive love, without putting in the work to earn it.

Meanwhile, Aibileen, who not only observes her employer's jealousy but takes pleasure in winning the young girl's favor, effortlessly sidesteps judgment. She is humble, intelligent, prudent, and loyal, so when she explains that she feels little guilt over displacing Elizabeth and quips, "I reckon that's the risk you run, letting somebody else raise your chillums," she only echoes the rhetoric of cultural critics whose currency is basic common sense (2). Aibileen's relationship with Mae Mobley is not formed purely out of spite, which allows Stockett to portray a space between African Americans and white Southerners that is untainted by social malice. Aibileen has the time and emotional resources to maintain a very close relationship with Mae Mobley. Due to the death of her only child, a young man who was in his twenties and wanted to be a writer, she can devote herself to the young girl without sacrificing the care of her own

children. With few ways to assert dominance, she knows she can retaliate against Elizabeth by winning her daughter's affection and performing mothering more adeptly. Aibileen also has a vested interest in Mae Mobley's development, however; she hopes to raise the girl in a way that will provide her with options that do not involve participating in the rampant racism in Jackson and beyond. Part of her plan is to have the young child develop empathy for her; empathy she hopes Mae Mobley will retain as an adult even though few other white women have done the same in Jackson despite similar childrearing.

Minny, the second narrator to speak, contrasts against Aibileen's more prudent nature. She offers tantalizing cooking skills to the families she works for but with it comes a sharp tongue. It is difficult not to imagine the tough, loyal Mammy from *Gone with the Wind* when Aibileen describes her friend Minny as a woman who is "short and big" and who "could probably lift this bus up over her head if she wanted to" (13). After losing yet another job, Aibileen finds Minny a position with a young woman who does not have children and lives on the outskirts of Jackson. While Aibileen believes Minny should be more cautious about speaking her mind she seems to recognize that Minny, like herself, has few opportunities to control the responsibilities she is given, let alone shape her relationship with her employer. The relationship that Minny forms with her new employer, Celia Foote, demonstrates to readers that not all Southern white women were racist, petty, and conniving; however, it seems that Celia is only able to adopt this more tolerant attitude because her poverty-stricken roots prevented her from being raised in the socialite-driven climate that Skeeter's friends dominate. Moreover, her limited material means as a child limits Celia to a lower social position that her husband's material security cannot alter. Even Minny feels she is superior to Celia. She rebuffs her employer's offers of friendship,

criticizes her clothing, and chastises the woman for her social blunders, which again provide comic relief in the novel.

Skeeter is the last of the three narrators to speak in the novel. She is also, arguably, the primary protagonist, so this placement indicates either an effort to build suspense about who she is and what her story entails or an effort by Stockett to downplay her importance in the novel. Having a white narrator serve as the primary protagonist has incited the dismay of some critics, including Jones, who writes: "*The Help* is not a story about the millions of hardworking and dignified black women who labored in white homes to support their families and communities. Rather, it is the coming-of-age story of a white protagonist, who uses myths about the lives of black women to make sense of her own" (www.abwh.org). To Stockett's credit, she does not permit Skeeter to commence or develop an easy relationship with Aibileen or Minny. In the opening pages, Skeeter asks Aibileen in the kitchen, "Do you ever wish you could ... change things?" to which Aibileen says to herself, "that's one a the stupidest questions I ever heard" (10). Verbally, however, she replies, "Oh no, ma'am, everything's fine" (10). Readers witness in this exchange the contrast between what could be said by the housekeepers and what they may have been thinking. Meanwhile, Skeeter is seemingly unaware that the woman to whom she is speaking is unable to return an honest answer without risking her own job and safety. The cool tenor of their initial conversations provides a juxtaposition against the intimacy Stockett portrays the women as sharing at the conclusion of the novel.

Skeeter displays a similar ignorance and failure to empathize when she secures a weekly newspaper column on housekeeping, a topic she knows little about. She uses the article as an opportunity to petition Aibileen for her expertise not only for the short term gains of securing the necessary knowledge for the topic on which she must opine but as a means of gaining more

frequent access to Aibileen. Skeeter's hope is that the woman will grow more fond of her over time and agree to participate in her project; however, when Skeeter first visits Aibileen at her home unannounced to approach her about the book idea, she chafes Aibileen by flaunting social rules that permit her to show up unannounced when Aibileen would never be allowed to do the same in return. While Aibileen is disgruntled by the double standard for etiquette, she is downright fearful when Skeeter outlines the premise of her book. "Don't she know how dangerous this could be, talking about this while the whole world can see us?" she frets (102). Skeeter's limited 'world'-travel experience allows her to remain unaware of the fear Aibileen would feel as a result of their meeting.

In short, Stockett presents Skeeter in the early pages of the novel as hapless and blissfully unaware. The idea to write about the relationship between maids and their employers from the African American women's perspective is more an effort to gain recognition from Miss Stein, an editor in New York, than it is to upset the status quo in Jackson or defend African American women in her community. This is shown clearly when she fumblingly attempts to develop an explanation for her editor that elucidates her motivation for her book idea; she had given this aspect of the project little thought. Ultimately, Skeeter chooses to highlight that she "was raised by a colored woman" and therefore has "seen how simple it can be and -- and how complex it can be between the families and the help" (105). She is nearly oblivious to the harm that she could bring to the maids who participate or to herself. Even Miss Stein, a Yankee who lived in the South briefly, recognizes the inherent risks involved, and asks Skeeter: "What maid in her right mind would ever tell you the truth?" (106). Although Skeeter has been exposed to women of color and holds deep affection for her former nanny, she has never 'world'-traveled in a way that would permit her to understand how different their daily experiences are from her own. As

she offers an impromptu summary of what she hopes to research, Skeeter pushes herself to experience the perspective of the women who work for white families for perhaps the first time and tells Miss Stein: "They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It's, that irony, that we love them and they love us, yet [...w]e don't even allow them to use the toilet in the house" (105-06). Like awkward first toddler steps, Skeeter attempts a new skill. As layers of ignorance continue to be peeled away, Skeeter acts as if she is finding a truth that no one else knows. She tells Aibileen, "everyone knows how we white people feel [...]. Margaret Mitchell covered that. But no one ever asked Mammy how she felt about it" (106). She recognizes, for perhaps the first time, that her 'world' is not the same 'world' that is inhabited by women who comprise the domestic help she and her peers consider fixtures in their lives despite the shared attachments they may experience.

Skeeter soon realizes that the 'world' she wants people to see does not want to be exposed nor can it be revealed without severe consequences. She holds onto the idea that empathy amongst her peers could be strengthened with knowledge, but in *The Coming Race War?* Richard Delgado highlights that the African American women have reason to remain cautious, as they do in *The Help*. Similar to Keen's argument that empathy can be used to gain an upper hand, Delgado contends that if an "oppressed group tells the oppressor what it wants to know," then the more powerful group can use the "information to destroy" the group more effectively (15). Skeeter is surrounded by African American housekeepers, but few want to participate, even Aibileen. After helping Skeeter with many housekeeping articles, Skeeter approaches Aibileen again with the idea of conducting interviews. Aibileen remains reluctant. Skeeter admits: "I am tempted to bring up the word *friends*, but I'm not that naïve. I know we're not friends" (109). She begins to see that while her power as a white woman can be persuasive in ensuring congeniality

and even participation in some activities, these interactions are just that and cannot be deemed friendship as a result of the power differentials. It is only after Hilly uses her influence to have Yule May, who stole a ring from her in order to pay for her sons to attend college, receive a longer prison sentence than typical that many maids come forward to join the project.

After Aibileen and Skeeter meet for their first interview, another layer of ignorance is lifted when Aibileen remains aloof. Skeeter chastises herself for "thinking [Aibileen] would stop feeling like a maid" just because they had met in her home and because "she wasn't wearing a uniform" (146). In this scene, which feels designed to help enlighten readers, Skeeter realizes that the position is more than a job, it is a way of being viewed, a way of living one's life in a community that holds deeply held beliefs about race and segregation. To upend this, Skeeter tries to encourage Aibileen to see her as a peer rather than as a person who has power over her. For instance, disregarding etiquette, Skeeter drinks directly from the bottle of cola she is given so Aibileen would feel comfortable doing so as well and therefore not create more dirty dishes for the woman who spends her entire day cleaning. Skeeter's physical travel to Aibileen's home permits her a fuller understanding that allows her to 'world' travel more easily as well, but even this is laced with the ulterior motives she has for completing the book project. Skeeter *wants* to ingratiate herself, but she could still reclaim her position of social privilege at any moment. Still, her willingness to emotionally travel blends with physical travel here to provide insight she would not otherwise accrue. While African American maids physically traveled to their employers' homes regularly and therefore "acquired encyclopedic knowledge of white communities and knew the intimate details of white lives," whites remained ignorant of the lives of the women who showed up every day, according to historian David Katzman (200-01). As Aibileen begins to tell more about her job working for Hilly, Skeeter feels as if she has "passed

through a leaded gate of confidence" (153). In this way, Skeeter's physical traveling, particularly to Aibileen's home, upsets the power differentials slightly and is enough to demonstrate her commitment. Skeeter's slow process stalls at points, however, such as when she blurts to Aibileen that she is tired of the rules that restrict so much of what they say and do in Jackson. With newfound insight, she adds: "I realize how thin this revelation must sound to her" (155). This dual consciousness ebbs and flows as she gains more practice, but it is clear as the novel progresses that she is less and less of an outsider to the African American housekeeper community.

Stockett presents in post-college Skeeter a young woman who resides in two 'worlds' as she travels literally from the side of Jackson where the whites reside to the neighborhood where the maids reside. According to Andersen and Collins in the introduction to *Race, Class, and Gender*, Skeeter is completing an important first step because "comparative thinking can foster greater understanding and tolerance" (8). They also note, however, that "comparative thinking alone can also leave intact the power relations that create race, class, and gender relations" (8). This occurs largely because the comparative thinking being utilized asks how the new information is "different," thereby privileging the location of the interlocutor as status quo. Skeeter follows suit and her social fluidity is not easily acquired. (Some would argue she never truly acquires it.) Skeeter keeps the details of her work clandestine, but the political convictions she begins to reveal become fodder for the rumor mill. Excluded from her friends but not fully accepted in the African American community, Skeeter gains a deeper understanding of the uncertain position she has no choice but to claim. "I no longer feel protected just because I'm white," she states (278). In reference to her book, Skeeter is aware that "Even though so many of the stories are good, celebrating the bonds of women and family, the bad stories will be the ones

that catch the white people's attention. They will make their blood boil and their fists swing. We must keep this a perfect secret" (278). She adopts the perspective of an outsider here, viewing her peer group remotely, and the "we" consists of the housekeepers she is interviewing and herself, rather than her white peers. This vulnerability encourages the housekeepers to deepen their trust in Skeeter, recognizing the peril in which she has placed herself. As she becomes integrated into the lives of the women she once only visited and with her social standing amongst her peers threatened, Skeeter gains a deeper understanding of the situation's breadth. Readers who have warmed to Skeeter as a narrator likewise view the community from the outside, which reaffirms their own sense of moral superiority in the process. Skeeter's voluntary vulnerability permits more forthright relationships with the maids she interviews because Skeeter no longer needs to 'world'-travel to understand the strain that results from knowing one's physical safety is under threat. She is placing herself in harm's way.

Part of Skeeter's 'world'-traveling in this context means that some of her peers perceive her as a race traitor. In "Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character," Bailey takes exception to Sandra Harding's argument regarding traitors and, in an attempt to redefine the parameters of her argument by fine-tuning the "distinction between 'privilege-cognizant' and 'privilege-evasive' white scripts," Bailey chooses to "characterize race traitors as privilege-cognizant whites who refuse to animate the scripts whites are expected to perform, and who are unfaithful to worldviews whites are expected to hold" (284). She stipulates, "Whites who engage in traitorous challenges to segregation may undergo some shift in their subject position in the sense that they may be ostracized from certain communities, but they do not exchange their status as insiders for outsider-within status" (287). Skeeter's work marks an effort to "develop alternative scripts capable of disrupting the constant reinscription of whitely

scripts," to use Bailey's words, but within this framework she should not be classified as either a race-traitor or as an outsider-within regardless of how she views herself (293). Skeeter's level of risk remains substantially less than the maids' due to race- and class-based privilege. Moreover, the way she is read physically permits her to relocate easily.

As highlighted earlier, the word 'help' takes on several meanings; it is not just labeling domestic service work or the workers themselves. Help in the form of maternalism is marked as unwarranted in this novel via the housekeepers' lack of interest in donations of clothes. The work completed by Minny, Aibileen, and the many other African American domestic servants help the white women maintain their social standing, their lives of relative leisure, and the perspective that they are entitled to undercompensated labor. Help is shown via white saviors and black saviors (e.g., Minny saving Celia from the predator). These situations all depict help in a positive light. More troubling, however, is the novel's easy reliance on Skeeter helping the African American maids by championing their right to be seen as fully actualized people via the publication of a book that permits her to subsume the role of interviewer and writer. Minny highlights this when she asks Skeeter, "What makes you think colored people need your help? [...] Why you even care about this? You *white*" (164). Minny's challenge is based exclusively on race and locates Skeeter as an outsider whose interest should be questioned. She does not question the exponentially larger recompense Skeeter will receive as a result of their work. Wishing to avoid conflict, Aibileen defends Skeeter, telling her friend they are a team working toward the same goal, but Minny continues to doubt Skeeter's motives.

As Skeeter further explores the racial divisions around her, she returns to the relationship she had with Constantine. From her vantage point, it never mattered that she was white and her housekeeper was black; their love transcended race. At this point in the novel, Skeeter has

enough narratives to send to Ms. Stein, but she wants to add Constantine's voice, and in order to do so she needs the rest of the story from her mother. She learns from Aibileen that Constantine had relinquished her daughter Lulabelle not only because the demands of her job required she seek outside care for her young daughter but because she was "high yellow" and it was difficult to find someone to help her. This secondary storyline demonstrates the evolving level of trust Aibileen has in Skeeter as she increases the depth of detail she is willing to offer about the events that followed Constantine's final letter to Skeeter. Skeeter expresses consternation upon learning that Constantine had relinquished her daughter to an orphanage, and Aibileen confers upon her a look Skeeter rarely sees, one filled with "frustration, antipathy" (358). Not only is Aibileen dismayed at the cultural pressures that make this type of relinquishment common, but she is infuriated that Skeeter's 'world' protects her from knowing the extent of difficulty so many African Americans face, even when they have paid employment. Skeeter can only "look down" and wonder "if Constantine couldn't take care of her child because she had to take care of us" (358). Moments like these remind Skeeter that she is still an outsider; she remains sheltered by the privileges granted her by virtue of her class and race. Skeeter also discovers that after Lulabelle returned to Jackson she attended a Daughters of the Revolution meeting hosted by Skeeter's mother, Charlotte. Now a young woman, Lulabelle socialized with the guests, and, as a light-skinned woman, was not immediately called out. When Charlotte learned her identity, she demanded the woman leave by the back door. Lulabelle spat in her face, and Charlotte retaliated by telling Lulabelle the real reason she had been relinquished to an orphanage. Charlotte's goal was to drive a wedge between Constantine and Lulabelle, not realizing her actions will have a similar result in her own life.

Skeeter sees the ways that her mother embodies the views of the Old South and how the cultural beliefs embedded therein both influenced and continue to influence her mother's point of view. Her relationship with Constantine and the knowledge that she died shortly after following Lulabelle back to Chicago challenges this loyalty and love that she feels toward her parents -- particularly her mother. Her mother sees the shift in her daughter. Feeling her image has been threatened, she chastises Skeeter for her naiveté as well as for "idoliz[ing] Constantine too much" (364). She reminds her daughter: "They are not like regular *people*" (364). Crestfallen, Skeeter tells readers: "There is no redeeming piece of the story. I know why Aibileen hadn't wanted to tell me. A child should never know this about her own mother" (364). Skeeter, with her broadened view regarding the maids, must now 'world'-travel to where her mom remains, but abhors the space her mother has cultivated.

Stockett concludes the novel tidily, retaining the simplicity of having those who are 'good' rewarded while the 'bad' are punished. Skeeter maintains her role as a savior by bequeathing her cleaning advice column to Aibileen and ensuring the newspaper will continue to compensate Aibileen at the same rate of pay she received. Skeeter is happy the income from the articles -- along with the royalties from the book, which was commissioned to a second printing - - will fill the financial gap left by Aibileen's termination and subsequent relinquishment of domestic service. With few remaining friends, Skeeter procures a job for a publisher in New York City and it is understood that she is moving on to a brighter and more enlightened future. Aibileen has to leave Mae Mobley but is encouraged that the young girl has learned some valuable lessons about race and has a new teacher, replacing the one who disciplined her for drawing herself with dark skin. Aibileen is optimistic about her future prospects in writing, which will continue her deceased son's ambition. She explains that she now feels "Freer than

Miss Leefolt, who so locked up in her own head she don't even recognize herself when she read it. And freer than Miss Hilly. [...]. Cause Miss Hilly, she in her own jail, but with a lifelong term" (444). Stockett's reference to whether mental/spiritual confinement is more difficult than physical confinement is certainly not the first, but the breeziness with which she nullifies the physical degradation and severe social limitations of African Americans is troubling.

Stockett's other characters are also given their appropriate karmic conclusions. Minny leaves her abusive husband and moves in with Aibileen, thus maintaining both women's stereotyped asexuality. Celia and her husband commit to retaining Minny's employment with them "[f]or the rest of your life if you want" after the women save each other from a sexual predator (405). Fearing her social status would be further marred if readers in Jackson determine she was the one who was duped by the prank Minny carried out, Hilly, who is one of the few people who knows that the book is about her and her peers, dissuades other people in Jackson from reaching the same conclusion. This secures the safety of the contributors in the process.

Last but not least, near the close of the novel, the preacher at Minny and Aibileen's church provides the two women with a copy of the book they published with signatures from many parishioners. He provides a third, stating: "This one, this is for the white lady. You tell her we love her, like she's our own family" (398). Aibileen, too, when reflecting upon how their relationship has changed over the course of the project, states, "Now I feel like we family" (436). In this reversal of the "she's like family" mantra employers often use to qualify their feelings for domestic workers, the figure head of the African American church insinuates that Skeeter is no longer an outsider-within; she is a member of their community. This helps quell Aibileen's tears that result not only from pride and happiness but concern that "ain't nobody in town gone sign a book for her and tell her she brave" (398). Aibileen continues to fret over her baby bird who has

flown the nest even though Skeeter is moving toward a brighter future than Aibileen will likely have as an African American woman in the 1960s in Jackson. Skeeter seeks to protect Aibileen, too, and tells her, "If something happens to you ... how am I going to live with that, knowing it was because of me?" (436). Her comment reflects an unwavering egocentrism and continued dismissal of the African American women's agency. According to Matthew W. Hughey, a sociologist and African American scholar, the women had to part ways because when black and white characters become emotionally close a "continued friendship would unsettle the racial status quo" and therefore trigger a "slew of unresolved questions and problems" (560). The only remaining injustice is that Yule May's prison sentence is left intact, but the women who participated in the interviews donate their royalties to her two sons so they may attend college. Readers, in other words, leave the novel hopeful despite the difficult subject matter of the novel.

Stockett claims in a short autobiographical essay following *The Help* that the novel was written as an effort to better understand the African American woman who cared for her as a child. In the close of her essay she tells readers: "I don't presume to think that I know what it really felt like to be a black woman in Mississippi, especially in the 1960s. I don't think it is something any white woman on the other end of a black woman's paycheck could ever truly understand. But trying to understand is *vital* to our humanity" (451). It can be presumed from Stockett's statement that she believes an element of this understanding occurs by participating in the role-playing that is part and parcel of the novel writing and novel reading experience. Stockett's references to empathy are clear (and she can therefore be included in Keen's list of authors who connect the experience of reading with the development of empathy). Indeed, her novel showcases a similar emotional trajectory with characters becoming more adept at understanding and helping one another as they develop deeper levels of empathy. Stockett

strongly indicates in the novel and accompanying essay that empathy and prosocial behavior are bedfellows. Not only does Skeeter's book within *The Help* promote some women to be forthright about their allegiances to African American employees, but Stockett's essay suggests that her own pursuit of an empathic understanding of her nanny led her to produce a novel that has reached millions of readers with her message of friendship, forgiveness, and interracial harmony.

In this personal essay Stockett also writes, "there is one line that I truly prize" and cites the passage in which Skeeter ponders to herself, "Wasn't that the point of the book? For women to realize, *We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought*" (451). Stockett presents a scenario here that is similar to what my work has argued is important, namely, that nurturing interactions that cross racial and class lines via the mother-employer/nanny relationship may maximize upon a vested interest in one another's lives in a manner that could accelerate alliance building amongst women. Empathy is required for these interactions to be successful and the resounding support this novel and ensuing movie has received from many consumers attests to the popularity of this message. It is disconcerting, however, that Skeeter is the one given ownership of Stockett's prized line. The question becomes: "Why Skeeter?" This is the crux of many critiques of *The Help* for different reasons. Even Minny, perhaps speaking to the novel's critics, explains to Aibileen that she will participate in the project because she wants "things to be better for the kids" but asserts, "it's a sorry fact that it's a white woman doing this" (217).

Stockett's decision to include Skeeter as a primary protagonist falls in line with several novels regarding African American caregivers in the South (e.g., *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Dry Leaves of August* by Anna Jean Mayhew, and *A Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers). The author of each of these

novels is white, it should be noted. Stockett suggests her novel is intended to model a way in which cross-race alliances can yield female empowerment, but her unsophisticated depiction and resolution of the issues she designs are not realistic and undermine the complications between women of different races. I, too, argue that the novel did not go far enough in examining a complex storyline and therefore undercuts its own message. Depth, in this case, is important and recent research posits "reading literary fiction, as opposed to popular fiction" contributes to performing "better on tests measuring empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence" (Belluck, "Better Social Skills"). Therefore, Stockett's choice to base the novel on a white protagonist who is not particularly complex could be short-circuiting the development of empathy in readers.

Moreover, as already suggested already, the lack of diversity in the collection of authors and narrators who tell stories of mother-employers and nannies is concerning, and it is similarly troubling that a white author and a white narrator carry the responsibility for telling the story in *The Help*. African American women do have a literal voice in both Skeeter's book within *The Help* and *The Help* itself, yet they remain mute in the sense that their voices are controlled via "knowing, loving ignorance" at both levels. Wallace-Sanders similarly contends that the "racism of southern white women authors has not yet been fully explored in a way that can deepen our understanding of gender and southern literature" (102). It will be difficult to explore this topic without the voices of women of color speaking for themselves both as novelists and protagonists. In a interview with Motoko Rich of the *New York Times* Stockett claims that Skeeter was added because she was concerned that "readers wouldn't trust her if she only wrote about black characters" (Rich, www.nytimes.com). She told Rich: "So I threw Skeeter in the mix and I felt a little better about it, because I was showing a white perspective as well" (ibid). This questionable

statement places Skeeter in the position of a bridge character, which is *New York Times*' Nicholas D Kristof's euphemism for "white saviors in Third World narratives who make the story more palatable to American viewers," according to author Taju Cole ("The White Savior Industrial Complex," www.theatlantic.com). *The Help* is certainly not a Third World narrative, but Stockett herself highlights that she felt her own race exists in contrast to the characters' race in such a way that 'world'-traveling would be deemed inappropriate or incomplete.

Skeeter's location by virtue of race is not the only vexing issue. For the purposes of this research, the question, "Why Skeeter?" is really asking, "Why *not* Charlotte?" Few novels about African American housekeepers focus on the mother-employer. The novels listed earlier addressing the relationship between an African American nanny and her white charge attests to this and in these novels both characters are typically socially powerless, though often even the white child has more power than her African American housekeeper.⁵⁰ No similar list could be developed for the relationship between mother-employer and nanny. Symbolically, the young female child has the advantage of representing the chance to start again through rebirth or the changing of the guard, but the drawbacks are substantial. While novelists in the past have not limited the complexity of the themes they explore as a result of the age of the narrator/protagonist, there remains a sense that the scope of the issue of nannies' relationships with the families they work for is limited because novelists, including Stockett, opt to use characters who are outsiders-within the power structures by virtue of age rather than race or class. Stockett's choice in particular seems to reflect the United States' infatuation with youth culture, so it stands to reason that Skeeter would be the one who is most capable of seeing the 'truth,' enacting change, and resisting the status quo. Consider this: *The Long Walk Home* has

⁵⁰The movie *The Long Walk Home* is an exception to this trend, but it was based on a short screenplay, not a novel, and therefore was not included in the research for this chapter.

been endorsed as a superior alternative to *The Help* by both political scientist Adolph Reed, Jr. and Amy Lee, a cultural writer for *The Huffington Post*, who writes that *The Long Walk Home* "benefits from the film's decision to keep Miriam and Odessa's relationship as the primary focus for the story" ("*The Help*: Is it Overrated?"). No novels or movies that have surfaced in this research have continued the work this film started. This raises many questions: Why have so many adult female readers been identifying with a young adult woman? Does the empathy that results involve an identification with the innocence of girlhood that is lost as one matures? What power differentials are sidestepped as a result of the age difference between caregiver and child?

Skeeter's mother, Charlotte (which, ironically means 'free man'), is not a caricature of a racist like Hilly; in fact, she is one of the more interesting characters in the novel despite the lack of space she is given. As a mother, she is stereotypical. She embodies pre-second-wave women's rights womanhood as she harps on Skeeter for not putting more effort into her appearance and seeing no other suitable goal for her daughter than getting a ring on her finger. Through most of the novel she is wasting away from stomach cancer, but even the model of the female martyr, she downplays her struggle refusing to be a burden upon anyone.⁵¹ As an employer, however, she is more complex. She is both threatened and hurt by Constantine's daughter's disrespect and flagrant disavowal of the rules. When Skeeter asks about Constantine, Charlotte explains how she told the "bawdy girl, whose own mama we gave ten dollars extra to every Christmas, she was *not* to step foot on this farm *again*" (363). Charlotte associates the bonus she gave to Constantine with acquiescence to the rules of passivity and servitude. She expects Lulabelle to fall in line. From her vantage point, Lulabelle had violated the unspoken agreement based on feudal

⁵¹Interestingly, although Stockett makes no explicit connections between the two, the mother makes a remarkable recovery as Skeeter's book gains popularity.

traditions of p/maternalism.⁵² One only has to revisit her admonishment to Skeeter [e.g. "You idolize Constantine too much. You always have" (364)] to witness the fear Charlotte has of being replaced. Charlotte does not question the ways in which her subservience and acquiescence mirror what she expects from Constantine. Stockett does not invite readers to do so either. It is easier to cast her as another villain rather than as a fellow victim in women's subordination.

Skeeter's location, on the other hand, is one of a young woman who is outside the power structure of Jackson. She did not actively choose to be part of the exploitation of labor. Her mother employed Constantine and ultimately enacted her rights as an employer to terminate her. Her mother paid the paltry wages and likely took for granted the work that Constantine provided. Her mother went along with capitalism's push toward securing labor at the lowest possible wage so that she and her peers could benefit accordingly. Her mother was unwilling to accept Lulabelle into her home or the DAR association. Her mother callously harmed the girl by telling her a family secret that was Constantine's place to disclose. In these ways, she is an insider socially, but her actions are so disdainful that Stockett excommunicates her from the story. Skeeter, on the other hand, loved Constantine as a daughter would love a mother (or so she claims), and then, when she is old enough, and is enlightened to the oppression around her, she becomes an agent of change. Her position in society is threatened but in a much different way than her mother's would have been. Skeeter still has the opportunity to start her adult life in Manhattan, find like-minded friends, and live happily ever after. Had the story focused on her mother, the repercussions would have been quite different and more nuanced. Her mother is left to fill the role of the conformist who can only be pitied for being close-minded and prejudiced; audiences know she will soon be a relic. Culturally speaking, Charlotte is on the cusp of

⁵²This overt acquiescence to traditional domestic labor relationships was changed in the movie, which, as Reed, Jr. points out, is geared to attract the largest viewership and earn the most money. In the movie, Charlotte is simply concerned with her social standing amongst the members of her DAR organization and shows regret about hurting Constantine in the process.

becoming an outsider. Moreover, Skeeter, as a young woman, is permitted to question authority without malice. Readers (and viewers) know the tide of racism will slowly ebb in the U.S. and Skeeter will be on the right side of history.

Charlotte's actions (unfavorably) showcase what it is to be a female employer of a domestic servant, the power that is enacted as a result, the jealousy that can exist when the mother-employer's child bonds with another caregiver, and the difficulty of terminating someone for reasons that rest primarily on personal beliefs. Stockett gives only a glimpse of Charlotte's emotional investment in Constantine. She presents Constantine's termination as most difficult for Constantine and Skeeter.⁵³ While Charlotte may seem emotionally divorced from her decision to fire Constantine, it is unlikely this is the case considering the contempt she retains. While it is tempting to look at Skeeter as the outsider-within, Charlotte is the one whose outsider standpoint is more curious. Like the madwoman in the attic, she is virtually a ghost of a woman, bedridden from cancer, with few chances to speak throughout the novel. When she does speak, her conformity to social convention restricts insight into who she is as a woman, a mother, or an employer. She has been relegated to the fringe. Stockett focuses instead on the repercussions her choices have on the child who loves her paid caregiver. As the one who has the most opportunity to exert agency in the novel, it is telling that Stockett has Skeeter punish Charlotte for her unethical treatment of Constantine and to a lesser extent for bad mothering. Charlotte's complexity is dismissed as uninteresting in favor of the story of youthful rebellion and forward-looking optimism.

The move toward complexity that was demonstrated so well in Jen's *The Love Wife* (and many of the other novels explicated thus far) disintegrates in *The Help*. The novel does not

⁵³ It is not a stretch to argue that Stockett is insinuating that the termination was so painful for Constantine that she had no choice but to die. This romanticizing of the nanny/child relationship undermines the idea that despite their attachment, many caregivers are happy to return to their homes and families.

attempt to trouble the relationship between a mother-employer and the nanny she hires or between the mother-employer and her daughter. The novel can be one-dimensional in terms of theme, character development, language, and tone; however, the popularity of the novel as well as the movie (and even the fact that it was made into a movie with A-list actresses) cannot be disregarded. Scores of readers on blogs and Amazon.com claim the novel and/or movie have been life changing. Often, while not explicit, it seems readers are enamored with the idea of how empathic engagement with others can be beneficial. (This novel would be a good selection for Keen to use in future research.) While race theory is increasingly complex and the ways in which race is depicted in novels has overall moved toward privileging complexity, this novel avoids both. It is critical to question why this novel has struck such a chord in so many people. One explanation: Women perceive the threat of being an outsider-within so threatening that they choose not to focus on the issue at all and defer to those who are inherently outsiders due to race or age to tell the story instead. Although this is likely baseless, the thought remains disturbing. This would suggest compliance with the less arduous task of looking forward via the next generation's point of view rather than examining the power structures as they are and discerning one's role within them. In this case, Stockett's choice of narrators allows her to avoid a sustained examination of Charlotte's motives and the temporal placement of the novel allows her to capture the optimism of the early days of the civil rights movement without challenging whether these efforts were enough or interrogate the ways in which social justice advocates later assimilated (or abandoned) their idealism as adults. Instead, the three narrators can claim the subversive power of being outsiders-within without dealing with the challenges full members of a community are often expected to undertake.

Conclusion

Lynet Uttal argues: "Both structurally and interpersonally, mothers and childcare providers are unclear about who has the authority in the childcare relationship" (114). This certainly is shown in the novels in this chapter. Whether the nanny or the daughter is the one seeking authority, the mothers in each novel find themselves questioning their roles as employers and as family members.

While the undemanding way that relationships are portrayed in *The Help* fails to achieve a depth of exploration that the topic merits, readers have evidently embraced Stockett's message. The effect that Stockett has achieved is worth exploring even if the novel itself has attracted considerable negative attention from race and feminist theorists alike. Moreover, *Lucy* and *The Love Wife* provide rich insight and fruitful literary material to explore, particularly when one attempts to trace the ways in which mother-employers struggle with their own racial privilege and (dis)placement in the family structure. In *Lucy*, for instance, Mariah does not see herself so much as the outsider-within as much as lacking an authentic past, particularly in relation to her nanny who has had more dramatic and significant life experiences, or so she believes. Kincaid demonstrates how changing power dynamics can shift in mother-employer/nanny relationship in such a way that some white mother-employers can feel adrift in their own families despite the kin- and racial-privileges that they claim. While she still extends herself as the savior in the relationship, Mariah senses her own lacunae as a result of Lucy's introduction to the family, which is steeped in the ideology of multiculturalism that marks middle-class whites as too uniform and well understood. Intrepid Lucy fills the role of the plucky immigrant and feminist by maximizing on Mariah's insecurity regarding race.

The nugget of insecurity Mariah demonstrates in this novel becomes markedly more evident in *The Love Wife*, a novel that mirrors the fear some mother-employers have that they are the outsiders-within their own families after hiring a nanny. Jen demonstrates that this fear can be traced in cultural trends rooted in beliefs about multiculturalism as well as the ideology of intensive mothering. Rather than gather her children around her for comfort as Mariah did, however, Blondie chooses to leave the family entirely with only one of her three children -- the only child that is biologically related to her. Lan, who fills the role of nanny, is left behind to live in the house that Blondie once claimed as her own with her husband and two adopted children. Blondie feels that this is what Lan desires, what her husband has persuaded her to do by his lack of loyalty to her both emotionally and physically, and even perhaps what her two adopted children want as a result of their struggles with their identity and membership to the family. Blondie, although she never admits it, is threatened by Lan's physical resemblance to her daughters and believes that Lan can relate to them in a more authentic way while offering them something she cannot: a connection to their heritage. She leaves not because her outsider-within status permits her to see the disagreeable aspects of marriage and motherhood in a new light, which Collins suggests can be a benefit of the outsider-within standpoint, but because she would rather be excluded on her own terms than suffer exclusion by those she loves most. Jen suggests that this may be misappropriated agency. While Mariah wants to possess Lucy so that she too can claim ownership of the young woman's complicated past and paradoxically simultaneously erase the offenses Lucy experienced as a British-ruled subject, Blondie is threatened by the ways in which Lan can fulfill her children's needs. Mariah does not seem to be threatened in this way. Rather, despite her feminist bravado, she willingly subjugates herself to Lucy. Both women see the nanny who helps them as a woman who can offer something she does not inherently possess.

In both novels, it seems that there would be less strife if the mother-employer were more confident of herself and her position in the family and learned to wield authority effectively. Perhaps novelists believe this is what their audience seeks to have affirmed in the books they read. In Mariah's case, her lack of questioning and eternal faith in humanity seem to be the culprit for not recognizing her husband's affair, which Lucy identified much sooner than Mariah. Mariah also loses Lucy, which, although perhaps inevitable, is depicted as a sour separation as a result of Mariah's insecurity and unfamiliarity with her position as an employer. Blondie, too, has similar issues, as has been discussed already, largely as a result of her feeling insecure as well as experiencing a more complicated set of dynamics stemming from kin relationships. More specifically, both novels examine the power that is rooted in racial privilege while simultaneously troubling the ways in which white privilege is not simply the paradigm of comfort. The mother-employers in *Lucy* and *The Love Wife* are both aware of some of the ways in which race shapes the relationship they have with the nanny who is helping them, but that does not mean there are simple answers to the conflicts that arise, that feelings do not get hurt, or that misunderstanding does not take root as a result of cultural differences. Both Kincaid and Jen suggest that good intentions are not enough, which Ortega highlights as well from a theoretical perspective. These relationships are strained in part as a result of racial difference, however. These novels capture emotions of jealousy and exclusion, with both mother-employers ultimately retreating. The result is the same; both women feel as if they are outsiders-within. While this may be a misappropriation of the term, as highlighted earlier, it is a term that remains useful in creating a context for understanding the emotional landscape contemporary female novelists believe mother-employers experience.

The Help creates an interesting addition to the analysis of mother-employers feeling ostracized from the family structure. Published five years after *The Love Wife* but taking place forty years earlier, the novel seemingly contradicts the claim posed earlier regarding a move toward complexity. *The Help* reverts to simplistic dichotomies between good and bad. It also echoes the trend of consciousness-raising novels that was popular in the 1960s (which *Lucy* showcases) and is strangely (and seemingly unintentionally) retro in 2009. Critics accuse the novel of professing an ethnocentric and oversimplified depiction of alliance building between women of different backgrounds; however, it also hit a sweet spot with readers. Stockett's choice to focus on the daughter provides an easy escape from the inherent power differentials that exist between mother-employers and nannies as well as questioning how and why structures of oppression are maintained. The popularity of this novel (and movie) suggests that race remains an uncomfortable topic for many readers. It also suggests U.S. readers are more apt to consume a feel-good story about non-hierarchical relationships between African Americans and whites than explore the complexities of labor relations, race, and neoliberalism. Moreover, while *Lucy* and *The Love Wife* show an evolution toward mother-employers feeling like they are outsiders-within, *The Help* sidesteps the issue by focusing on a young woman who *wants* to be an outsider-within in part because it permits her to bear less responsibility for the oppressive racism around her. The mother-employer in this novel shifts from *feeling* ostracized to *being* ostracized; she is bedbound, physically tortured, and removed from the family's activities almost entirely. Despite all of this, she still earns little pity and even less empathy as a result of her racism and embodiment of warped social structures.

Each of these novels also highlights the role of the white savior, however, which seems to indicate that this role is adopted as a means of reasserting power that is steeped in a less

masculine and unilateral place. While scholars who study domestic service warn against maternalism, each of the novels shows the nanny of color exhibiting some participation in and appreciation of the ways in which white characters offer financial, emotional, and/or physical assistance. The most blatant (and highly criticized) incorporation of this is in *The Help*, which has a white author, but the novelist's race is clearly not the only factor since the two other novels were penned by women of color. The savior complex is also able to develop because the characters retain a sense of arrogance, which Lugones warns prohibits 'world'-travel. Lugones also argues that she and other women of color are the "'outsiders' to [...] White/Anglo organization of life in the U.S.," adding that the "flexibility," which is acquired either out of necessity or is "willfully exercised" to understand and function within this foreign culture, can be thought of as 'world'-travelling (3). Certainly, as Lugones points out, women of color are encouraged to 'world'-travel even when it is done "unwillfully to hostile White/Anglo 'worlds,'" because it is both expected and necessary. Their efforts are often unacknowledged by dominant members of society in such deep ways that women of color may make these journeys without even fully recognizing the work that they do to accomplish this feat. Lugones rightfully points out that "[r]acism has a vested interest in obscuring and devaluing the complex skills involved in it" (3). This does not mean that this is a trait that is only meant to be developed by women of color, she adds, contending that it "can also be willfully exercised [...] by those who are at ease in the mainstream" (3). However, she also posits that flexibility is required of women of color because it is a skill that is "necessary for the outsider" (3). The novels in this chapter trouble this aspect of Lugones' argument and highlight the ways in which white mother-employers are displaced -- often against their will -- although in a markedly different ways than the women of color Lugones discusses. While Lugones highlights that 'world'-travel is often a skill that is well-

honed for many women of color because it is "a matter of necessity and of survival" and is not often developed in women who enjoy the privileges of being white, these novels show that feeling a sense of membership may be more complicated (11). Membership, these authors suggest, may be in the eye of the beholder.

The previous analysis asserts that race and social capital are important to understand not only from a theoretical level, as many feminist scholars have suggested but also from a experiential perspective. This is not to say that the process will be easy, because, as Lenz cautions,

such a focus on difference can foster the tendency to enforce rigid categorizations rather than to interrogate the social conditions that construct group perspectives, creating boundaries among different groups of women that, while clearly exposing the falsity of universals, simultaneously obscure the commonalities among women, the shared circumstances that foster similar and related, if not identical or equal, oppressions. Such a step limits the transformative potential of women's insights by removing their analyses from the particularities of their circumstances to an abstract, categorical realm. (99)

Therefore, not only is this a call for more literature that examines critical intersections of race, gender, and class -- particularly the complex points of friction as they are described in literature - - but to also examine points of harmony. Stockett seems to support this when she claims that race relations remain difficult but "trying to understand is *vital* to our humanity" (451). Her novel seems to fall short of this goal of understanding when examined critically, but the responses offered online argue that she has been accomplishing this goal. With this in mind, it seems worthwhile to explore how Stockett's less complicated approach to such a complex issue affects the development of empathy in readers. Keen does address the role a novel's literary merit and

complexity have in readers' development of empathy, but reader reviews of *The Help* seem to counter her claims. These points require further inquiry.

Finally, the novels in this chapter indicate it is not only women of color who are the outsiders-within traveling to new places and fearing that they cannot assimilate. While not intended to undermine the pervasiveness or depth of what women of color experience, these novels show that mother-employers feel they too stand on unstable ground like the women they hire to care for their child(ren), even if that instability is for different reasons. While Anderson and Bosniak both present alluring arguments regarding the ways that domestic workers' labor yields more stable citizenship status for white women of material means by permitting this group to pursue public (and lucrative) careers, neither examines how membership to one's immediate family is affected by a mother's choice to pursue paid work or hire a nanny. In *Lucy*, *The Help*, and *The Love Wife*, the authors depict race-conscious characters who, for various reasons, are forced to confront their own preconceptions about race as a result of their interactions with domestic help, primarily in the intimate and profoundly important role of child care. These novels show that race remains an important issue in the contemporary United States and that it is not only the race of the nanny that can be problematic.

Re-Questing the Female Hero: Exploring Liminality's Role in Mothering, Travel, and Empathy

Introduction

There is certainly no shortage of theorizing on the role globalization has played in contemporary economics, global relations, and in the child care market specifically. Sociologists, including Bridget Anderson, Grace Chang, Rosie Cox, Barbara Ehrenreich, Arlie Hochschild, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, have all published thoughtful work on domestic care and often highlight the ways globalization can have negative influences on financially insecure individuals. Trends in globalization and the increasing prevalence of neoliberal policies have strongly shaped the childcare market for both the provider and the consumer. Today, two structures have profound impacts on why domestic service is utilized and who is available for the work. First, according to Rosanna Hertz, children remain part and parcel of the American Dream for middle- and upper-middle class adults, but, deviating from previous generations, "*both* spouses now want achievement and self-sufficiency" (247). Moreover, due in part to the prevalence of economic recessions worldwide as well as a decrease in support from the welfare state, many couples no longer have the choice of whether one parent will stay at home. With both parents working, many middle- and upper-middle class families outsource reproductive labor. As discussed, few women with significant social or material capital function as providers in the childcare market; the demand is often sated by undocumented workers who have few other options due to lack of education, financial resources, or language skills. These workers, according to Hertz, help maintain the working couple's sense of self-sufficiency, in part via the construction of the fictive kin relationship that is often established. Like Linda Bosniak and Anderson, Hertz highlights that U.S. women's participation in the workforce helps them

achieve material and, consequently, community stability. Ironically, under this model, which is informed by neoliberalism, some U.S. women maintain the belief that they are saviors for employing female domestic workers.

Second, the type of couple Hertz describes, while resistant to receiving government entitlements due to the belief that to do so would diminish the demonstration of independent success, still benefit from policies that encourage -- or at the very least do little to discourage -- immigrants from working in the U.S. as part of the informal labor market. Meanwhile, many countries in the Global South have been targeted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) to receive assistance via Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). These programs have not been a boon for most countries in the global South (or the poverty-stricken families therein). Joya Misra *et al* note:

Neoliberalism shapes carework in both sending and receiving countries. As states have withdrawn from social care provision, women's carework requirements have intensified. Poorer women migrate to provide support for their families, while wealthier families solve their care needs through hiring immigrant careworkers. Rather than states taking responsibility for aiding families, neoliberal strategies have led to an international division of carework that places the burden for care on the least powerful (immigrant women workers). (318)

As a result, countries targeted for SAPs often continue to experience major financial turmoil and have found it necessary to export one of the primary capitals they have readily available: human labor. Few social safety measures have been put in place to regulate the migration and employment that has ensued. Not only do the statements above allude to why international

carework is so prevalent, but as Misra *et al*, like Judith Rollins, contend there are inherent power differentials at play between the women in these labor relationships at a macro and micro level.

The labor relationships that form in the global North have a powerful impact for the women who emigrate from the global South as well as their families. Intensive mothering cannot be performed by women who work abroad for their own children and Parreñas, who has examined the export of female labor from the Philippines to Rome and Los Angeles, claims "mothering from a distance has painful emotional ramifications both for mothers who leave and children who are sent back or left behind" (*Servants of Globalization*, cited hereafter as *SG* 116). These emotions may include: "helplessness, regret, and guilt for mothers, and loneliness, vulnerability, and insecurity for children," according to Parreñas (*SG* 16). The women who emigrate are seldom poverty-stricken; rather, they are trying to improve their family's economic and social status. Their roles as mothers are often filled by other female family members, older female siblings, or women who do not have the financial resources to emigrate. Parreñas explains: "While class-privileged women [in the global North and wealthy countries in the Middle East] purchase the low-wage services of migrant Filipina domestic workers, migrant Filipina domestic workers simultaneously purchase the even lower wage services of poorer women left behind in the Philippines" (*SG* 62). This has been labeled the 'nanny chain' by Hochschild. Few men in her study took on the responsibilities of mothering, a point that certainly warrants further discussion. Parreñas concludes there are "winners and losers in the formation of transnational households. The losers are the family members who are denied intimacy, and the winners are the families of employers who gain intimacy at the cost of the formation of transnational households for the domestic workers" (*SG* 250). Sau-ling C. Wong similarly argues that the biggest disadvantages in this system are allocated to the children of the mothers who

emigrate, claiming they are the "rightful recipients" to their mother's care (69). Both arguments rest on the premise of intensive mothering that has been discussed heretofore by privileging the biological mother's role in her child(ren)'s lives.

While arguably tangential to the following work, I believe it would be injudicious not keep these points in mind as one considers the dynamics present between a mother-employer and the nanny who helps care for her children. This very brief overview of macrostructures and current issues of globalization offers the most basic socio-political underpinnings to the inherent difficulties and vulnerabilities of the women who emigrate to become caregivers while also providing a context for the novels that will be explicated shortly. In reference to the specific purposes of this research it is productive to examine some of the ways literal travel and 'world'-travel comingle and affect the mothering completed by the mother-employer and the nanny who emigrated as well as the repercussions this has for the child(ren) tended by the nanny and the nanny's children who are left behind. While I have not given abundant attention to the ways in which physical travel appears in the novels explicated thus far, I have drawn attention to the numerous times travel takes place. *Men and Angels*, *Lucy*, and *The Love Wife* include travel within the opening chapters, for instance, with characters commenting in the latter two about the difficulty of being able to navigate. *A Gate at the Stairs* and *The Help* include moments of insight that occur during or as a result of travel.

It is a common cultural belief in the U.S. that leisure travel fosters insight into one's own identity, the identity of those with whom one travels, and the cultural milieu to which one is exposed. Certainly, remaining a devout "fork," as Blondie calls it, would limit these outcomes, but it is culturally discouraged to refrain from immersing oneself in the customs of the society

one chooses to visit.⁵⁴ For many travelers, bragging rights can be garnered for the uniqueness of their exploits. Travel books try to out-do one another in finding the most 'un-touristy' places to visit. For instance, the first result when "travel books" is typed into Amazon.com is: *Reader's Digest Off the Beaten Path: A Travel Guide to More than 1000 Scenic and Interesting Places Still Uncrowded and Inviting*. National Geographic similarly offers *Secret Journeys of a Lifetime: 500 of the World's Best Hidden Travel Gems*. Moreover, in Michael Wade Simpson's review of Judith Fein's *Life is a Trip: The Transformative Magic of Travel* Simpson describes the aptness of her focus on the "in-betweens" of travel, adding: "For her, the most mundane moments are often turning points, when a trip can turn into a catharsis, where plans are thrown out and intuition takes over. Fein loves to take herself off the beaten path and then wait to see what happens" ("In Other Words"). In many ways, this is the milieu Mona Simpson and Styron create for their protagonists. Their journeys are physical and emotional quests that impact their self-understanding and their ability to reconcile relationships with maternal figures in their lives.

In this chapter, *My Hollywood* by Simpson and *All the Finest Girls* by Alexandra Styron, feature physical and emotional dislocations as well as literal travel more insistently than the previous novels have. In "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism," Janet Wolff, a feminist cultural critic, examines how travel is situated in the fields of post-colonial criticism, post-modern theory, and post-structuralism, and argues that the "metaphor of 'travel' helps to de-essentialize both researcher and subject of research and begins to transform the unacknowledged relationship of power and control which characterized post-colonial encounters" (118). This claim could be reconfigured easily to address the relationships between a

⁵⁴ In this section, I am specifically referring to travel that has been selected of one's own volition rather than other forms of travel such as immigration for work or political reasons. However, it is worth noting that a considerable amount of xenophobic commentary is based on the notion that individuals who have immigrated are not assimilating fully and 'properly'. Grace Chang offers an excellent analysis of this in *Disposable Domestics*.

mother-employer and nanny as well as between a nanny and the child(ren) she has been hired to tend. In *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*, the women who have significant cultural and material capital achieve personal insight regarding their own vulnerability as a result of the physical journeys on which they embark. Their physical journeys to the homes of the nannies with whom they have relationships reifies their emotional investment. Moreover, for protagonists in both novels, 'world'-travel (and world travel), when accomplished, alters the "power and control" Wolff references.

As highlighted in the last chapter, power and control remain contentious issues for many woman. According to Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, the "separation between feminist discourse and maternal discourse can be attributed to feminism's complicated ambivalence about power, authority, and, [...] anger" (166). In this chapter, I will apply this notion to the role of mother, which will include biological mothers, other-mothers, and becoming-mothers. Hirsch also aptly points out, "a mother is simultaneously a daughter and a mother, a woman and a mother, in the house and in the world, powerful and powerless, nurturing and nurtured, dependent and depended upon" (196). This chapter does not force bifurcation upon the female protagonists' multiplicity, but the authors who have created them request that readers examine how the aforementioned dualities function. For the three protagonists in these two novels, physical travel is required to assimilate the polarities cohesively. Furthermore, extending the discussion initiated in *The Help*, this chapter will continue examining the mother-daughter dyad and extend the analysis to examine the ways in which the figure of the nanny can serve as a proxy mother in the psychodynamic quest for identity. According to Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a director at Columbia University's National Center for Children and Family, "academics know, roughly, nothing about how nannies

impact children" (qtd in Davidson, "Best Nanny"). She attributes the lack of research to the difficulty of accessing participants in an informal labor market that discourages transparency from both the nanny and the employer and because funding is usually given to studies on at-risk children who seldom have nannies. Some of the novels in this body of research make an effort to explore the relationship between a nanny and the child(ren) she is paid to tend, with *All the Finest Girls* being the most exhaustive. Overall, there have been only minor moves in literature toward filling these gaps, with even less attention given to the biological child(ren) of nannies whose work involves caring for other people's children. Using the material available, I will extend Nancy Chodorow's work beyond the mother-daughter dyad and establish the ways in which her conclusions can be relevant to the relationship children experience with the nanny who tends them as well as in the relationship between mother-employer and nanny.

Travel resonates deeply in the male quest, and travel is arguably a primarily male activity. Chodorow contends a mother's childcare responsibilities makes her primary social location one that is domestic whereas men, who may be "involved with particular domestic units [...] find a primary social location in the public sphere" (9). Wolff's essay goes even further and argues that "practices and ideologies of *actual* travel operate to exclude or pathologize women" (115). I would stop short of making this claim but endorse her effort to reference both the literal and epistemological senses of the word travel. Some believe women can be heroes who follow the same steps in the traditional quest (i.e., residing in the ordinary world, following a call to adventure, refusal of the call, introduction to mentor, crossing the threshold into a different world, incurring tests, preparing for a trial, engaging in a trial, experiencing a reward, beginning a journey back to the ordinary world, engaging in another trial, and returning to the ordinary world). However, there are others, like Melodie Monahan, who argue in the article "Heading out

Is Not Going Home: Jane Eyre": "The woman who undertakes the journey and feels the struggle and empowerment in her revolt against marginality will resist subordination in a household" (590). She further explains: "this female enactment of quest-romance turns in against itself; what the female hero is as a questioning protestor against patriarchal tyranny, she cannot be as an assimilated member who connects and stabilizes with others" (591). In other words, some women may find that not only is leaving the home essential to their quest but returning home is the antithesis of what their quest was designed to achieve, particularly if the home does not readjust to accommodate a burgeoning or established sense of autonomy and authority. Simpson and Styron both focus on the journey of threshold women who travel far from their homes, but this does not make their journeys one that mirrors a male hero.

The term "kitchen sink drama" typically pertains to women's stories about personal, often domestic, relationships. In many novels, home is not only where these relationships are literally placed, but houses and homes serve as a metonym for feminine domesticity and even the relationships therein. Moreover, female characters' placement inside or outside of the home can reflect not only stages of her quest but achievement of identity, individualism, and social freedom. According to Victorian literature scholar Lee Edwards, the female hero in early novels was "[d]enied the escape route given to her male counterpart" and therefore the "aspiring woman hero avenges her existence where she can: at home" (24). She concedes this is no longer the case due largely to the fact that by the beginning of the twentieth century, novelists were more willing to "abandon the project of entrapping the female heroic character" and focused on the "task of inventing maneuvers" whereby the female hero could "break out of familial, sexual, and social

bondage into an altered and appropriate world" (16).⁵⁵ Moreover, as Monahan points out: "Heading out is going home for the male hero in at least the one sense that he exists in an androcentric culture, and he has access to male privilege whether he is in the world or at home. The female's relationships to both heading out and going home are problematic, particularly so when the two are conjoined" (590). Each of the primary female characters in *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls* struggle with rectifying difficult home environments that they have had various degrees of agency in shaping. However, Edwards asserts: "Flight without the promise of a new social coalescence leaves heroism incomplete" (20). The women in the following novels are not necessarily looking for social coalescence per se. There is some desire to assimilate to their peer groups, particularly in *My Hollywood*, but the female characters are more keen on finding stasis in themselves and the structures of their lives. As for their placement as adult women, returning home is not the antithesis of their quest; rather, their quest is to redefine their homes in a way that works for them. Their discomfort with their homes is what triggers a deep sense of instability, but I argue that it is this instability that permits an openness to the type of 'world'-travel that Lugones espouses.

The female characters in these novels are not tourists, but they are travelers. For Lola, the oldest of the female narrators, the quest is as much to resolve her identity as a mother as it is for Claire, although their journeys are manifested in very different ways. For Claire and Addy, the younger female narrators who are both in their thirties, the quest in which they engage is about finding their respective places in the matrilineal line with which they identify. In ways that relate and are unrelated, Claire's and Addy's roles as daughters remain significant to the plot of the novels. In *My Hollywood*, the person mothered is Claire, who is also the mother-employer. Lola,

⁵⁵Edwards cites *Jane Eyre* as a primary example as does Monahan in her work on liminality and the female hero. This suggests that Jane's role, and I would argue the role of the nanny more broadly, embodies liminality as a result of the "betwixt and between" aspect of kin status, class, and employment.

the nanny, dedicates the majority of her physical and emotional labor on Claire's young son, as expected, but she also fulfills a maternal role for Claire in important ways. In the second novel, Addy attends her childhood nanny's memorial in an attempt to reduce the conflict she feels about her relationship with her mother, her nanny, and her nanny's children. In the previously discussed novels the nannies have largely either been very young and inexperienced or inept due to personal problems. Their primary identities were not connected to mothering. Despite rather different plots, these two novels have some key consistencies. In both novels the nannies have traveled a great distance for the position obtained; both see their positions as temporary; and both nannies are, by most common standards, excellent caregivers to the child they have been hired to tend, to their own children, and in Lola's case, to the mother-employer responsible for hiring. Moreover, both of the younger women in the novel are approximately the same age, rely on their creative-based careers for comfort, require mothering by their nannies that their own mothers could not provide, and return to the nanny's home country in the hope of finding a resolution to personal difficulty.

I contend that in these novels it is not the act of travel per se, but the sense of emotionally-grounded liminality (which often occurs when one travels regardless of whether it is literal or not) that permits a refined sense of personal understanding. I will further argue that this personal development may help increase the level of empathy one is able to experience for another individual. The theory of liminality referenced here comes from Victor Turner in *Ritual Process*,⁵⁶ who describes it as being "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, conventions, and ceremonial" (95). In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell, in his description of the hero's journey or quest, suggests that after the hero departs and before he returns he is in a process of initiation that mirrors the liminality Turner describes.

⁵⁶ Turner credits Arnold Van Gennep for the premise of his own research.

Both of these writers exclusively analyze the figure of the male hero. Claire, Lola, and Addy demonstrate the importance liminality can play in personal and interpersonal development of women. As Turner points out, "attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (*Ritual Process*, cited hereafter as *Ritual*, 95). This does not mean that these individuals are necessarily liminal *personae* in all aspects of their lives, but instead, that the lack of definition and clear categorization permits an openness to considering themselves and their places in society, at least in this realm, in unconventional ways. Nannies in particular are located liminally by virtue of their paid emotional labor, pseudo-kin status, and impermanence. Anderson claims that the domestic worker "occupies the imaginary space between the two worlds, symbolically ordered and imagined in very different ways" (4). As argued in the previous chapter, this placement is not unique to nannies; some mothers also feel bereft of kin status and are unwilling to utilize the power inherent in their position as employers. Both mother-employers and nannies then situate themselves as "neither here nor there" in their positions as family members, employers and employees, and in their thought process regarding the commodification of carework, with love being, at times, simultaneously purchased and genuine (Turner *Ritual*, 95). In this way, the relationship that exists between mother-employer and nanny as well as those that stem from it resist binary conceptualizations.

The characters in Simpson's and Styron's novels also show that identity development may be a critical component to 'world'-travel and may be assisted by actual travel. These characters do literally travel, but the physical travel is not the goal in and of itself. The place to which they travel is dictated by the nanny, and it is a means of achieving resolution with the nanny who has

mothered them. As stated earlier, Lugones treats 'world'-travel as a close synonym of empathy and she is clear that world travel is not the same as 'world'-travel. Furthermore, physical travel is not the same as the journey toward personal development. This chapter will focus on the ways that physical travel and 'world'-travel intertwine, inform one another, increase personal development, and contribute to the expansion of empathic interactions in two novels. It will also briefly explore how readers 'world'-travel when they immerse themselves in a novel. Certainly issues of identity are not unique to female heroes (or their readers) but, as Judith Kegan Gardiner writes, "for every aspect of identity as men define it, female experience varies from the male model" ("On Female Identity" 349). Evidence for this is based in part on the ways in which the mother/daughter relationship is constructed, as Chodorow effectively argues. Her work on the pre-Oedipal relationship mothers develop with their daughters will be featured prominently in the upcoming analysis, particularly in the ways in which her work suggests that female identity development may remain more in flux than male's and in the ways in which this may promote the development of empathy. Moreover, as Edwards suggested earlier, female heroes' quests may be more problematic in that if they achieve their goals, they may likely be placed outside the esteem of their kin, peers, and wider society. This, too, is evident in the following novels.

***My Hollywood* by Mona Simpson**

In *My Hollywood*, Mona Simpson skims satire as she explores mothering in the last breaths of the twentieth century via two women's lives. The first is Claire, an upper-middle-class U.S. woman who is attempting to navigate a professional career and motherhood. The second is Lola, a 52-year-old woman from the global South who is pursuing, among other things, financial stability for her adult children in the Philippines. Claire, a talented but relatively unknown

composer, is married to a television script writer whose long hours at work leave her essentially alone to care for their newborn son. Although this echoes Simpson's own life as a New York transplant and wife of Richard Appel, a Los Angeles-based television writer, Simpson insists, like Lorrie Moore, that the novel is not autobiographical (Lee, "Never Mind"). The novel was never intended to focus solely on Claire or even mothers, according to Simpson, who, in an interview with David Ulin, claims the novel was originally "about children, or even more about the immigrant nannies who care for them" (www.oprah.com). The children in the novel are hardly key players, but unlike many novels that center on mother-employers and nannies, this novel deftly weaves in a second, distinct voice in Lola, whose actual name is Wanda. Lola cares for William, Claire's son, and even Claire herself in order to help support her five children. The monies earned from this work fund their college educations and presumed upward mobility. *My Hollywood* permits these two women to share the space of the novel nearly equally in alternating chapters with each woman presenting her concerns and struggles -- struggles that sometimes have to do with one another but not always. Each woman is on a quest and both quests dance around the identity of motherhood without keeping this role as its sole partner.

Claire, who speaks first, is a recent transplant from New York (her ordinary world) to Los Angeles with her husband Paul. It is Paul's 'call to action' that takes her, her new son, and her cello to the foreign land of California, which she describes as "hot, plain, and bright, mocking" (10). This is not the glitzy, pristine LA of Hollywood movies, Claire suggests. The money she was awarded from a Guggenheim fellowship provides the funds to relocate and, it is worth noting, St. Claire is the patron saint of television writers.⁵⁷ Claire is not a submissive follower, but despite her name she lacks clarity in her own life and despite her creativity, intellect, and

⁵⁷In the 1200s St. Claire, who was too ill to attend mass, had a 'televised' mass appear on the wall of her bedroom. She later became the patron saint of this medium as a result.

insight she seems lost as to how she can assemble a fulfilling and multifaceted life. Turner categorizes artists as "liminal and marginal people," and Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* claims more pointedly that an artist heroine is not torn between life and art, like a male artist is, but "between her role as a woman, demanding selfless devotion to others, and her aspirations as an artist, requiring exclusive commitment to work" (*Ritual* 128, qtd in. Hirsch 5). Claire, as readers learn, struggles immensely with these pursuits, which she perceives as conflicting, and does not find comfort or inspiration in her compulsory liminality.

The impermanence of their situation is palpable nonetheless. She and Paul live in a rental house in an upscale neighborhood of Los Angeles with a black kitchen Claire wants to change. She puts off renovations since the investment may not be worth the time and money, particularly since they do not know when they will move again. Even Paul's job is uncertain. He is renewed for ten-week stints and the security of more stable employment eludes him for the majority of the novel. With the story told from an undefined point in the future, Claire tells readers, "It would still be years before I'd realize -- we had settled. I was the only one waiting" (26). Most salient and troubling for Claire is that she is neither a full-time mother or a full-time composer. The first role is fixed, she believes, and important to her identity as a woman; the second is perceived as an indulgence, but one that is vital to her sense of self. Claire straddles the nebulous space between the two. Her quest is to find an inhabitable space that will permit her the security and recompense of music while allowing her to honor enough of the demands of intensive mothering so that she does not feel remiss. Part of the difficulty is reconciling the social pressure she experiences, which she feels pushes her to commit more fully to a single pursuit, preferably motherhood. In other words, Claire, who is ambivalent about having one foot in the world of

music and one in the world of motherhood, is unsettled by the liminality she feels is unalterable. Throughout the novel, her husband Paul remains an elusive figure who is more notable for his absence than the impact of his presence.

After marrying Paul, Claire is forced to identify with a class in which she feels dislocated. Claire knew little of material wealth as a child.⁵⁸ She was raised by a single mother whose work at a local shop left Claire as a latchkey kid after school. Paul, on the other hand, and their new neighbors in a tony area of LA are and always have been, it seems to Claire, financially secure. (It is worth noting that the wealthy trendsetters from whom Claire feels estranged are the most heavily satirized characters in Simpson's novel.) Claire is candid in explaining that she did not identify with the "upper-middle-class kids who, from college on, moved everywhere around me, wearing their advantages lightly, like expensive clothes, only a tiny bit different from what the rest of us had" (53). She recognizes that she is circulating in a new circle as a result of her husband's financial standing, but she fails to acclimate, thereby earning empathy from the scores of readers who have felt socially estranged (for any reason) and the many more who feel they would be prohibited from socializing in this circle by virtue of income, appearance, or any number of other markers. While successful in her own right (although difficult to ascertain to what extent), Claire remains an outsider-within, feeling she has not or cannot accept full membership to this group. She even feels dislocated as a woman, shaming herself for not knowing the intricacies of female beauty maintenance routines. Setting herself against the image of LA's obsession with a perfected physical aesthetic, Claire confesses, "I've always been afraid of beauty shops" (216). With Hollywood as the backdrop, Claire witnesses the magical world of

⁵⁸ Here, too, it is appropriate to reference Turner, who believes liminal *personae* include "parvenus (upwardly mobile marginals)" as well as "women in changed, nontraditional roles" (*Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* 233).

easy wealth, ego-centrism, and seemingly content homemakers (who have an fleet of domestic workers on hand) from afar.

Claire's call to action is a summons to successfully integrate her music career and motherhood; it proves a difficult quest. Ron Charles of *The Washington Post* accurately asserts that Claire's "stream-of-conversation patter" is a "mixture of acerbic wit and nervous despair from a smart woman who can't figure out how she can write music and care for a child without growing shrewish and unpleasant" ("Book World"). In the opening chapter of *My Hollywood*, which is titled "50/50," Claire describes her first date with Paul, whom she met in her early thirties. Claire informs Paul that maintaining a career as a musician and as a mother may be infeasible, but Paul, like her mother, tells Claire she can successfully do both. Claire dryly dismisses the latter by explaining, "But my mother was mentally ill" (3). Paul seems unfazed by their "conversation about who would do what," recognizing perhaps what he sees as a simple solution: outsource the reproductive labor (3). He, after all, had been raised by an African American woman and still sent money to her family. Claire, on the other hand, explains, "I never had a nanny. I had a mom, like everyone else I knew" (9). Her mother, however, was never a role model she wished to emulate as a result of her mental illness and her mediocre abilities to parent her. Claire austere notes, "She made it to the finish: she kept me till I was seventeen, then sent me out mostly intact, with an instrument to hold" (166). Chodorow claims: "Women as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and the needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself" (7). Unlike Chodorow's semi-fused mother/daughter dyads, though, Claire resisted and continues to resist merging with a woman she perceives as an unstable force in her life. She suggests here that both of them avoided or were prevented from forming a sense of enmeshed, liminal identification as it

is described by Chodorow. Despite being present physically, Claire's mother joins the ranks of absent mothers in nanny novels. Regardless, Claire believes she is responsible, at least in part, for her mother's unmooring. "My existence," Claire explains, "had caused too much pain. Having a child wobbled and undid my mother, forced her through strenuous marathons, at the edge of her capacity" (166). Claire fears she will mirror her mother in this way and that motherhood will have similar consequences for herself.

While women succeed to varying degrees in making concessions in regard to either their careers or to their roles as mothers, for Claire this is more complex in part because she begins the journey feeling deeply ambivalent about motherhood and struggles with feeling adept as a mother as a result of her fractured relationship with her mother. In college, where, according to Claire, "everything felt equal already," her utopian view of motherhood allowed her to have children and work. She notes that in this fantasy "[h]e, the putative he, would work a little less and I'd work a little less and the kid would have long hair, paint-spattered overalls, and be, in general, a barrel of monkeys" (10). This is not how it transpires after she finds herself holding a living, demanding infant, who, according to Claire, "felt astonished that he was stuck with me" (6).⁵⁹ This discomfort with an obligatory acceptance of motherhood and mothering is not unique and Edwards argues that the female hero's quest seeks to "disconnect the worlds of love and reproduction" (237). Claire never suggests that Paul coerced her into motherhood in any way, but she does reference that motherhood has unmoored her. She does not reference mental illness, but there are echoes of her own mother's inability to stay centered. "Marriage hadn't changed me," Claire explains, "Having a child did. I was a dandelion blown" (24). She adores her new son, William, but is befuddled by the directions to swaddle, is shaken by his unremitting crying, and

⁵⁹ Paul Mandelbaum in his review of *My Hollywood* claims Claire is "racked with bouts of post-partum depression," but I disagree and feel her response is quite identifiable for many women as they acclimate to motherhood for the first time. ("Whose Hollywood Is It Anyway?").

can't sleep out of fear he might die. "This was a monumental responsibility, like nothing I'd ever known," she states (6). She does not describe the self-gratifying enmeshment that Chodorow claims reenacts the pre-Oedipal pleasure of a mother/child bond, perhaps because she never experienced it as an infant. Chodorow claims "good and desirable maternal care" is a byproduct of a "mother's 'empathy' with her infant and her treatment of it as an extension of herself – as someone whose interests she knows through total regressive identification" (82). Not only is Claire unenthusiastic about the care she received, but she suggests, too, that she is mirroring her own mother's early anxiety with her. Simpson does not judge Claire but takes her time shaping Claire's world -- a world that has many choices and even more doubt.

Underlying her ambivalence and self-doubt is the loss of her single focus on her career. Unlike jobs taken for the sole purpose of income, music, for Claire, "was not exactly work. It formed something I'd had since I was a girl, a banister I touched to be calm" (92). Music, unlike her relationship with her unstable mother, represented that which is solid, controllable, and permanent. Thrust into motherhood and suddenly feeling the demands intensive mothering can bestow with it, Claire no longer finds easy solace from this aspect of her life, even as she craves the stability it offers more intensely. Paul's mother suggests Claire just put William in a crib and go to her study to work, but Claire offers myriad paltry excuses for why this would be unrealistically difficult, including the heat and quality of light, to which Paul's mother pragmatically offers window shades as a solution. Claire counters that William cries, but Paul's mother simply responds: "Then let him cry" (7). Her prudent solutions mark the relative newness of intensive mothering, but while her mother-in-law addresses the practical problems at hand, she does not address the emotional discomfort Claire is experiencing. It seems that, for Claire, Cyril Connolly was right when he penned in *Enemies of Promise*, "There is no more somber

enemy of good art than a pram in the hallway." For Claire, knowing that her difficulty may be a well-worn cloak is cold comfort. For Claire in *My Hollywood* (as well as several other protagonists in the novels covered heretofore), intensive mothering is unduly restrictive yet remains so fervently accepted that opting out of the belief system is nearly unfathomable. Claire wants to be like the mothers in the park who seem to know exactly what to do, but she is left only mimicking them, hoping she will not be identified as a fraud. She fears the mothers in her social circle are suspicious of her inability to commit and intuits that they sense she "wanted something from them" (90). Claire acknowledges she does. "I wanted the secret of their ease, the way their houses felt" she admits, "But I couldn't bear the life they had, to pay for it" (90-91). Under the weight of intensive mothering, Claire feels her ability to parent is judged more critically than Paul's, both by the women in her community and from her own introspective gaze.

Theoretically, hiring a nanny could have helped alleviate the angst Claire experiences, but Simpson does not permit an easy resolution, which would ring hollow to the many middle- and upper-middle-class women who express ambivalence about hiring a nanny to tend their children.⁶⁰ For Claire, it is not only a conflict with intensive mothering that leaves her unsure of hiring help, but her sense of class dislocation shades how she enters this new terrain. Paul, as a result of his previous experience, "knew how to do this," according to Claire (7). She, on the other hand, is taken aback by the "thirteen women, all immigrants, on the quarter hour" (7). Simpson constructs Claire's description as one written from the perspective of a stranger in a strange land. Claire admits, for instance, that until recently she believed nannies were "something English, from long ago" and believes the women who come to interview "resembl[e]

⁶⁰ See essays in Susan Davis and Gina Hyams' *Searching for Mary Poppins: Women Write About the Intense Relationship Between Mothers and Nannies*.

the hags of Grimm more than Juliet's nurse or any Disney nanny" (10, 7). One woman already looked sick and another steals a plate of cookies. Claire witnesses the cross-currents of immigration, poverty, and low-wage labor that inundate the field of childcare. These nannies' class and race mark them in ways Claire finds unsuitable, and many readers likely identify with Claire's mildly judgmental point of view. When the woman they hire does not work out, Claire shows uncharacteristic agency and hires Lola on the spot when she meets her in a park. She hires Lola specifically because "I knew my deficiencies and so I selected a supplement. I hired a happy nanny" (12). Like her mother, Claire sees the shortcomings that angst and mental insecurity can wield.

Unwittingly, Claire summons the myth of the omnipotent mother who can manipulate her son's personality and applies it to Lola and herself, although for Lola she presumes the power will have positive effects while her own influence, she fears, will impact her son negatively. She admits, "I was becoming a woman who sighed. How I had my baby and I saw. Why women got so little done. How much my own mother had given. Why so many people feel mad at their mothers; because whatever childhood was or wasn't, they're the ones who made it" (10). Claire expresses appreciation and regret regarding her mother's ability to mother. She understands her mother had little outside support yet attributes her unimpressive childhood to her exclusive influence. This is not atypical for female heroes, according to Edwards, who agrees with Chodorow's argument that the mother/daughter dynamic is one that causes children to feel "simultaneous and incompatible feelings of overwhelming love for the nurturing provided by the mothering figure and an equally powerful rage against the dependency this nurturance seems to require" (Edwards 165). Claire feels she must be present in her son's life in order to give her son love and receive his in return. She expresses a desire to both fulfill what her mother had done for

her and surpass the ways her mother had struggled. Claire seems to be inept at constructing a life that merges her pursuits as a mother and a musician, but it is this merging that she must achieve in order to feel capable, independent, and whole under the framework of intensive mothering.

Unlike the nannies Claire and Paul interviewed, Lola identifies with a class that seems on par with Claire's, or at least the one in which she was raised. Lola recognizes that "we seemed a fortunate family" in the Philippines and remains proud of her leadership in esteemed social organizations, but she earns three times her husband's salary as a white-collar executive in the Philippines by working as a domestic servant in Los Angeles (38). Lola had hired her own domestic servants in the Philippines, which was common for many families of even modest means, but she is new to being a domestic servant herself. Her post with Claire is only her second job in the U.S. (The first involved an oppressive working environment in which she had to rely on a passerby to escape.) Like the characters in *A Gate at the Stairs* and *Men and Angels*, Claire looks past the ways in which class identification increases a sense of compatibility and opts to believe Lola's acumen is rooted in her nationality. Lola explains: "My employer, she says when a baby comes home from the hospital, a Filipina should arrive with him" (32). Lola is unsettled by Claire's conviction that "all Filipinos" would make good nannies and sardonically questions if Claire's belief extends to "[m]aybe every single human being from Asia" (32). In these moments, Simpson sharply identifies the inherent racism that continues to pervade the mother-employer/nanny relationship. However, Simpson also brings forward Claire's insecurity in this statement thereby tempering the negative perception that could form in readers who are accustomed to more politically sensitive conversations about race.

Lola feels the money she earns is critical in order to send her five children to prestigious universities. She relays to her children that she views her work as a sacrifice to which she

submits herself in order to be a good and devoted mother. Even though her work takes her away from her children for many years, she projects a belief that she is a better mother as a result of her choice. Contrasting Claire, who explains she has a nanny "just because I wanted to work. Needed to or wanted to? A question I'd never asked before," Lola easily states, "I wish only for money. To buy schooling. So my kids, they will have their chance" (10, 39). Lola was away from her children when they were young, too, though. When Claire questions Lola regarding who cared for her children while she helped lead her social organization in the Philippines, Lola lightly tells her the yayas. It is not her answer that surprises Claire, but, as she explains, "No American woman I knew could say that so simply" (364). Here, Simpson encourages readers who identify with Claire's allegiance to the dogma of intensive mothering to questions how other ways of mothering can be and are successful.

Lola sidesteps potential remorse, explaining: "My employer has the American problem of guilt. But you should not be guilty to your children. It is for them that you are working!" (31). This sanguine outlook on intensive mothering troubles the ways cultural conceptions of motherhood influence a mother's sense of identity. Lola's seemingly unwavering stance is challenged when she accompanies Claire on a business trip, however. After finding the check Claire is given for teaching a symposium, Lola realizes the amount Claire earns does not cover the expenses she, Claire, and William accrue on the trip. Perplexed, Lola cannot imagine why Claire would still pursue her work. It is clear Lola accepts her absence from her children only because she feels she is providing a more valuable service via her income, but she views Claire as a good person and loving mother and must therefore re-form her perception of what constitutes good mothering, particularly in regard to delegating the care of a child to another

woman. Lola is also pushed to consider Claire's rationale and her empathy with the woman encourages an openness to ways of mothering that she may initially reject.

Lola's dislocation from her family also forces her to question her motives and the potential outcomes of her actions. Lola, too, occasionally doubts her decision to emigrate based on a line of thinking that privileges hands-on mothering. "I do not want that my kids will work as hard as I do. [...] Schooling makes them smart. But what will make them kind? Maybe only I will," she muses (100). Like Claire, she privileges the myth of the omnipotent mother. Lola is well aware that her children would like her to be at home with them in the Philippines, even though they are young adults, and she admits they are "a little jealous" (33). She suggests her children have due cause, disclosing she is "closer to Williamo than I am to my grandchildren. Because I see Williamo every day" (33). Lola convinces herself the money she is able to send to her children for their education will make a more substantial impact on their future lives. In this sense, she struggles with some of the same issues Claire does. Simpson presents contradictory information regarding Lola's guilt, and readers are left to intuit for themselves if she is bluffing to placate her employer, being forthright, or deceiving herself in order to maintain peace of mind. Both women are working to define what good mothering is in an abstract sense as well as what good mothering means in their own contexts specifically. Simpson does not dilute either approach and remains empathetic with both women. On the other hand, Lola's temperament is not one that encourages her to fret, which problematically creates a situation in which Claire is perceived by several critics and Amazon reviewers as a whiny and self-absorbed American while Lola is perceived as plucky and happy with her lot in life despite being compelled to migrant for a low-prestige job in the U.S. caring for another woman's child despite having her own.

Claire respects Lola's pragmatism and confidence in her pursuit to earn the funds that will likely yield increased social capital for her children. As a mother, Claire has little confidence and is often perplexed by Lola's natural comfort with William -- a comfort she believes she, as his biological mother, should possess. However, Lola is the first to admit that she is a different caregiver as a nanny than she was as a mother. Having been in both roles, she has the advantage of being able to compare the two. She explains: "Some nannies favor their own and some the other, just like mothers. As a mother, I was stricter with mine. But with William, I am more fair" (37). Lola, interestingly, admits: "When I first came here I was already a Lola and I was a better Lola than a mom. With mine, I had too much pride in them. I wanted them to be more than I was" (354). She verbalizes, in essence, one of the primary tenets of competitive parenting: the wish for one's children to bypass the marker that s/he has achieved.⁶¹ She expresses regret regarding her adherence, too. Simpson suggests, in effect, that mothers may be better at mothering if they, like Lola, are less preoccupied with their children's success and focus instead on their children in the present moment rather than the children they want them to become. Couched in the mouth of an older woman from the global South, the advice becomes instantly sage. Charles accurately points out that Simpson resists the trap of Lola becoming a "Southeast Asian version of the Magical Negro, who exists merely to help some self-absorbed white person reach enlightenment," but the terrain is overly familiar ("Book World"). She carries authority not only as a seasoned mother, but as a woman from a culture that is often depicted as exporting selfless, patient caregivers. Simpson mostly avoids the role of a magical minority figure largely by permitting Lola's story to begin before she meets Claire and to continue after her employment

⁶¹ Another primary tenet concerns the ways in which globalization has increased the difficulty for securing job security within a more dynamic and competitive international workforce.

with Claire ends, which defies one of Matthew W. Hughey's key markers of this figure in "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films."

Lola also claims she is a better caregiver to William than to her own children because "when I had my kids, I had to earn money too" whereas now, as a nanny, she can be "what they call here stay-at-home mom" (354). For Lola, nannying and mothering are nearly synonymous and her statement reveals the slippage that occurs between the two for her. She does not highlight that she is earning money *while* spending time with William. Uncommodified mothering remains a primary focus for Lola, and she conflates the act of mothering with being a mother. Echoing intensive mothering again, she expresses pride regarding the time she spends with William, which she believes is more important than earning additional money and purchasing toys for the boy (or increasing funds she can send home). She states: "But I chose time over money. Lola over robots" (229). As with other choices in the novel, there is an underlying doubt, which she revisits on William's birthday, "Now, the day of the party, I wish I had the gift to open the eyes big" (229). Ironically, she has chosen the opposite with her own children, presumably believing at their stage in life they need money more than time with her. With her labor already commodified, and to an extent her love too, the desire to reify love via material items is difficult to avoid for Lola, particularly when the model is already in place via her biological children. She does not see herself solely as a paid laborer, though, even while recognizing that the emotional labor she provides has been commodified and therefore permits her to continue earning money for her children. Paradoxically, she does not see mothering as a pursuit her own children should strive to achieve, at least not at the exclusion of paid labor. Additionally, when a fellow nanny decides not to pursue medical certification in the U.S., despite having a medical degree from the Philippines, she explains: "We always understood she would

leave us behind, but now that she was not going to be anything, we wanted her to. [...] But Lucy ended up like the rest of us, not doctor, just a mother" (321-22). In this regard, and in her advocacy of formal advanced education for her own children, she sees the role of childcare provider -- whether mother or nanny -- as unsatisfactory.

While nannies are liminal figures by the very nature of the position, Lola is also intrinsically marginal according to Turner, who places "migrant foreigners" in this category (233). Perhaps as a result, Lola recognizes that many employers want both anonymity and emotional support, including Paul and Claire. She still cannot help but feel diminished by this, and states: "They remember I am here and they forget. It is the way they would be in front of a pet" (79). However, she also points out that "everyone has somebody to help" in the Philippines and, at least for her, there was scant personal involvement; the woman she employed was simply "the One in the House" (44). That woman is now her and it is easy to empathize with her employer's perspective. Lola's position as someone unfamiliar with U.S. culture allows her to comment on events around her as an outsider, but her middle-class status fosters a perspective that frames a tendency to compare rather than only experience the differences between the cultures. Far from hypercritical, Lola both envies and rebuffs the extreme wealth of the female employers with whom she comes into contact. She maintains her dignity in part by demeaning the requests for labor she and her peers receive and recognizing the ways in which her employers seek to be infantilized. Lola explains: "Americans enjoy to have done for them what a Filipina would do only for children small small" (101). In the process, she frames herself as capable and powerful with her employers being the converse. Simpson is able to satirize the people and environment through Lola's interaction with Claire's peers, and she reinforces the image of the

pampered LA stay-at-home mother who is loathe to spend time with other women's nannies despite happily having these same women care for their children at play dates.

Claire holds a slightly different place in Lola's opinion since she recognizes Claire's more modest upbringing. "My employer, she did not grow up with a helper. She cannot easily ask" (43). Claire does not threaten her sense of identity. Lola seems more intent on differentiating herself from some of the women who emigrate and have less social capital. She prides herself on knowing basic civilities such as not interrupting someone who is talking on the phone, and points out that some babysitters, "the ones who grew up in the jungle or some swamp without telephone service," talk to the employer anyway (101). Her desire to differentiate herself from the working-class immigrants with little cultural capital is evident. In the Philippines, she was the one who was often respected, while in the U.S. her work often marks her as subordinate. Like Claire, Lola is ambivalent about her position and glides along a spectrum, at times taking deep pride in her work, other times inflicting guilt upon her daughter for the labor she completes, occasionally nearly apologizing for not maintaining her place of social privilege to friends in the Philippines, and even being indignant that some acquaintances from home community would think that she is embarrassed of her job. Her love for William remains unwavering however.

It is clear, at least in the first half of the novel, that Lola sees her work in the U.S. as temporary, and it seems her call to action is straightforward. She hopes to fulfill an exportable version of the American Dream, which as a modern mother from the global South means commodifying her labor in the international market in order to fund her children's education. When the novel opens Lola is clear that she does not plan to stay in the U.S.; "I am not here to settle. America may be the future of the world but it is not the future of Lola," she explains (39). When she considers the impact of winning the lottery, she reaffirms this: "If I win, poof, no more

Lola. That was all I wanted, when I flew over, my hands useless on my lap" (39). Lola claims her sole motivation is material and it is likely a significant aspect of many of her choices, but the last clause again highlights her need to contribute and be productive, particularly maternally.

Throughout the novel, Lola describes her intense desire to be needed. Unlike Claire, she is most comfortable when she is responsible for others. She reveals she left the Philippines in part because she felt there was little else she could do for her children that would have as much impact as financially providing for their schooling, even though she states: "Degrees cannot make them happy. Not guaranteed" (39). Helpless, she asks: "But what else can you give?" (39). Moreover, among her cohort of nannies she quickly becomes the *de facto* leader, with one of her tasks being to organize collections of money whenever one of the other nannies becomes unemployed or has other financial difficulties.

Lola also takes a deep, albeit understated, satisfaction in her relationship with Claire. She boasts that Claire "believes she cannot live without me" (32). This is not a burden either, and she posits, "I was always proud for Claire. Glad to be a part of her achievement" (294). Claire's son, William is at the center of this desire to be needed, though, since he relies on her in a way her own children no longer do. Lola rather quickly slides into wanting to stay with William (as well as Claire and Paul) for at least five years because she believes if she can retain her employment for that duration then William will never forget her. In other words, she will no longer be a liminal figure in his life. Like Claire, Lola's quest is to achieve personal fulfillment, but for Lola this fulfillment is deeply related to carework. The inherent liminality of reconstituting her life in a foreign country permits these patterns to emerge more clearly. Lola believes she can escape the threat of liminality if she can secure a lasting emotional connection with William. In other words, mothering, and the close identification that results from caretaking, is her way of securing

her own identity. The dichotomy Simpson develops between the women -- one from the global South not feeling fulfilled unless she is providing love and care and the other from the global North resisting that role, particularly if it detracts from her professional career -- is troubling in its reliance on cultural stereotypes. Despite this premise, Simpson provides enough interest via characters' nuances, ambivalence, and evolving development, which counteract what could be an otherwise flat portrayal of stock characters.

Lola does not express to Claire the same emotional attachment she relates to William, but she is very much invested in her and to a degree their relationship, too. Her deep feelings (both positive and negative) toward Claire, the amount of time they spend together, and the partnership that forms between them is significant to her. While she initially refused to eat dinner with Claire and William, eventually she comes to feel comfortable with this arrangement; if Paul appeared, however, she would immediately excuse herself. In this way, she manages to maintain a friendship of sorts, liking Claire's company, but still recognizes her status as an outsider, particularly in reference to Claire and Paul's relationship. Claire's lack of confidence and loneliness provide Lola with another reason to be needed, though. She recognizes that Claire and Paul are "little spoiled, like my own kids, but I don't mind" (44). While her demotion from the status she held in the Philippines could be presumed to be difficult, Lola contends, "It is not hard. Not when you have a purpose. And I have five purposes, the youngest twenty-three studying medicine" (43). While she is dislocated physically from her home, she is not adrift emotionally (at this point at least) and feels a sense of responsibility and love for her biological children, as well as William, and even Claire. Paradoxically, it is largely her presence alone that allows her to claim the merit of good mothering with William, but it is the financial support she provides her children back home that permits her to retain her self-image as a dedicated mother. Simpson uses

these complexities -- even inconsistencies -- to develop a nuanced character and generally avoids the stereotypes that are rife in mother-employer/ nanny novels.

By having her own needs met by being needed, Lola offers Claire what she has lacked as a daughter: a woman with whom she can safely merge and complete the process toward autonomous adulthood. (Lola's own needs as a daughter are met to a degree by a woman named Ruth, who had saved her from her confinement at her first job and offers her a home when Claire fires her.) As an adult mother Claire has difficulty merging with her son in part because she did not, when she was a young daughter, interact with her mother in a way that would foster a development of empathy that Chodorow claims is "[c]hief among the conscious outcomes" and inherent in the merging process that occurs between mother and daughter (viii). Lola seemingly is able to do this more proficiently than Claire, which encourages Claire to see Lola as a confident, stable, and successful mother to her biological children. She envies the way she applies these same traits to her work with William, too. Having never had a secure mother figure in her life, Claire looks to Lola to model the work of mothering. She not only respects the fact that Lola has raised good, competent children, but that she has done so, at least from Claire's perspective, without the guilt that she feels so profoundly. Simpson suggests that mothering William is easy for Lola and that she is gratified by the emotional connection they share. While this is a component of carework that many nannies consider pleasurable, Simpson further complicates the tension when Lola must choose between additional income and her attachment to William.

Lola turns down an offer from Helen and Jeff, who are Claire and Paul's friends and for whom she already works on weekends, for seven-day-a-week employment that would nearly double her current daily pay as William's nanny. Since she already works seven days, albeit for

two different families, this position would permit greater stability, increased income, and the opportunity to live in one place all week. Despite the benefits, she is not swayed. When she hesitates at the offer, Helen asks: "Either way, still friends?" to which Lola responds: "More than friends. You are my weekend employers" (71). She notes that Helen and Jeff laugh at her response because "For them this is a joke. For me it is not funny. If I say no, what if the person they get wants seven days" (71). Again, readers witness the blurring of lines between kin, friendship, and commodified care. Inherent in these relationships is a liminality that is not intrinsic to either kin relationships where financial payment is often not present or in labor relationships that do not require the same degree of emotional labor. For Lola to be successful, she must be able to 'world'-travel and determine the best way to remain in Helen's good graces. Additionally, Lola is expected both to care for her young charge but not become too attached while simultaneously remain accountable to her family and consider the wages she earns. These are common demands on nannies, according to Cameron MacDonald. With Helen, Lola's response emphasizes the labor component of her work, but her allegiance to William and the emotional gratification she receives from the relationship trumps even the money she could acquire and send to her family. She opts to stay with the current routine of working for both families, but throughout her tenure with Claire and William she periodically tallies how much more she would have been able to send back to her children had she taken the more lucrative position.

While Lola provides Claire companionship and lessens the physical demands of mothering a small child, this does not fulfill what Claire expects of Paul, as either a father or as a husband, and she feels that the marriage contract continues to be stretched between them. Claire complains to her friend Lil early in the novel that she "didn't get married to have dinner every

night with my kid and a maid" (confessing that the "maid part didn't sound so bad" when speaking with her close confidante) (149). Sharing the emotional rewards and struggles of parenting fifty-fifty remains the ideal for Claire, like many women born in the U.S. after the advent of second wave feminism, but this is an unattainable goal for Paul who remains committed to making a name for himself professionally and sharing the financial rewards that ensue with his wife and child. Lola grants Paul a shield from many of the emotional demands of home life, but this often exasperates Claire. When Paul gets called into work on Christmas, for instance, he attempts to sidestep his wife's request to stay with them by asking Claire: "Why don't you call Lola?" (119). Claire reminds him that she charges double for holidays but, in truth, Claire simply wants Paul to be with her. Lola does come in to relieve Paul and in effect assuages his guilt while still not meeting Claire's needs. In this depiction of events, Simpson taps into a common complaint by mothers in nuclear families, which is that they feel alone in the process of raising her and her spouse's children. It is not hard to find articles on married men's dereliction of reproductive labor in mass media magazines or in academic journals. Claire, then, garners empathy, particularly from readers who can identify with her plight. Lola, in this case, has the temporal availability to become a savior and the impetus to do so as a result of her desire to fund her own children's education. Saviors are rarely identifiable, however, and as a result readers are less inclined to experience empathy for Lola. She is likely respected and perhaps even admired for her selflessness, caring nature, and financial prudence, but these traits do not necessarily win the hearts of readers. She is more prone to readers' altruism when she reveals the insecurity she feels in her relationship with William.

While Paul's career gathers steam, Claire's progresses in fits and starts. Claire questions if some effort is better than none, asserting: "Men had to keep working. But for a woman an

unblemished record is best, even if that record is brief" (109). Perhaps, in other words, it would be best to rest on the laurels she has already attained rather than risk producing less elite work. Yet, she follows with, "There were too many virginities," signifying she does not want to be dismissed like so many other women with children (109). Indeed, many women in Claire's peer group dismiss their prestigious degrees in medicine or law as "backgrounds" that are less important than mothering. This rankles Claire and she is again in the position of attributing her distress to the ambivalence she has about maintaining her career while mothering a small child. Simpson, tangentially, suggests Claire's ambivalence about working is not a result of class, but of cultural stigma. When her symphony is finally performed and receives poor reviews in the *New York Times*, Claire believes the mothers back home will not give her credit for writing a symphony, as Paul suggests, because "*Trying* doesn't register. Almost the opposite," she claims; "They'd consider it a vanity. If I'd made something they admired, they'd forgive me" (209). Her disappointment after her performance is much larger than just professional disgrace because, for Claire, her professional life and mothering cannot be mutually exclusive. Moreover, the weak reviews mean the time away from William has been squandered. Claire points out, "Paul worked twice as many hours as I did, yet I still believed I had a vein of talent. But wasn't *this* important too? I didn't know how to extricate care from time" (82). Time is at the core of intensive mothering, but it is also finite.

As in *The Love Wife*, the issue of time is reified via food when Claire explains: "Paul would have been just as happy with a Happy Meal. Will would have been happier" (83). She then asks: "But if I didn't, who would? And if nobody did, what kind of life would we have?" (83). For Claire it is important she enacts intensive mothering because she believes the actions behind the ideology are best for her son. Symbolically, feeding her son remains fundamental and

food remains a tangible means of measuring her input. As a infant, she could not produce enough milk for him, but now she can control her means of production and the results. It is irrelevant if her husband or her son want what she offers; *she* believes it to be important. As when William was first born, however, Paul and his mother encourage Claire to pursue her professional goals, telling her: "*Go. Work. The boy will be fine,*" but this only irks her more (171). She counters: "As if all those women who stayed with children, for countless centuries, had been fool idiots" (171). Time as a care provider trumps all again as well as she explains, "Will and I had bright flashes of glory, but too many times I'd left him reaching for me, from a babysitter's arms. Am I still a mother? [...]. What parts of the day could I cut out and still give him enough? Paul never asked himself that" (278). Claire, steeped in the cultural ideology that places the onus, she feels, only on her also feels entrapped by the belief system she endorses. Importantly, it is not the ideology she wants to dismantle but her role in it. Fathers, she decides, "loomed above it all, in high trees" (10). "That was my problem all along. I wanted to be a father," she later confesses (238). She, too, wants to experience parenthood from afar. In her opinion, men, including Paul, do not have to struggle with this pressure since their material contributions, which are typically garnered in locations outside of the home, is what defines them as good fathers.

This approach is equally problematic though. While she envies the clarity of Paul's role, which permits him to compartmentalize Claire, William and Lola "until he had time to consider us all," she concludes this would make her son "grow up on the peripheries" (217). Her efforts to avoid this leave her with a constant sense that her son and her music are vying for her resources. "Every time I left, I measured: *For what?*" Claire claims (145). This is not the only barrier, according to Claire, who explains: "I didn't work in a straight line, anyway. I had to sink into parts of myself I didn't know. That took the opposite of force" (217). Not only does she feel there

would be negative consequences for William, but she would not feel comfortable with herself as this type of parent. Claire is unable to eradicate her worry and guilt, which in turn restricts the flight of mental capriciousness required for creativity. Returning to one of her first conversations with Paul, she states, "I supposed you couldn't make someone worry fifty-fifty" (62). Claire recognizes the double bind she is in of wanting to mother in a way that fits the standards she and her peers have identified but also craving autonomy. The difference between her career and Paul's surfaces again when they both feel like they are coming down with colds and Paul privileges his own work above hers to which Claire is left thinking, "I was the one in the house with the insignificant cold" (226). Not only is her role as a mother replaceable due to Lola's relationship with William, but her work as a musician is, to Paul, less demanding, not as time-sensitive, and perhaps most crucially, less lucrative. Her ire reflects, too, that while she may question her interests as a musician and her importance as a mother, she repudiates being diminished by her husband.

Paul remains a placeholder character throughout the novel, and therefore Simpson, who challenges the traditional male model of caregiving with some compassion, seems more empathetic toward Claire. Claire admits she is unhappy with her current situation and claims she "wouldn't have signed the [deal] we live by, which was that I worried about everything" (62). From the female hero's perspective, according to Edwards, "all social contracts have been bargained in bad faith and must be renegotiated" and it is in this way that "the woman hero is an emblem of patriarchal instability and insecurity" (4). Nannies, Simpson suggests, even ones as capable as Lola, can only provide relief from the physical labor of mothering a small child and cannot relieve the emotional labor mothers often find so taxing. Claire realizes that for a slew of reasons she cannot simply opt out of motherhood even if she chooses not to be physically present

for it. Even hiring a nanny for William unnerves her. Claire quips to her friend, Helen, in front of their husbands: "It's weird, isn't it, having this substitute for you every day?" (62). She suggests instead that she and Helen (and perhaps mother-employers in general) should hire male nannies so that men can "[s]ee how they'd like being duplicated" (62). In effect, she would no longer have to learn how to emulate another woman's mothering or deal with her son having what she perceives as two mothers. Both Helen and Jeff reject this idea outright but miss the larger point that Claire is making, namely that she feels dislocated in her own home.

Whether in a conscious effort to reform the social contract of marriage or out of the natural camaraderie that develops between Lola and herself, Claire eventually begins to see Lola as someone who fills the space between spouse and mother and therefore can execute what she needs in both capacities. Together Lola and Claire remodel the kitchen Claire found so unsightly thereby making the physical home more palatable. It is more than just the aesthetics though since the act not only brings them closer together but reifies her commitment to the building that houses her family. Claire acknowledges that while "it would be nice to be by myself in the house sometimes," she also deeply appreciates the fact that Lola "worrie[s] with me about Will," adding: "Without her, I'd be alone" (228). She sees Lola as someone emotionally invested in William in a way that makes sense to her, in a way that supersedes the financial contribution Paul provides. Moreover, she has entered a relationship with Lola in which, like a pre-Oedipal child, she can find relief in mirroring another woman. Consequently, Claire has few qualms about doing what she can materially to secure Lola's allegiance. Lola overhears Claire tell a friend, "I worry about Lola's birthday more than Paul's" (93). Claire, unlike Paul, is willing to do nearly whatever it takes to retain Lola's time and loyalty. She lies to Paul about how much Helen and Jeff give Lola for an annual bonus as well as how much she gives to Lola, increasing the

former and lessening the latter. She resists the guilt that could follow, stating, "Odd that this year, when I'd earned less than before, I considered that check mine to give" (110).⁶² Claire is troubled by her lack of substantial income and debates if she should have a nanny as a result, but her passion for music, lingering doubts as a mother, and fear of being alone encourage her to maintain Lola's employment. A couple years later she gives Lola diamond earrings she would have enjoyed owning herself as well a substantial bonus. Like a child, Claire offers Lola what she desires for herself rather than considering what Lola wants or needs. With an unobstructed view, Paul tells Claire to offer more modest bonuses because "Lola'll send it all home anyway" (198). He reminds Claire, in other words, that her effort to indulge Lola will not work as she intends without recognizing Claire's emotional investment. Claire does not disagree, but she offers the more substantial bonus anyway. Her justification: "I wanted to save her. But Lola refused to be one person" (199).

There are two important aspects revealed in her statement. First, as argued in previous chapters, women in the global North, who in the literary examples provided herein have all been white, struggle with the disparity of resources and opportunities that are available to them and not the women they hire from the global South. In "Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood," Bonnie Thornton Dill discusses this disparity and the ensuing exploitation of lower-income black women by middle-class white women as a barrier to a favorable perception of interracial sisterhood. Several novelists, including Simpson, imply that the exploitation Dill outlines is recognized by middle-class mother-employers, who consequently default to a position of savior in order to assuage their guilt while retaining a position of power. Claire is uncomfortable being an employer and is unaware of the depth of feeling Lola has for

⁶² Lynet Uttal, Linda Hirshman, and MacDonald espouse a model in which both spouses' salaries are tallied together before subtracting the nanny's wage, but that is a cultural shift that does not seem to be widely accepted

William. Vulnerable and attached, Claire senses a lack of power similar to the child in the mother/daughter dyad Chodorow describes. This is not entirely different than the mother-employer protagonists in the previous chapters who rely on the nanny who tends their children for personal emotional support, particularly in *A Gate at the Stairs* and *Lucy*. With that said, Claire also feels a sense of proprietorship over -- if not Lola -- the structure of her employment with their family, just as Sarah and Mariah did in the aforementioned novels. When Paul senses that Claire is increasingly acquiescing to Lola's escalating demands, he tells Claire: "How much of a raise are you proposing? There's got to be some point at which we say no" (172). Claire clandestinely balls a fist and retorts: "Easy for you to say" (172). And, in truth, it is Claire's life (and William's) that will be most impacted. Paul has limited interaction with Lola and, as a result, she remains replaceable. In this way the material gifts reflect another related aspect of the point above, namely the way that power and money can become conflated. Claire admits "[p]ushing Lola seemed more promising than pushing Paul," and she recognizes that this is largely as a result of the labor contract between employer and employee, which is inherently different than the marriage contract (170). Claire, in this way, acknowledges the power differential that plays to her favor and is willing to use her financial holdings to entice Lola's capitulation to her own needs. Claire, however, also sourly notes: "I paid [Lola] extra whenever we had a dinner. It wasn't as if *I* got *extra*" (170). Paying Lola for emotional and physical labor emphasizes the lack of remuneration she receives for the same work and she expresses a bitterness regarding the social contract that permits her labor to be offered and taken for free.

Second, Claire's comment about Lola refusing to be a single person reflects her sense of enmeshment with her. Returning to the theoretical basis Chodorow outlines, Claire has difficulty deciphering the difference between saving Lola and saving herself. In this way she re-

experiences childhood and the enmeshment, limited as it likely was, again, but this time she has the opportunity to recreate the script that left her to feel so isolated as a child. Chodorow argues: "Motherhood may be a (fantasied) attempt to make reparation to a mother's own mother for the injuries she did" (90). In light of this, Claire's burgeoning identification with Lola encourages her to re-enact the helplessness she felt as a child. This helplessness not only affected her sense of identity, as it does for most children in terms of relying on an adult, but in Claire's case centers on the fact that her mother needed assistance that she, particularly as a child, was unable to provide. As an adult, Claire now has the opportunity to 'save' her mother via her effort to provide Lola with material items.

Claire clearly feels indebted to Lola, but when William's prestigious preschool notices issues with the boy's behavior and recommends Claire and Paul fire Lola, Claire concedes (after briefly resisting). Competitive parenting again trumps her own beliefs as a mother and loyalty to Lola. "Paul had made the decision to fire her, but he still went to the Lot. All of a sudden I understood with an awful clarity. He made more money than I did now, and for him that explained everything" (274). Of course, both women's goals were reliant on Paul's income, but more importantly, Claire fails to recognize that she was active in Lola's termination. She prefers to place full onus on Paul. The fact that Simpson implicates Claire fully in this decision, while creating a moment of personal ignorance, is worth highlighting because, as Paul Mandelbaum writes in his *Los Angeles Review of Books* article, "It's possible, since Claire will eventually evolve toward a place of greater worldliness and empathy, that *My Hollywood* means to take her to task over this" (*Whose Hollywood Is It Anyway?*). Claire mourns her relationship and later in the novel compares the separation with Lola to her more recent separation from Paul, noting, "[w]hen Lola left, no one had asked anything. The difference had been profound but private,

like the end of an affair that turned out to be the love of your life" (329).⁶³ Chodorow contends that the merging that occurs between mother and child can incite extreme fear as well as longing; Claire opts to honor the former. According to Hirsch, if Claire is to continue her quest then the "bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, must be broken so that the daughter can become woman" (43). The bond between Claire's biological mother and herself was never sufficient, but in this mirrored relationship between Lola and herself, she can confront what Adrienne Rich calls a "painful estrangement" (226). Claire must now take on the task of making her home a place where her life can flourish independently. She is ready to learn how to mother William and herself.

Claire only realizes how much Lola did for her family after she leaves. She is amazed Lola was able to complete all the necessary tasks while still incorporating time to watch television during the day. She concludes it was possible in part because "in the evening she had me" (276). In other words, they had a partnership -- albeit one structured at least in part around money -- which had permitted both women to achieve goals they felt were important. She recognizes that she contributed to the success she had viewed as exclusively Lola's. Shortly after assuming full responsibility of the home and childcare, Claire experiences the prototypical doubt associated with the hero's journey and determines, "I couldn't live like this. [...] I did everything and felt exhausted by the time I put Will down. Everything but work" (275). Like Hondagneu-Sotelo in chapter one, Claire does not associate reproductive labor with 'real' work. This may result from the lack of income for her labor, but it seems more likely that her reliance on intensive mothering, which contends that women should find mothering fulfilling rather than laborious, has more of an impact. Claire remains ambivalent. After she lists her daily chores, she

⁶³ The ways in which mother-employers in the novels in this research maintain relationships with nannies that mimic - and even replace - their heterosexual marriages is fascinating. I plan to pursue this line of research in the near future.

asks: "Where was the music in this?" (276). With this narrower scope of responsibility, which has been redefined by *and* for her, Claire stifles her passion for music. Limited time forces her to commit to a single pursuit. From this place of resolution, a second outcome emerges. With her newfound autonomy Claire finally gains more confidence as a mother and decides: "Maybe we could live without Lola" (288). When forced to be self-sufficient and separate from the figure she emotionally located as a mother, Claire accepts the challenge and decides she has the wherewithal to mother well, even executing a birthday party that meets her lowered (but still substantial) expectations. She misses Lola, but it is an emotion based on affection rather than need.

Lola, being the one who is rejected, reacts squarely like a jilted lover. She claims she hates Claire, particularly after she finds out that she was not fired due to financial hardship as she was told. She remains shell shocked, stating, "So it is over, no more William and Lola. How can that be?" (257). Ruefully, she concedes she should have taken the more lucrative job offer noting that it is her own family that will suffer the consequences, not Claire's. Lola simultaneously still pines for her time with Claire and William, though, highlighting once again the complicated dynamics innate to the indefinable combination of emotional labor, sincere attachment, and financial remuneration. Like Claire, she enters a new employment situation but decides it is a poor fit. Lola then takes a position with a single mother named Judith whose infant daughter, Laura, requires rigorous care due to developmental delays and, in time, she takes solace in being needed again. Judith works long hours, is rarely home, and seems much less conflicted about outsourcing reproductive labor than Claire. Laura is essentially raised by Lola and prefers her to her mother, but Lola, while deeply attached to the young girl, resists opening herself up in the same way she had with William. Judith seems unthreatened by her daughter's

affection for Lola and names Lola as the girl's guardian in her will. Lola, perhaps more jaded or simply out of sync, does not experience the same chemistry with Judith as she did with Claire.

"Almost six years, Judith and I have lived together; we cooperated, but we are not close. Many times she said things that hurt me. Like in a marriage, those do not go away," she explains; "We made a so-so marriage, like many others, bound for the love of a child" (354). Lola still agrees to sign Judith's will without telling her husband.

Like with William, Lola grows to love Laura and wants to stay with her until she is five. When she meets this milestone Lola moves the finish line to her eighth birthday, hoping if she stays longer the girl will always remember her. According to MacDonald, some nannies, like Lola, find "satisfaction in the belief that they were leaving a lasting legacy with the children in their care" (155). Similarly, the financial milestones that dictated when she would return home are modified as she looks for reasons to postpone leaving. When she begins to dream in English, she decides her return may not be as essential as she once thought. When Judith's boyfriend moves in, however, he proceeds to make demands of Lola that she refuses to accommodate, such as ironing his shirts. She decides she should return to the Philippines so her daughter can have the church wedding she had been delaying and celebrate her fortieth wedding anniversary. She hopes absence will make Judith's proverbial heart grow fonder, but right before she leaves Judith suggests Lola's upcoming trip is a good time to permanently part ways. Lola again feels betrayed, stating, "Now I am stuck. More than five years, almost six I have taken care this girl. Every day did the exercises. Worried over what girls she played with, steered her to the better ones, and helped her see the good in them. I just now realize that I love this" (352). Lola has accepted that mothering fulfills her in a profound way; it is more than just the income. Being needed and taking care of others, along with the monetary compensation she receives and can

give to her children, allows her to feel useful. Despite the emotional and temporal investment she has, Judith still controls the relationship. Lola's only comfort is the aid she has given the girl. "I turned [Judith's] broken baby into a real girl," she explains, but then simultaneously and paradoxically undermines the storybook ending that this transformation suggests, adding bitterly: "now I should go back where I came from, an island of dark millions, all good with kids" (354). Lola decides to return to the Philippines but resists the trope she believes others want her to follow. She states: "Disney did not draw me. And I refuse to dissolve into sky" (354). Liminal does not equal illegitimate, she suggests. Lola insists vehemently that her journey is one that is not only important but one that exists in a sphere that is separate from that of the people for whom she works. Betrayed twice by women she thought were more than just employers, she rejects liminality for something she believes is more stable: her family.

Stability is not hers, however. Back in the Philippines, Lola finds that life there has moved on without her. "In less than one week, I think, this was mistake. There is nothing for me to do here. My kids, they are busy. And I cannot sit still" (355). Her children "have made new habits that are not anymore to them new" and the clubs she had started "do not exist anymore" (355, 356). Her children, while appreciative, do not know how to reintegrate her into their lives, which they had led without her for almost a decade. Her eldest daughter tells her: "Do not worry, I still love you," to which Lola responds, "Still love me. You should love me. What is the 'still'?" (355). Hurt and feeling unneeded, Lola decides: "They only want what I buy for them" (356). She pines for her connection with Laura, but Judith restricts phone conversations between them because hearing Lola's voice upsets the young girl too much. Unwilling to accept being eradicated from Laura's life, Lola sends a bracelet to Claire to give to Laura, believing Claire "still owes me for the chop" (359). When Claire reports back she tells Lola that Laura's new sitter

is incompetent. Claire also overhears, and relays to Lola, Laura's sitter telling someone on the phone that Laura had said, "I love Judith, but Lola is my mother" (359). This disproves one of Lola's earlier dissatisfactions with her position, namely that children "always love the parents more. [...]. No fair. Just true life" (307). This statement reaffirms another primary tenet of intensive mothering, specifically that if a mother chooses to abdicate from the dogma it espouses then she risks losing the relationship that should matter most to her: the one she has with her child(ren). *My Hollywood* suggests that both Judith and Lola have opted for financial security over the emotional security of biological motherhood and in turn relinquish a valuable component of their relationships with their children when, in truth, it does not have to be a zero-sum game. While the amount of time that passes is left undisclosed, seemingly a short time later, Judith's boyfriend moves out and Judith relays to Claire that she wants to employ Lola again. Although her income is not substantial, she is willing to give Lola half of whatever she earns each year. This is all the impetus Claire needs to arrange a trip to the Philippines in order to convince Lola to return.

Like Judith, Claire is now single and free to explore less traditional modes of mothering. Edwards argues that as a result of culture's asymmetric "imposed biological restrictions [...]" the woman hero's quest has searched, more often than the male's for a shaping gesture that might disconnect the worlds of love and reproduction" (237). Claire and Judith accomplish this by severing themselves from their romantic relationships. Edwards also contends that when this has been "accomplished, the character can re-form (and thus reform) the social world to endorse her intuition that love is truly communal and affiliative only when it is freed from a compulsory entanglement with propagation and with sexuality in its narrowest sense" (Edwards 237). This is the path both Claire and Judith pursue. Claire further identifies this re-forming when she is

traveling to the Philippines. Hurling between countries, a flight attendant asks Claire if she is traveling for business or pleasure. She replies: "*Neither really. Or, both, I hope*" (362). This statement attests to the profound ways that the mother-employer relationships in this novel resist categorization and by extension how the women in them struggle to find a place in which they feel centered and valuable. She is between her own home and the home of her proxy mother, recognizing the work and pleasure intrinsically involved, and at a point where the line between want and need has become easier to decipher. Claire's response not only breaks down the aforementioned binaries but affirms Edwards argument, which charges: "Once the heroic figure is free to invent new modes of human intercourse, she moves from the periphery of a hostile society to the center of a new communal form" (236). Judith and Claire both seek to undo their previous decisions regarding Lola's termination. Without being committed to a traditional romantic relationship and the caregiving roles that can be inherent therein Claire and Judith are able to redefine not only mothering, but, by extension, the shape of their lives as women.

Without male partners to influence the structure of their relationships with Lola, both women return to Lola, not as children, but empathetic adults set on establishing a mutually beneficial and egalitarian relationship. Edwards similarly contends that when the female hero upends traditional expectations of women to marry and have children the result leads to the evolution of a "loose network of egalitarian and reciprocal relationships" that replace a "system of opposing dyads" (237). She adds: "A focus on a transforming but inherently open friendship has supplanted the closed complements of death and marriage" (Edwards 237). When Claire tells Lola about Judith's proposition in person, Lola reiterates the title of the opening chapter: "Half-half" (361). It is not the arrangement Claire had envisioned, or likely one Lola would have agreed to when she perceived her place in the U.S. as temporary, but both women find in the

other a place to establish a home. William, who is school full time, does not need Lola's supervision, and Claire, it seems, has settled into her role as a mother and musician, but she proposes that Lola care for her mother who is deteriorating mentally while Laura is at school. Claire sells the advantages to Lola: "So you'll have two salaries. Two rooms. For your weekends. Your offs. You can bring Laura too. I want it to be your American home" (365). Not only does Claire use Lola's word for vacation days indicating a conciliation of sorts, but she again addresses Lola's liminality as an advantage that fulfills Lola's competing interests. Moreover, she does not claim her home as Lola's only home, conceding that Lola has a life of her own. Her ability to think flexibly and, more importantly, with empathy permits this outcome to take shape. Lola will not only have two homes in the U.S., but a third in the Philippines. She remains dislocated, yet paradoxically more rooted. In this way Claire, Judith, and Lola succeed in satisfactorily restructuring traditional family dynamics and consequently achieving a radical reconfiguration of mothering.

As a result of Lola's years as a nanny, it is no longer financially imperative that she continues working, but she still wishes to return to the U.S. and recognizes the ways that working fulfills her. With this in mind, she tells Claire, "I will go for Laura if I am needed" (365). Her answer couches her residual anger toward Claire and Judith for dismissing her. Lola's children are upset and argue: "We are five here. Why you are going back for one?" (366). The first time she left the Philippines was for them, but this time it is for herself. She is proud of what she accomplished for her own children, but her purpose has changed. "Laura is young. Maybe she will still need her Lola," she explains (366). Ultimately, while her choice is one based upon the logic of intensive mothering it also fulfills her own desires. Moreover, she has restructured this ideology to include children who are not her own and is at peace with the commodification

of her emotional labor. According to Lola, "I have never left this girl -- not like my kids. [...] I get from her that I cannot live without" (355). This relationship remains pure in a way that her relationship with her own children has not.

It is important to recognize that Lola's relationship with her husband has changed as well. When Laura had told her that she believes Lola and Bong Bong are like Ulysses and Penelope from *The Odyssey*, Lola tells the girl: "Once upon a time, the Trojan War maybe, the men went out. But in our life, I was the one who could earn. When I signed up to be a mother, it was already decided. And I was success!" (357). Gender roles, she suggests, are not rigid or immutable and the modern-day quest is one that requires comfort with transition. On this new journey, her decision is not preordained, however, and she recognizes the inherent problem therein. Bong Bong and her "were fine before," Lola explains, adding, "We had to be. My working here was necessary, for more important things than our lives. Now we have the American problem of choice" (347). But even while she was still in the U.S. she had recognized that her marriage was dissolving. He evidently felt the same. Despite remaining faithful throughout nearly her entire tenure in the U.S., he initiated an affair shortly before Lola returned believing she was not going to come back. Lola feels Bong Bong is happier with the new woman and encourages him to continue the relationship. She is happier with the children she tends and decides to "give Bong Bong to the lady who loves him" (366). She recognizes that she opens him up in a way she never could, and adds: "It is okay; because I had my love, too, mine not the shape of romance. But I am old enough to understand it is the same as big, the same as true. And now I love people in two places" (366). Lola chooses the life she has created with Claire and William, Judith and Laura. She has reconciled her decision, but still retains a sense of liminality. For her, this is now its own form of stasis. "I am returned to die on American soil or maybe, who

knows, some-a-day I will die in the sky, between" (369). These are the closing lines to the novel, affirming once again the liminality that refuses resolution.

Regardless of Lola's choice, Claire, too, has found a way to center herself, particularly as a mother and as a musician. She is more productive as a musician and informs Lola she is collaborating with a chamber group that will perform her music. Her relationship with Paul remains ambiguous; they live separately but talk every day and even go out on what Paul openly tells her is a date. When he apologizes for his past mistakes, he states: "We were something" (341). Claire agrees, but confesses: "I'm still trying to figure out what" (341). There remains both benefits and disadvantages to the new layout of her life. First, money has become more of a concern despite working more, but, despite this, "it felt easier to work," which Claire finds comforting (340). Second, social judgment remains an issue. Still astute to how she is perceived by her fellow mothers, Claire is irritated by a woman who continually asks if she is living in her same house and questions if she would be subject to the same query if she were still married. Years pass and the woman continues to ask the same question. The house that initially represented her insufficient rootedness becomes a place she now defends.

Simpson presents two very ordinary female heroes in *My Hollywood*, both of whom are notable not for quests that change the course of a nation or even a culture via brief moments of breathtaking physicality but their quiet resistance to entrenched definitions of mothering. Edwards explains in a passage Claire would likely appreciate: "Heroes because of their power to improvise rather than accept, they write the script we read, compose the tune the rest of us can only beat out in assigned rhythms to the double bar" (189). This is the quest of many literary female heroes. In the mother-employer/nanny relationship both women are often redefining mothering as well as paid labor. In this novel, both Claire and Lola's marriages dissolve in part as

a result of their individual quests. Early in the novel, Lola had warned a younger nanny in her cohort, "Mary Poppins, she will never have husband," highlighting the difficulty of maintaining two sets of emotional attachments (157). Like other aspects of the novel, this is a troubling philosophy, but her point does remain true to Edwards' contention that female heroes often reconfigure traditional heteronormative relationships. It is unclear why Judith's relationship dissolves, although this information would be an interesting addition to the novel because, as it stands, readers are uncertain if she wants Lola to return out of necessity or because she tires of the pressure her boyfriend had applied. Like Claire, Judith was mothered in direct ways by Lola. Lola tended her postpartum, sacrificed income to help her secure a male romantic partner, and generally encourages her success. Simpson does not develop Judith's character very deeply and readers, therefore, know much less about her. It is unclear if Chodorow's theoretical work would have as much bearing on the dynamic Simpson portrays here. Simpson does suggest via this second relationship that Claire is not an anomaly.

As cited in the first chapter, there remains heated public conversation about whether women can "have it all," which in this context means a career, marriage, and children. Simpson suggests the answer is no, although the women in the novel do not seem particularly distressed by the dissolution of their romantic relationships and seem more focused on self-definition and communal, bilateral support. "The conventional old plots of heterosexual seduction and betrayal play a minimal role in contemporary women's fiction" according to Gardiner, and consequently, "Women in recent novels do not fear loss of their lovers, nor do they seriously resent male infidelity" (Gardiner "Female Identity" 360). With only one novel left to discuss, it should be clear that this statement holds considerable weight in the collection of novels presented heretofore, and it will prove interesting to follow up on the repercussions of this observation as

well as the ways in which nannies both affect this outcome and are affected by this dynamic. Claire, Lola, and Judith rebel against the traditional marriage plot as well as the social contract which informs it. It is in these "loose network[s] of egalitarian and reciprocal relationships" that Edwards references that these women are able to assemble a version of the "fifty-fifty" dynamic of parenting that Claire opens the novel describing and Judith and Lola agree to at the conclusion. Claire and Lola also forge this bond as a result of their willingness to reject traditional notions of femininity and mothering. Power differentials remain, but their willingness to operate as liminal *personae* locates them in a place in which notions of femininity, motherhood, and collaboration can be re-formed. The women's ability to acquiesce to the discomfort of liminality permits an environment in which both women's needs are ultimately met, even if they had to weather disagreements, ambivalence, and self-doubt along the way. The ending Simpson provides is not the perfect Hollywood ending, but as the title suggests, it is an ending that satisfies Lola and Claire. The title belongs equally to them both.

***All the Finest Girls* by Alexandra Styron**

In the previous chapter two novels that included daughters were explicated. *The Help*, which features a daughter who has a close relationship with her nanny, and *The Love Wife*, which highlights the ways in which children may be manipulated as part of the emotional rivalries between adult women. The novel explicated earlier in this chapter features a mother-employer who is both a mother and daughter as well as a nanny who mothers her biological children, the children she has been hired to tend, as well as the mother-employers who pay her salary. The final novel to be discussed at length in this project focuses on a daughter again. Alexandra Styron (daughter of William Styron) focuses on the impact of a Caribbean woman's choice to

care for Adelaide (Addy) Kane Abraham, a young girl in Connecticut who is the only daughter of self-involved, well-to-do parents. Addy is on a quest to resolve the problematic relationship she has with her mother; the nanny who helped raise her; and her nanny's children, whom she views as adversaries. Unlike the previous novels, *All the Finest Girls* proffers the biological children of the nanny textual space and voices of their own. While the space is still restricted to only a small portion of the novel, this incorporation of polyvocality substantiates my hypothesis that there has been movement toward increased richness and complexity. Like previous novels in this work, the chapters in *All the Finest Girls* alternate, but it is not the narrator that shifts; instead the temporal location of a single narrator changes. Half of the chapters are told by Addy as a young girl and the other half by Addy as an adult.

As a child, Addy is a troubled girl. Although Styron hints at mental illness, readers are not privy to confirmation of this other than one doctor's opinion of general anxiety disorder, which does not seem to address the full scope of her issues. At thirty-two, Addy is very much still trying to find her place in the world. She is an art restorer who does not create her own pieces but tries above all else "not to leave my mark" (162). She claims when she had done her "finest work, [she] was invisible" (162). Like Claire, she finds deep solace in her work. She explains: "I had always relied on the museum as a place where I could disappear. I felt cradled and cosseted there, as though the vast scope of the place could minimize, annihilate my anxieties and fears" (107). But unlike Claire, she is not married (or involved with anyone) nor does she have children. Both are points she bristles at when raised by those around her, which happens more often than she would like. Edwards argues that the female hero escapes the home in order to dismantle the uneasy conjoining of marriage and mothering with the home, but this is not Addy's quest. As the daughter of a woman who experiences her own ambivalence about

mothering, Addy's journey is one designed to reconcile what it means to have a mother and to find a home.

Similar to *Men and Angels*, *Lucy*, and *The Love Wife*, the novel opens with a primary character making a voyage, and like *Lucy* Addy travels between the Northeast and the Caribbean during winter when the climate shift is just one more stark reminder of how different the two worlds are. As she exits the airport terminal in St. Clair, Addy begins her story: "I've never been much of a traveler, particularly to places under the sun's fiercest gaze" (3). She describes the sun not as a welcome relief from the cold she left behind but fierce and threatening, which highlights her ambivalence about the knowledge she seeks. Her narrative, even before she leaves, suggests she experiences a feeling of being neither here nor there, a sense of being unmoored from where she is located. She had recently contracted a flu-like virus that left her feeling "as though someone or something were always at my back. I got better, but I wasn't the same" (8). This virus comes after she makes an error she feels is substantial at work and runs into her father, who had "made a name for himself by anticipating the chaos and violence of the sixties" and spent a fair amount of Addy's childhood drinking too much and instigating arguments with those around him, partly by belittling his wife/Addy's actress mother, Barbara (101). Her father later left her mother (and her) for a student in one of his college classes; Addy still feels acrimonious toward him. After returning home, her body is "warming under the blaze of the coming fever" and she replays the encounter she had with her father "like a film editor" (99). Again, with knowledge comes heat, even when she is liminally present in her life -- a remote observer charged with judging the content.

After she returns from her "odyssey" of illness, Addy explains that her "encounter with my father ran a viral course through me" (99). Her body has purged itself of the animosity by

splicing apart the film footage and separating herself from the child who suffered under her father's acerbic behavior. After being ill, she becomes an adult daughter who can potentially forge a renewed relationship with him. She is a different person in other ways too, though. "I didn't feel like me at all, but as though I'd been kidnapped from myself and dropped at an unmarked crossroads with no identification and no map," Addy explains (107). Even the museum, which gave her the sense of being "cradled and cosseted," now seemed like "alien terrain" (107). Addy improves physically, but she "blank[s] out" twice "in the space of a month," as she had when she was younger (18). She may have confronted her "anger and vitriol" for her father but not her mother (99). It is this first 'trip' that creates such deep confusion in Addy that when she receives the literal call (via telephone) about Lou's death she views it as a call to action. Recognizing how imperative this trip is, Addy admits she pressed herself on Marva, Lou's sister, and "spoke of my grief and expressed my condolences until she was nearly forced to make me an invitation" (108). Addy tells her supervisor there was a death in her family and must travel to the funeral. She claims her supervisor "figured I was heading toward some place for deep psychiatric evaluation or intensive cure" (108). If that's "what she thought, then she wasn't entirely wrong," Addy adds, because she was indeed "making a bid for self-preservation, backing out like a mole from my tunnel of darkness" (108). With images that echo an infant's delivery, Styron's point clear: a rebirth is underway.

Like the novels discussed previously, Addy is a neophyte world/'world'-traveler who recognizes she is navigating a terrain that may prove difficult. While she had visited the Caribbean as a child, Addy admits she and her parents "would travel directly from the airport to our hotel, where we remained for most of our stay" rather than try to become involved in the daily routines in less tourist-driven areas of the island (19). Addy remains the prototypical

stranger in a strange land and views both Lou's family and her native island from a vantage point of a curious outsider. Her physical location in St. Claire, which at one point is identified as at "the kitchen's threshold," reifies her mental state (20). In other words, she must resolve the liminal position she holds in the relationships she has with her mother, Lou, and womanhood. Barbara, did not fulfill a traditional role of domesticity and Styron suggests that some of her impetus to work far afield was to avoid Addy's emotional difficulties. Addy, like Clair, must now try to make peace with her relationship with her mother and part of that is determining what Lou means to her. Lou's death is the impetus for re-examining the ways in which her presence permitted her to remain estranged from Barbara. Once on St. Clair, where Lou's family still resides, Addy questions her motives, feeling unsure of how she fits in and sensing she may not fit in at all. This sense of dislocation needs to be resolved in order to achieve resolution at home.

Unlike past vacations to the island, Addy's primary interactions are now deeply personal as she shares Lou's family's grief while also searching for a way to ascertain how she fits into a family she considers to be an extension of her own due to, what she believes, is her intimate knowledge of Lou and her sons. Her time with Lou has created a situation in which she knows many intimate details about the woman's life as well as her family, but not only has she never met them but her information is bracketed, ending when Lou left her position with Addy's family. Therefore, when Addy first meets Derek, one of Lou's two boys who had been left behind when Lou came to the U.S., Addy is taken aback by the "adult face to go with the name I'd once worried like a rosary" (5). She explains she had "imagined meeting Lou's boys a hundred times, had fashioned them with thoughts and personalities as if clothing imaginary dolls," but none of these "fantasies had resembled this sudden, brittle truth" (5). The truth is that the physical reality of Lou, her family, and St. Clair all conflict with the imagined world she had

constructed while in Lou's care and in the years that followed. Her journey therefore becomes one in which she must reassemble a place she had constructed independent of the reality that exists. This requires a willingness to 'world'-travel since she must now learn to assimilate the viewpoints of those around her; people who had once been little more than play things upon which she could project her feelings and desires.

As a child, Addy assembled a world for Lou that would not threaten her relationship with the woman who was the only reliable adult in her life. Lou's children, and more largely her life on St. Clair, were the most prominent threats. Addy, who had seen photos of Lou's children on her nanny's bedroom walls, explains from her younger self's perspective the deep jealousy she felt for the boys who shared a biological bond with the woman she loved so deeply. Addy would "kneel down before the pictures" (suggesting at once piety, reverence, and humility) and build a world in which Philip, who is slightly older, "plays with me anyway" and Derek is her "best friend" (132). When Lou informs her that there are no pine trees on St. Clair, Addy decides she will bring the boys a tree, thereby simultaneously becoming a benefactress who provides what the boys do not have and ingratiating herself to win their favor. In another fantasy Derek saves her from a wood demon. When she doodles the images of her fanaticized trip, she draws herself in a "dress, my skin a shade of brown darker than my own" (132). In her playscape, she is still aware of the physical differences that exist between them, but her wish is to narrow that gap, even if it is by the small act of subtly darkening her skin to more closely resemble Derek, Philip, and Lou, who was the "darkest person" she had ever seen (14). In these fantasies, Addy simultaneously tries to play up her femininity, seeing the boys as sexual entities whom she can introduce to the wider world; platonic playmates who can relieve her from her solitude and loneliness; and siblings who can save her from her own inattentive parents.

Addy cleaves strong emotions to these drawings. After one drawing of Derek does not turn out as she had hoped, Addy screeches to Lou that she hates him until her throat hurts. She knows, even as a child, that "'It' is what I meant, not 'him'," but the slip exposes her emotional vulnerability (133). Moreover, Lou, who is not typically drawn into Addy's outbursts, fails to reframe the situation for Addy but instead yells at her (for the first time), "I'm sick of it! Yah hear me? Yah cyaant hate Derek, and yah cyaant love him neither. Yah don't even know him!" (133). Lou's anger is a strong response to Addy's possessiveness of her sons and reflects her self-directed anger that results from her fear that she too does not really know her son due to the amount of time she has been away from him.

On St. Clair, Addy is again insecure about her relationship with Lou when she realizes that despite the fact that she had robust fantasies about Derek and Philip, they know little about her and what they do know does not reflect well upon her. While the novel gives no unequivocal confirmation that Lou either loved or disliked Addy, a comment by Lou's aging father sheds some light on Lou's possible ambivalence when he states, "She's not what me visioning, Minerva. I cyaant believe a girl so frail woulda done de tings yah say" (170). Addy knows it is Lou who had helped construct their image of her and therefore when Philip, the more lighthearted son, jocularly asks, "Hey, Connecticut. [...] Is it true you were ... sort of crazy? When you were little?" Addy confesses that his "words stabbed the woolly fuzz of my thoughts" (62). Unwilling to empathize with the effort it takes to correct previous, unflattering, misconceptions, Addy feels betrayed, not by Lou's description of her to her sons, as one would presume but that Philip unknowingly erased the "casual flirtation" she felt had been transpiring despite Philip being married with a child on the way. Her "anger and embarrassment" take shape into the thought: "Fuck you [...]. I don't need your charity. And I don't want your friendship,

either" (63). Her inability to empathize with him leaves her unable to fathom that he also likely sees her as a threat to the exclusive relationship he desired to have with his mother. It is interesting, too, that while she had earlier constructed herself as the benefactress, she now references a reversal of this more typical dynamic in which the less materially secure person is the one who accuses the employer of false benevolence. Adrift and dislocated, the redistribution of power constructs a situation in which Addy is the one who feels most vulnerable.

Addy realizes she was a different sort of child. She knew her mother was overwhelmed by the task of parenting her and had her own ambitions in acting. She played that to her advantage, often wielding the control in their relationship even when she was quite young. Addy describes her inability to control her rages in several passages and frequently depicts a hallucinated cat that visits when she is especially frightened or anxious.⁶⁴ Lou is the only person who provides her with enough solace and stability that even her imaginary cat goes into hiding. Addy describes the "quiet she leaves" as one that can "soothe me like a language all its own" (15). In this pre-verbal/pre-Oedipal scene, Addy can be calmed. In return for this, Lou earns her complete devotion -- devotion that is developed for her rather than simply shared with her. As a child Addy claims a visit to a young neighbor who had recently lost his mother to cancer. Rather than inciting fear or sadness, the visit spurs her to "envy the uninterrupted quiet of this motherless house" (13). As an adult, however, she claims she "wished [Lou] were there, to calm me" (63). What begins as a wish to not have a mother morphs into a desire to have Lou be her mother. This does not mean that her relationship with Lou allowed her to replace one woman with another or that Lou recognizes the ways in which Addy venerates her.

⁶⁴Monahan mentions in her analysis of *Jane Eyre* that the novel opens with "the mad cat" who chooses to no longer "endure the blow," which creates interesting parallels with Styron's own work (qtd in Monahan 593). Moreover, Chodorow's discussion of the mother as an external ego suggests that in these instances Addy's mother's inability to act as an external ego led to Addy's adoption of an imaginary substitute.

Lou, too, recognizes that part of what makes her position with Addy distinct is that she is not the girl's mother. For instance, when Addy refuses to brush her hair for weeks on end, much to her mother's chagrin, Lou explains: "A child's always got the power to break her mumma's heart. But yah cyaant break mine; not yet, Addy" (67). Under this theory, Addy has significantly less power with Lou than she does with her own mother, who does not tolerate these power struggles well, often choosing to placate Addy or rationalize away the disturbances. However, her mother's choice to opt out of the battle almost entirely (which, to be clear, is not automatic when childcare is outsourced) by delegating the work to a nanny, hurts Addy. Moreover, Addy seems to recognize, likely correctly, that her mother feels she has failed in certain regards of mothering, and, as a result, Addy is able to use Lou as a means of exacting revenge on her mother.

Despite her flash of anger at Philip for rebuffing her, Addy continues to spend time with both of the brothers. Her status with them remains imprecise, which is shown most clearly in the ways in which she considers the men to be both brothers and potential sexual partners. After Addy, who rarely drinks, consumes three beers she heads out with Philip and Derek and learns that Lou's brother in London will not attend the funeral. Like a young child, Addy quickly brags that she made the trip despite being almost as far. In doing so, Addy conflates physical travel with emotional connection. Her overt attempt for acceptance quickly becomes awkward as the passage below demonstrates. While lengthy, it is worth keeping intact.

"Your mom was so great," I said wedging myself between them and venturing a hand on Derek's back. It was obvious to me all of a sudden that I hadn't impressed upon him how I really felt. Knowing that Lou was truly loved would give Derek comfort, ease his anger and pain.

"Really," I continued, "she was the best. God I miss her. Have missed her. All these years."

I looked at Philip, whose mouth was set in a frozen grin. Maybe I'd been wrong about Philip. He wasn't so bad after all.

"You know what she used to call me? Her white daughter. *You my white daughter! Fah true you are!* She used to say it just like that. And I'd call her my black mother."

Derek gave me a quizzical look. Did that sound strange?

"Not in front of other people," I clarified. "Just when we were alone."

Finally, walking between Derek and Philip, I felt I belonged. Lou had, after all, been a mother to me too. She loved me. But more than that, she *saw* me, like no one else had ever done. Lou looked beneath that tangled disaster of a little girl and found someone loveable. And I, because I was special in her eyes, saw *her*. I looked beyond Lou's skin color, her accent, everything that made her different. My parents pretended to, but they were just going through the motions. *I* was the one who really got it. For me, there were no distinctions. These men and I were siblings, truly, united at last. We were meant to grieve together. That's why I was there. (137-38)

Readers are privy to Addy's social awkwardness, plaintive desire to be accepted, and her self-described mutually loving relationship with Lou. Addy suggests that a sense of empathy existed between Lou and herself, even as Derek and Philip (and readers) see this as mostly inaccurate. She sees herself as enmeshed enough to cross racial boundaries in a way Derek and Paul perceive as inappropriate. Addy's efforts are designed to have Derek and Paul see her, know her, and provide them with what she would want if they were her rather than being rooted in 'world'-traveling and a sense of empathy that would allow her to see what they desire.

Ironically, in the process of trying to strengthen what she believes is a sibling bond, she increases the acrimony they feel for her -- particularly Derek. The brothers are not amenable to her unwarranted suggestion that they are family, but, at this juncture, neither man calls Addy out on what they perceive as a white women's racist, self-serving depiction of their mother via her pointed reference to the color of her skin and dialect in way that is not only possessive but casts Addy as benevolent. Addy remains oblivious to how Derek and Philip perceive her statements even as she congratulates herself for being a more open-minded person than either of her parents. She is painfully unempathetic despite the physical journey she undertakes. Readers of this passage likely align with Derek and Philip, who are put off by Addy's perception of her relationship with Lou, while still empathizing with Addy's misguided statements and bumbling efforts to connect. Philip takes control of the conversation and changes the topic to prevent Derek's ire by talking about a political speech their father, who was used as a political pawn due to his light complexion and strikingly good looks, had given when they were together on St. Clair. Derek, who was only three at the time, does not remember the event and Philip describes the day to him. Interestingly, when he tries to remember the celebrity their mother had met that evening, it is Addy who recalls the name because Lou had hung a signed photo of the man in her bedroom in the Abrahams' house. Addy feels a "flush of pride," but the men are not impressed (142). Throughout this exchange, Styron permits Addy to humiliate herself while Philip tries to prevent her from further irritating Derek. Addy is not malevolent, though, and, as a result, she incurs readers' good faith in her. Readers who feel they, too, are still learning to navigate basic aspects of developing relationships with people of differing racial backgrounds are likely to empathize with her errors, but, for others, Addy's refusal to 'world'-travel and adjust to a perspective that is not endowed with white privilege may limit their compassion.

Lest readers overlook it, Addy later censures herself for ruining any chance of making her "mark with Lou's sons" by acting like "a drunken boob," a word that is both oddly out of date, benign, and juvenile (158). It is clear their approval of her matters. While her initial regret is appropriate, she intensifies as she proceeds: "The bottom line was never simpler to me than at that moment. God, I was sick of myself" (158). It is not clear why she castigates herself so harshly, but she seeks reformation. Styron showcases Addy's effort to develop a sense of self that stretches beyond her current strictures, but her rationale for creating a character who self-denigrates herself so profoundly is less clear. Styron constructs an interesting point, however; Addy does in fact know, or in some instances is simply better at recalling, certain aspects of Lou's life that her sons cannot. This complexity reflects the ways in which Addy is "betwixt and between" family membership. While Derek and Philip are invested in minimizing the connection between Addy and their mother, and Derek specifically seeks resolution to the anger he feels for being abandoned, Addy sees Lou's family as a beacon that can guide her home and offer her a sense of belonging. This yields a situation in which Derek and Philip want to forget the years Lou was in Connecticut while Addy wants to highlight how important those years have been for her. Travel, in this case, whether it is desired or not, spawns interaction that would otherwise not occur. This includes both Lou's decision to travel to the U.S. and Addy's decision to travel to St. Clair. As a result of both women's physical alterations, emotional dislocations and relocations result.

Had Lou left solely for monetary reasons, perhaps both her sons and Addy could categorize the relationship differently, but, in truth, Lou was looking for an escape as much as she was looking for income. In this way, Styron deviates from the poverty-stricken, pitiful female immigrant from the global South. While money was likely a factor, Lou was primarily

prompted to leave St. Clair in order to escape a troubled relationship with Errol, Derek and Philip's father. Marva reveals the full details of this to Addy while the two women travel together on a bus to Eldertown, a nearby village. When she tells the whole story, Addy has her first epiphany:

Hearing her talk was a little like traveling somewhere you've only known from a picture postcard. The happy people aren't as carefree as they look, the sun rarely sets so brilliantly, the shining palace turns out to be a shambling relic held together with cheap mortar and tin. And, standing perception on its ear, neither is the distant vista what it appeared in two dimensions. The undistinguished, fuzzy background turns out to be the gateway to an entire, unimaginable ecosystem. Ultimately, Marva's version illuminated for me, unrefracted, a vast landscape that had been wholly, stubbornly obscured. (183)

It is Marva then who finally rubs away the too-smooth sections of veneer that coat Addy's memories of childhood, thus permitting Addy to re-see the additional contours of the woman she previously viewed only in the more limited realm of her childhood home in Connecticut. Addy admits she "hadn't ever considered the possible reality of Lou's life, *why* she was apart from her children and so far from home, stunned and shamed me" (163). She has little choice but to acknowledge the additional facets of Lou's life that had remained obscured previously.

Perception, she suggests, is just that; 'world'-travel requires more effort and empathy often chases right after. Here, away from the comfort of home, Addy's new location insistently presses upon her. While she claims a day after being in St. Clair that "nothing held its center," it is this decentering that allows her to accommodate the information required to become an autonomous adult and, as a direct effect, recognize the ways in which Lou was an entirely separate being from her.

Because Lou left when Addy was still young she never had the opportunity to learn about Lou in the way that she did her parents, whose relationship was forced to evolve over time. Addy, who is often a psychologically aware narrator, offers, "I'd maintained a childish but convenient philosophy of absolutes: Some people got love right; others did not and never would. The Abrahams were most decidedly the latter sort, love handicapped. Lou, however, without seeming too corny, *was* love" (163). This is a viewpoint that few adults can maintain about another individual, but which defines the peaceful enmeshment Chodorow describes between mother and daughter. As an adult, Addy never experienced the maturation of her relationship with Lou and therefore never abandoned her childlike devotion; it was too threatening to do so and daily experience did not mandate it. On Addy's jaunt within a journey, deeper truths are revealed, and Styron endorses the cultural belief that physical travel will be rewarded with discovery and insight. Earlier, in fact, Addy attests to this when she explains that because she "hadn't traveled anywhere in years" she had encouraged a sense that she had "mastered the chaos that had once ruled my life and built a little citadel against its possible return. No one came in, nothing went out" (162). Physical stasis, she suggests, yields mental stasis, with the inverse being valid too. Addy's journey fosters an uncomfortable, but necessary, disequilibrium. As she hears Marva's story, Addy explains: "We were hurtling suddenly, much too quickly, toward the hustle and life of our destination" (193). The destination, of course, is both literal and figurative.

Lou could not remain Addy's talisman and the journey she embarks on, which takes her away from her home and the familiarity of routine, was inevitably going to alter her understanding of this valuable relationship, Styron suggests. Addy is forced to reconsider what her relationship with Lou meant (and means) to her while confronting the fact that Lou likely did not share the same sentiment for her. She is essentially forced to reconstruct a new meaning of

this important relationship for herself and, in the process, sees Lou's 'world' for perhaps the first time as a result of the information Marva, and other members of the family, shares with her. Had Addy not traveled to Lou's family's physical location, this information would not have been conveyed. This is a place and perspective that stands nearly entirely separate and is removed from her and yet if she assimilates this new information she will be better equipped to resolve the issues that 'infect' her. While promising in some respects, this depiction relies on the aforementioned classist limitations of travel. Addy had the financial and temporal resources to expend that would allow the journey to be possible and while Styron never suggests that Addy's material wealth 'bought' the insight she acquires, it is not difficult to interject this perspective upon the novel. On a different level, however, Styron, as a writer, encourages her readers to embark on Addy's journey alongside her and interrogate the ways in which Addy's situation may mirror their own personal life experiences. This also invites readers to read empathically.

When the women arrive in Eldertown, Addy wanders the market with Marva in a scene reminiscent of Joyce's "Araby"; she even calls it a "bazaar" (199). Rather than participate, she withdraws, "feeling strange and distracted" because the "story Marva had told me on the bus shook my brain so that everything inside it was suddenly awry" (199). At this moment, she sees a cruise ship docked -- a connection to the world she left behind -- and leaves Marva. As she inspects both the ship that is "[i]nsanely out of scale with the town" and the Lilliputian people who disembark like a "rainbow-colored army of ants," she admits to being "transfixed" (199). Styron is insistent that Addy is not mentally grounded, and I would argue that this proves critical in her willingness to examine what she sees in a way that is new and porous. The travelers she observes are not unlike her, or who she was; the contrasts are becoming evident, to Addy at least. She does not see herself as similar to them, describing a "state-of-the-art grotesquery" that "filled

me with crazy longing" (200). She asks: "Why was I not a girl on a cruise?" since she too, or at least a part of her, wants to "loung[e] on one of the countless white deck chairs that lined up in perfect sepulchral rows (as though in paradise you did not die but napped and tanned for eternity)" (200). She sees the allure of being "at sea, going nowhere, deciding between activities, asking the purser for an extra pillow" and recognizes that with the "slightest turn of the dial, I could be that: a white tourist on vacation who didn't give a rat's ass about the faceless blur of black people whose water I was befouling with my tons of bilge and gasoline" (200). In this passage she describes food she has never tasted and physical activities she has never performed. She, too, could be another "pink American grooving on the incredible scenery and enjoying the hell out of myself. *Out* of myself. That was the operative phrase" (200). This form of travel is entirely different than the journey she is on, and she envies the mental ease and physical pampering that it permits.

Styron's ship is unmistakably liminal; a place in which a person does not really live, but does not die either; a place at sea in which one is "going nowhere" and never reaches one's destination. In this way, Styron suggests that world-travel and 'world'-travel can both be liminal experiences, but that Addy's journey, which aligns with the latter, is more arduous. This alternate form of travel offers her something else that is valuable: a chance to get out of herself, according to Addy. As mentioned, Addy is "sick of herself," and this artificial travel experience offers escapism without the work or, it seems, the growth. Something about it still draws her in, however, and she questions not only the ethical implications of tourist-centered travel that permits this counterfeit travel experience but struggles to explain why she cannot allow herself to enjoy this less demanding approach. She remains dislocated, unable to see the rewards that her work will yield. While white, educated, and financially secure, she does not seek membership

with the group of cruise passengers, deciding they are not her peers, but she is also not accepted by Lou's family as kin, which she also increasingly realizes she has no right to claim. She remains betwixt and between, adrift.

Pulled out of her thoughts by the sight of Marva, Addy returns to the market, but here too she is uncomfortable. Marva stands by a table that is so "pungent" Addy believes "it might asphyxiate" her (200). What she takes in, in other words, is overwhelming and potentially toxic. She describes the black flies that whizz by her face, landing on her "sweaty brow," attracted to the death of her former perspective. On her journey, one does not nap, as the tourists on the boat do; the stakes are too high. Marva and the shoplady laugh when Addy gags at the smell of a fish, mocking her sensitivity. She recoils out of the shade of Marva's umbrella "back under the sun's merciless interrogation and looked again toward the ocean liner and the town it dwarfed" (201). Pain privately experienced and brought on by her own agency is better. Squinting, she tries to discern "what lay in the boat's shadow" (201). She is drawn to identify the underbelly of the limited perspective of the global North that offers blissful ignorance. She cannot rest in the shadow either, and the "sickening smells of the market" drive her away (201). She remains betwixt and between and waits to pass out. Instead, however, her heart slows and she realizes: "I wasn't being hit by a wave of anxiety but something perhaps the inverse of it. I was having a calm attack. My senses, all of them, were painfully acute, crystalline" (202). Styron's description of the physicality of the experience is easily immersive, even uncomfortable, and Addy mirrors this. Her frenetically tuned awareness is unwelcome, and she longs for what she had earlier dreaded, the "eclipse of consciousness" (202). Addy realizes, however, that fainting, while previously a "useful escape hatch," would no longer permit entrée. Instead, she is "left out in a

white-hot blaze" (202). Ambivalent as she is, knowledge is before her, waiting, unwilling to be ignored but still unattainable.

Addy's situation is not unique since self-understanding can often dovetail with liminality. Turner speaks directly to the importance of knowledge to liminal *personae* when he writes: "To be brought fully into the light is the work of another phase of liminality: that of imageless thought, conceptualization at various degrees of abstractness, deduction both informal and formal, and inductive generalization" (Turner *DF&M* 51). Clearly, Addy does not welcome the experience. In fact, she claims: "If I'd had a gun [...] I would have taken a marksman's aim and shot out the sun" (202). At no point is this journey easy, she tells in sharp detail. Like the 'trip' she had while ill, she struggles against assimilating the influx of perspective. She explains how the world was becoming a "Magritte-ish one of unreal hyperclarity, strange and obvious at the same time" (202). Throughout this section of the novel, Addy's self-admitted revelry in the surreal casts her as an unreliable narrator, despite her otherwise truthful and self-reflective nature. Her compass is spinning and she remains, as she was earlier, unmoored. Interestingly, in the chapter that follows, in which Addy is a young girl again, she is stung by a jellyfish. She barely manages to swim to her mother and when Addy reaches her she "cannot stop [her]self from falling into her arms" and fainting (210). This foreshadowing of the return she will have to her mother highlights the ways in which she is changing. This time, she no longer passes out but struggles through the obstacles and discomfort, resolute in the necessity of her journey.

As the quest becomes nearly unbearable, Addy sees Errol's bar, Foxy, in the distance. She asks: "Was this a sign, for was it a Sign, a Dadaist perversion made up in my head?" (204). Unsure, she goes to find Errol, believing he will be able to fill in the missing pieces to what she has learned from Marva about Lou. As she crosses the blazing beach she witnesses a demanding

tourist and moments later sees that the one being hassled is Derek. When they lock eyes, Derek confronts her on her reason for coming to St. Clair. She first offers: "I thought it might help," but when Derek scoffs, she asks: "Why do you hate me so much?" (215). This question opens the floodgates. "I do not hate you. Me don't *give* a shit about yah," he begins (215). He continues in another passage worth keeping intact.

"Yah tink yah were special. Me know. Like she loved yah and oh, ain't it sweet how yah loved her so much. Yah black mother. Yah. Yah proud of yahself, right? Treated her just like one of yah own, after she gwan and wipe yah uptight white ass for a couple of years. [...] Now yah come down here and doing us all a big favor in our time of grief. Well, listen. Thanks, but we not interested."

"Derek ---"

"No, let me *instruct* you. [...] So yah stop misunderstanding yahself, all right? I understand yah and here's the real shit. [...] Maybe yah feel a lickle sorry for her, like she's a puppy or some such, because she's black. Maybe it made yah love her more, even. But de shit of it is yah *neva* once looked at her without tinkin', 'She's black and me whiter dan white.' Did yah?"

A memory washed in like bilge, crowding my vision.

"Yah tink she woulda wanted yah here? She wouldna given a shit. Don't yah get it?" Derek poked the air with an emphatic, trembling finger. "She was paid to be caring for yah!"

"So what?!" I shouted, feeling myself unraveling. "I still loved her. Regardless of what you think of my love, Derek. Of the *quality* of my love! Or the, whatever, *color* of it!"

"Den where yah been?" he shouted back, bringing his face up close to mine. "All dese years. [...] When she gwan fucking crazy, not knowing who she was. Hmm? Dis ain't about she, yah coming down here. It's about *you*" (215-16).

Derek stalks off, but his points finally break down the last remnants of disillusion in Addy.

The nanny's child finally has the space to offer commentary and it is scathing. These moments suggest Derek, too, is not completely aware of his own motivations, however. He stresses the commodification of Lou's labor and the ways it shaded her relationship with Addy, but the emotional tenor of his tirade betrays his claim that he does not care about Addy. His couching of the emotional connection between Addy and Lou as one based on money exposes his effort to differentiate his relationship with Lou as something different than Addy experienced. Addy fairly points out that she, a child like Skeeter, was somewhat removed from that aspect. Addy was young enough that even if she understood her parents were paying Lou to care for her, she did not fully grasp the ways in which this arrangement would influence Lou's demeanor toward her. Moreover, as chapters two and three have shown, race and class can have significant impacts on the relationship a nanny forms with the individual members of the family that hires her. It is no different here, Derek suggests, and it is perhaps even more profound since Lou's race *and* class status differ from those of Addy's family. In this regard, Addy remains purposely obtuse, as will be shown momentarily. Derek's conviction that he knows Addy is false, too. He resists re-forming his perspective of Addy because, despite his claim otherwise, he is bothered by the relationship his mother had with her. Moreover, he expresses anger at Addy's unencumbered love. The recent years with his mother had been laborious and painful, filled with her disease and the mental anguish that results. His questioning of Addy's absence is as much an accusation of limpid love as it is a challenge to justify not helping *him* through an

overwhelmingly difficult experience. She cannot claim kin status, he suggests, without investing the work. Styron again implies that the journey Addy takes and the travel inherent to it do not permit the seclusion offered to the tourists on the boat. Addy is forced to 'world' travel even when she finds it unwelcoming, and regardless of her conviction that her intentions are pure, Derek's alternate viewpoint forces her to reexamine her relationship with Lou.

Under this new light, which strikes from every direction, Addy has no choice but to see that the relationship to which she has clung is more one-sided than she had believed it to be. Loving Lou, she realizes, means that she must fully commit to truly seeing Lou's 'world' as well as those in it. Styron implies that Addy would not have come to this conclusion had she not traveled to St. Clair. This becomes even more evident when readers learn that the memory that had washed upon Addy during Derek's tirade is one that serves as the culminating moment of the chapters told by Addy as a child. Addy is eleven years old and permits a boy to feel her barely developed breasts and insert his fingers into her. When Lou walks into her room and witnesses the event she admonishes the boy and ousts him from the room. Addy screams: "YOU get out. NIGGER!!!" (229). Her embarrassment at being caught in a sexual situation, which she implies felt improper, along with the circumvention of her effort to be accepted and loved - in whatever form possible, propels her to hurl the most vicious assault she can muster. In the process, Addy asserts not only her power as a white girl of affluent parents but the hatred she feels for being raised by a woman who is not her mother and whose physical features and mannerisms mark her as someone who could not be her biological mother, thereby broadcasting to all who meet them that her mother does not love her enough. Or so she believes. Despite the intense love, there is a part of Addy that hates Lou. Lou is a daily reminder of the relationship that she does not have with her biological mother, and while a loved substitute, Lou is still a proxy. Interestingly, this

comingling of love and hate that Addy experiences in reference to Lou is typical of any mother/daughter dyad, according to Chodorow. The most blatant way she can reify the separation is by calling attention to the physical markers that separate them.

Addy retains full ownership of the ensuing guilt, but, while she may be remorseful of her treatment of Lou, her actions demonstrate that their relationship was not as equitable and pure as she convinces herself that it was. Nor is it the basis of the utopian familial bond she projects to Derek and Philip. The chapter that details Addy's fiery verbal assault ends almost immediately thereafter with Lou subsequently choosing to return to St. Clair. Lou never responds or even speaks in the novel afterwards. As noted previously, Lou had told Addy early on that she did not have the power to hurt her like she could her own mother and therefore wielded much less power with her, but Addy's racial epithet was delivered years later. Styron is ambiguous about whether Lou felt deeply attached to Addy despite her flaws and the reports she delivered to kin of misbehavior. This missing piece could help indicate if she was emotionally struck by the girl's explosion. Lou exhibits physical affection, emotional concern, and even takes Addy to church with her on her days off. The fact that she left so soon after indicates she may have been deeply hurt. As with other novels discussed, it is unfortunate that Styron renders her almost entirely mute and that the actions of a white girl is what accomplishes this. Following this encounter Addy is distraught but is too absorbed in her own emotions to consider Lou's. Unlike most efforts to disentangle, Addy's first foray concludes in a permanent schism. She follows by making the relationship a martyr and idolizing it thereafter. The journey to St. Clair provides her with the experience she needs to reframe what their relationship was.

When readers are returned to the 'present,' they encounter Addy sensationally burned. She decides to return to Petionville by taxi. On her trip back Addy describes the molting process that

her skin will follow, a painful sequence involving the scarred tissue "coming to a greasy sheen," "the dead skin flaking off," and the emergence of the "pink, defenseless, easily scarred new layer," which will eventually lead to durable new skin (238). The process is not unlike the emotional process she has recently experienced and will continue to experience on her quest to obtain an autonomous identity and sense of home. After the intense exposure to the light and the tense confrontation with Derek, Addy confesses: "Derek of course was right, and now that I was fully conscious, the truth struck me as if I'd been beamed in the head with a brick" (238). Styron's language choice is again strange, as it was when Addy described herself as a "drunken boob." Both moments create distance between Addy and the reader via the use of words that are atypical and unfamiliar to a contemporary audience. Regardless, her evolution is reaching a crescendo. Addy questions her own journey, asking, "What in the hell *was* I doing there?" (239). Still, "Derek's pronouncement -- that I didn't much matter in the grand scheme of Lou's life -- cut me with a deep force. I had loved Louise Alfred. But was that why I had come? Who was I really mourning?" (239). Finally, it becomes apparent to her that the journey was not one designed to honor Lou but to piece together the fragments of a difficult childhood in which Lou played a significant role. She is mourning herself, a death in a way. Her enmeshment with Lou and her success in superimposing her as a maternal figure permitted her to avoid having to come to terms with her own mother. Lou's death, Addy's journey to her home, the ensuing moments of identity analysis, and 'world'-travel culminate in a way that permit Addy to finally accept the separation.

Reconciled to the fact that the journey is more for her than for Lou or her family, Addy decides not to interrupt the gathering at Marva's house. The people inside, she explains, are "strangers to me, who were joined together in every crack and fiber by one woman, whose face I was still struggling to recall" (239). She considers herself an outsider, untethered to this group

despite her relationship with Lou, who is more a stranger than not. Even as she approaches the memorial for Lou, she still must face events which are unanticipated, including her emotional response to a family that is very different from her own. "I don't know what I'd expected" she states, "But as with nearly every other assumption I'd made on this trip, I was mistaken. The Alfreds were throwing Lou a good-bye party. They were celebrating her life" (241).

Experiencing another Joycean epiphany, Addy is finally in a place where she realizes, "Lou had *had* a life" (241). This is a radical shift from Addy's childhood projection of Lou "standing by my coffin, raining tears" thinking: "*My white daughter, she was my white daughter*. Lawd, I should never have gone to town dat day" (152). Of course, adult readers can likely find humor in Addy's age-appropriate self-centeredness, but that does not make her revelation as an adult any less important. She can finally step outside of her limited perspective and see that Lou's sphere of influence was wider and more profound for many people she does not know and may never understand. This acceptance of how little a role she played in Lou's life permits her to take the next step toward autonomy.

As Addy attempts to leave unnoticed, she hears Derek's eulogy, a speech he says results from a walk he had taken earlier in the day; the same walk, most likely, that involved the intense encounter with Addy. While honoring his mother he confesses to questioning when he was a boy if his mother loved him enough. In this way, he admits that whether he wants to care about Addy or not, the dynamics of a nanny's work shaped his life and he had -- and has -- little choice but to consider Addy's presence. In a way, Addy and Derek are natural adversaries; albeit not siblings, they are similarly affected by Lou's passing. Both mourn the woman and struggle to define what their relationship meant to her and means to themselves. Like Addy, he questions his place in his mother's life. On this evening, he tells his audience, "it doesn't matter if yah are loved. It's

enough to love. Whether yah loved back or not. Yah don't ask why, yah just *do*" (247). This offers some resolution not only to Derek's angst but Addy's as well. He seems to have accommodated Addy's impassioned retort to him earlier and sees not only her perspective but recognizes that they are similarly located in reference to Lou. In this way, Addy's physical journey proves important to Derek as well as to herself since her presence pushes him to challenge his own thinking. Styron does not make Addy a savior, or Derek for that matter; instead, each character challenges the other with fruitful results.

Months later, Addy visits her mother and has the opportunity to make peace with her. Addy's journey to St. Clair while vital in and of itself also serves as a precursor to this trip. Turner posits that liminality often requires a symbolic rebirth with imagery and metaphors of returning to the womb enacted. As Addy nears her destination, she remembers a quote from Picasso, which states, "It takes a very long time to become young." Addy had spent three days on St. Clair, mimicking the time it took for Christ to be resurrected, and emerges as a different person. Transported back to childhood on a boat that seems almost womblike, Addy states, "I rode the Bay Shoals ferry feeling as if I really ought to have an ID tag around my neck and a chaperone to hold my hand" (248). She describes herself as feeling "suggestible," which could function as a loose synonym for liminal. It is here Addy recognizes that suggestibility leads to deeper revelation. With a reconciliation of her relationship with Lou in place, she returns to her mother as a child in order to complete the rebirth Turner references and Chodorow argues is a critical component to female identity development. As a child Addy had claimed personal agency and power when her mother traveled for acting gigs, saying: "I've wished her away, and she is gone" (110). Now she returns. After being unmoored for the majority of the novel, Addy nears the dock, ready to find stable ground.

While visiting her mother Addy comes into contact with the philosophy she had held herself for so long. Her mother tells Addy she was "generous" for going to St. Clair and is sure Lou's family was "glad to have you," adding, "You were probably such a help" (257). Addy is a more experienced 'world'-traveler now. She explains to her mother: "They didn't. Want me there" (257). Her mother again tries to tell Addy how much Lou loved her, but Addy only laughs, "Not at her. At myself" for having had believed the same thing. She tells her mom, "You know what, Mom? They didn't know a thing about me" (258). Again, her mother attempts to placate: "You were a daughter to her" (258). But Addy knows better. "No, I wasn't a daughter to her," she asserts again (258). Addy's mother, it could be argued, *wants* Addy to have had a close relationship with Lou. She likely recognizes the ways she did not enact intensive mothering and has consoled herself with the thought that Addy was better off with Lou. Her mother then exposes her own relief at Addy's insistence that Lou's family had not welcomed her, not to celebrate her daughter's exclusion but at the knowledge that her place as a mother has been affirmed. Addy contends "something unwieldy had just been lifted from her back" (258). Her mother can claim full ownership, despite her flaws, self-absorption, and time away and has the wherewithal to be charitable. Echoing the conversation Addy had with Derek, her mother attempts to placate her one final time. "Well, you loved her, Ad. That's what matters" (258). The statement reverberates differently for readers when Derek makes the claim about his relationship with his mother, when he accuses Addy of false empathy, and when Barbara placidly repeats it. Stryon does not stake ground one way or the other but invites readers to trouble this theory wholly and from the different perspectives of those who make the assertion.

Addy's identity, and her point of view, are now her own. Her travels fostered this development. At home, now, she can see the ways that her limited perspective had tempered the

way she viewed her mother. After her mother remarried, Addy claims she was critical of her mother's new relationship and the ways in which she had become more contained, but Addy now admits that she had been the one who was "being the snob" in the ways she had "christened them stupid and dull" (255). Addy reveals only one failed romantic relationship, one which she had little emotional investment. Her mother, she realizes, has had two meaningful loves and had grown with the experiences of each. Even her father, who Addy had perceived as abusive to her mother must continue to be re-interpreted through her mother's perspective. When Addy notices a letter from her mother congratulating her father on his recent book publishing, she realizes that they had stayed in contact and he had consoled her after her second husband passed away. "All this time when my mother and father had been busy being kind to each other. Where had I been?" (257). Her mother, it seems, has forgiven and is leaving the past where it is; Addy has been the one who has remained stagnant all these years, she realizes. Addy also sees the fruits of her mother's travel research and recalls how her mother had often invited her along on previous excursions. Addy refused each time, uncomfortable with the disruption it would cause. Styron suggests that she may make different choices now; they can travel together as two adults.

Addy concludes the novel by examining the awkward peace between her and her mother. There is a sense of camaraderie, but she tells readers: "We spoke very little at dinner, neither of us knowing how to bridge the new landscape that had begun to reveal itself about us" (259). Their reunion is not enjoyable, *per se*, she explains, but she recognizes that together they are "giving birth to something" (259). Something new is gestating between them as a result of her willingness to re-form herself on her journey to St. Clair and back again (259). The wording of this is particularly interesting when one considers Edwards, who argues that after a woman accomplishes her quest to find a "shaping gesture" that "might disconnect the worlds of love and

reproduction" then she can "re-form (and thus reform) the social world to endorse her intuition that love is truly communal and affiliative only when it is freed from a compulsory entanglement with a propagation and with sexuality in its narrowest sense" (237). This task is never easy. Resistance is offered from many external and internal forces. Moreover, Hirsch argues the "mother-daughter narrative is resolved through continued *opposition, interruption, and contraction*" (35). Addy claims she had "lost some sort of resistance" to herself, explaining that "Louise's death, and my three days on St. Clair had, ultimately, undone me" (252). Her separation from Lou permits a rebirth. Immediately after identifying this lack of resistance, Addy claims "for the first time in years, I actually wanted to go home. Whatever I thought that was" (252). Home is no longer a physical location. This becomes more acute when her mother exuberantly offers Addy the opportunity to redecorate her room. Addy is resistant and when pushed again thinks to herself, "*I don't live here*" (250). Again, being physically present in the location provides her with the opportunity to synthesize what her mind already knew. She claims ownership of her life and successfully re-forms her relationship with her mother. As with nearly every aspect of her journey, this too is difficult and Addy remains frustrated and impatient at times, seeing both her achievements and her "not-yet-there"-ness. She states, "I'd imagined it all different. Better. Fixed. I'd imagined *myself* better. There was still so far to travel" (248). There is always more traveling to be done, but readers leave Addy healed of her deepest wounds. Her home is not with her mother, but with her mother she now has a home, one that looks the same and may stay the same but is experienced very differently.

Addy, in the novel, has not yet achieved an empathic understanding of her mother, but I argue that it is this first reconciliation and move toward an autonomy that is not burdened with animosity that will allow her to assimilate information that she can identify as either 'hers' or 'not

hers.' Until she has clarified her relationship to Lou and her mother, this would have been infeasible. The novel's existence presents evidence for this. Like Stockett, Styron includes a short autobiographical essay after the conclusion of the novel. The essay, titled "Mothers," highlights the ways a nanny named Daphne Lewis shaped her childhood.⁶⁵ The essay alludes to the novel's autobiographical underpinnings and cites the ways in which Styron's relationship with Daphne was similar to the one Addy experienced with Lou. Daphne, also from the Caribbean, likely inspired the character of Lou and Styron notes that after many years together, Daphne, like Lou, called herself Styron's 'black mother,' which, despite the raised eyebrow that often followed, caused them to laugh. Unlike Lou, Daphne never had biological children, which Styron attributes to the emotional and temporal investment she exerted upon Styron's family. Moreover, similar to Barbara in the novel, Styron's own mother had taken up work outside the home. Styron's mother pursued her passion as a human rights activist, which often took her away from the family. Styron's father, the acclaimed William Styron, is described as being ill-suited to hands-on parenting and, the younger Styron amicably contends, privileged his own work over tending her. After Daphne arrived, however, Styron notes that her "favorite blouse, or the argyle kneesocks I just *had* to wear had inevitably been plucked from the laundry basket the night before and were waiting, freshly laundered, on the chair for me" (5). In other words, she suggests, it would be hard not to love and feel loved when one is cared for so thoroughly.

Both Stockett and Styron offer unequivocal praise for their respective nannies, which leaves readers to ask: Are any autobiographies that discuss mothers as resoundingly positive? Certainly, in this essay, Styron is not nearly as enamored with her own mother as she is with her nanny. She notes that the moniker Daphne had selected of being Styron's 'black mother,' was all

⁶⁵ A key difference is that Stockett has denied that *The Help* is anything but fiction and was sued by Ablene Cooper, who claims the similarly named maid is based on her.

the more enticing "because it drew a deeper line between us and my real 'white' mother, whom I was busy being very angry at" (6). She admits she was too young to "recognize the complexity and validity of the choices my mother made," because she "was bent on punishing her for her absence" and decided the "best gambit" was to "flaunt my affection for the woman who had served in her stead" (6). As highlighted throughout this work, a nanny can be a marker of welcome and unwelcome difference. Styron is more conciliatory toward her mother as she looks back, but her teenage fury is nearly palpable. Moreover, as alluded to briefly, there is an equally intense relationship between Styron's mother and Daphne, according to Styron, who claims that the triangle formed between "me and my two mothers -- was at times as quietly explosive as any family members joined by blood, or lovers by passion" (6-7). Despite reaching an age that rendered Daphne's position as a nanny unnecessary, she continued to work part time for Styron's parents and attended all family gatherings. Styron claims she and her mother are "old friends now" and "have developed their own peculiar relationship that is as interdependent as any long marriage" (8). Styron claims Daphne will sit next to her mother at her upcoming wedding as a second mother of the bride.

The crossovers between the novel and Styron's own life are not atypical, but many authors, including Moore, Kincaid, and Stockett, make conscious efforts to dissuade comparison between their work and their lives (McCrum, "First Lady"; Lee, "Never Mind"; Norris, "Criticism"). Tracking the work of recent scholars in her search to identify what characterizes writing by women, Gardiner claims the "hero is her author's daughter" ("Female Identity" 349). In this way, "the woman writer uses her text, particularly one centering on a female hero, as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition and her empathic identification with her character" (357). Moreover, this makes the text and its female hero a "narcissistic extensio[n]

of the author" which allows her to "define herself" ("On Female Identity" 357). This process, according to Gardiner, can be a "positive, therapeutic relationship" that allows the author to "experience oneself as one's own cared-for child and as one's own caring mother while simultaneously learning to experience one's creation as other, as separate from self" (357).

Styron's essay makes it quite enticing to superimpose this claim upon her novel, and I would add that if one accepts this basis it may be concluded that Styron's self-examination permitted further exploration of critical figures in her life, including her biological mother. *All the Finest Girls* implies that Styron has become the artist Edwards references when she claims that no worlds are left to be conquered when a hero has become an artist because in this realm the "heroic figure is free to invent new modes of human intercourse, she moves from the periphery of a hostile society to the center of a new communal form" (236). Novels, of course, invite community, whether through interaction with the text, interaction with the author via interviews, interaction with those who have read the novel, or even self-interrogation. Novels, as Gardiner posits, allow readers to "oscillate between transient empathic identification" with characters and "defense against them," during which they continue to define themselves (358). It is in this way that the process transforms participants -- a mother and nanny mother and a mother and nanny are mothered, a child mothers and is mothered, a child-cum-mother gives birth to a hero who mothers and is mothered, and readers enter the circle, as mothers and daughters, ready to mother and be mothered, too.

Conclusion

Travel is a critical component in *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*, particularly in relation to the concept of a female hero's quest to reconcile her identity and sense of home as

well as the ways world-travel and 'world'-travel can influence one another. While very different novels, both authors depict similar elements in their work such as reiterations of cultural beliefs regarding physical travel, the positioning of motherhood, and an implication that identity development can be a critical precursor to fostering empathetic interpersonal relationships. In each of these concepts there is an underlying reliance on the notion that liminality, even when uncomfortable, is a necessary aspect of advancement. Furthermore, both authors suggest that art, including the absence of creativity, can both reflect the inner emotional landscape and may be a means of dealing with the discomfort of feeling dislocated.

First, both Simpson and Styron establish in their respective novels that physical travel can be a vital aspect of self-awareness, particularly when one's concept of identity and cultural or kin-based norms is challenged. Physical travel shapes much of contemporary domestic carework and is, of course, inherent in globalization. The concept of globalization is particularly critical in *My Hollywood* with Lola emigrating from the Philippines in order to secure a better future for her children. In *All the Finest Girls*, Styron highlights some of the difficulties that Lou experiences when she leaves her two sons behind. In this scenario, Lou's decision to travel to the U.S. for work is based more on escaping a romantic relationship than the economic effects of globalization. In both novels the financial disparity between the global North and the global South is presented in clear terms. Additionally, in *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls* the respective nannies are world-travelers and are also the impetus for 'world'-travel by the white narrators. They are not placed as guides necessarily nor are they victims in need of saving. In neither novel does a character become a savior for the other, regardless of age, race, class, or access to social capital. Rather, self-knowledge and the exposure of another 'world' is reason enough to reach outside of one's comfort zone to see a different perspective. Neither novel

presents this journey as an undemanding one, nor are resolutions offered at the conclusion of either, but the complexity of the characters and willingness to explore the nuances of difference offers readers an opportunity to travel with the characters. Both Lola and Lou are complicated in their own rights, although Simpson gives Lola substantial narrative space that is almost entirely restricted to Lou by Styron. Both female authors ultimately espouse travel as a beneficial aspect of self-development. The change that results is, overall, positive for all the characters involved, even if it is challenging.

Second, in both novels mothers are simultaneously very present and very absent. Claire and Lola for instance are both mothers in *My Hollywood*, but both are absent from their respective children's lives in different ways. Lola's and Judith's mothers are never mentioned; Claire's mother is mentally unstable. Lola, however, is a proxy mother in critical ways for Claire and Judith. In *All the Finest Girls*, Addy's mother is depicted as self-absorbed and Lou is physically absent from her sons' lives for a few years. Lou is an almost larger-than-life mother to Addy, though. Lee argues that female heroes' quests in contemporary literature no longer mimic those in novels from the Victorian and Romantic periods. In "Jane Austen and the Tradition of the Absent Mother," English literature scholar Susan Peck MacDonald lends support to the claim that similarities still exist, however, when she argues that the "literary phenomenon" of absent mothers "might, superficially, seem to imply that mothers are fairly unnecessary, expendable items in their daughters' passage to maturity, but tribute is paid to motherhood both in explicit comments characters make and in the relationships they have to motherly women who are not their own mothers" (58). The absence of mothers, she argues, derives "not from the impotence or unimportance of mothers, but from the almost excessive power of motherhood; the good, supportive mother is potentially so powerful a figure as to prevent her daughter's trials from

occurring" (58). Readers certainly witness this effect in both of the novels explicated in this chapter. MacDonald adds: "If the mother is to be present during her daughter's maturation," like Claire's, "the mother must be flawed in some way, so that instead of preventing her daughter's trials, she contributes to them" (59). Interestingly, this claim does not apply to proxy mothers. Indeed, whether mothers are the impetuses for the journey that ensue or not, the quests that are undertaken do not occur in isolation. In each woman's story, a maternal figure emerges who assists the younger one, helping her on her quest, even quite literally in *All the Finest Girls* accompanying the young woman to Eldertown.

Third, in both novels the creation of art plays an important role. Turner claims liminal *personae* are often "highly conscious and self-conscious people" who "may produce from their ranks a disproportionately high number of writers, artists, and philosophers" (*DF&M* 233). Certainly readers experience this in *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*; however, in both cases, the protagonists' creativity is stilted, unable to flourish fully. Claire is not only plagued by the fear that her work is not a valid reason to leave her young son in a nanny's care, but she worries continually about how she is perceived by other mothers in her community. Addy, on the other hand, does not produce her own unique work; rather, she mimics the masters, repairing the errors that time has dealt. When she fails even at the act of mimicry, which offered her a modicum of control, her world crumbles. For both women, their personal struggles are embodied in their art, which preferences the belief that art (including literature) and emotion, even empathy, are conjoined. For Claire and Addy, feeling dislocated thrusts them into an uncomfortable space that I argue is liminal in nature and this placement, rather than being conducive to art, is a barrier. This has interesting implications when one examines the author's role in the creation of the material, since, if this premise is accepted, then both authors imply

they have some distance from what they have created or are not in the untethered space of liminality, at least in reference to the specific issues presented in their novels. This has pointed connections to Styron, who does not dilute the ways that her novel evolved from her life experience. If, as Gardiner suggests, the female hero is the author's daughter, this further echoes the myth of maternal omnipotence in troubling ways.

Moreover, throughout both *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*, as well as in other novels in this work, it can be argued that when characters share a space of liminality they are more prone to help one another, hear one another, and share with one another a part of themselves that might otherwise have remained closed off. For the three primary female characters in the novels in this chapter as well as Derek in *All the Finest Girls*, liminal locations endow them with a porousness that proves valuable. For the women, physical travel is a key aspect of their liminality, but 'world'-travel is not disqualified by either author and is portrayed as relevant, valuable, and advantageous. These novels demonstrate how 'world'-travel and world-travel can merge and how both aspects of travel are often rooted in a liminality that may permit a deeper form of empathy to develop. These empathic interpersonal exchanges also foster reconfigurations in traditional notions of mothering, being mothered, and identity development.

Last but not least, empathy, which Chodorow asserts is a byproduct of the lack of individuation that exists between mothers and daughters, emerges in these novels only when issues of identity are confronted directly, namely by creating an autonomous sense of self that is separate from the mother, even when the mother is not biological, as in the case with Lou. According to Chodorow the desire to mother originates in part as a result of the desire to return to the cohesive, secure, symbiotic, and empathic connection between mother and daughter. Individuation should occur first, however, before this return can be successful. While none of the

characters are extraordinarily empathic at the conclusion of the novel, there is clear movement in this direction, specifically indicated by an ability and even a willingness to assimilate the perspective of other individuals. As readers witness the neglected opportunities, the missed connections, and the errors that follow from looking inward rather than out, an example is proffered for consumption that will hopefully look different, maybe better, when regurgitated. I further argue that novels themselves may be a reification of the female authors' ability to develop and express empathy, particularly in instances such as *The Help* and *All the Finest Girls* in which the author highlights the specific ways that personal life experiences have served as fodder for the novel that has been produced.

As stated several times, though, the fact that both novelists in this chapter are white, formally educated, materially secure women from the global North is problematic in terms of the scope of experience that they can offer readers. The overwhelming number of mother-employer/nanny novels penned by authors who are similarly marked by the descriptors listed above may contribute to the dearth of nanny's children depicted in literature. These demographically similar authors, as a collective, may have been tended to by nannies of color or may have hired nannies of color (and Kincaid was a nanny herself), but none are children of nannies of color.⁶⁶ In this chapter, the nannies in these novels are almost idolized. Lola and Lou, like Aibileen in *The Help*, are created by women whose personal experience with nannies of color fostered an interest in the novels they wrote. Stockett, in an interview with NPR's Michele Norris, called "*The Help*: 'an apology' and a 'homage'" ("Criticism"). Perhaps out of gratitude to these women, perhaps out of apprehension of appearing racist, these women have created nannies who are flawed just enough to remain interesting, relatable, and likable, but are otherwise adept women, superlative

⁶⁶ Marina Budhos' young adult novel *Tell Us We're Home* deals directly with the children of domestic workers. Mary Romero's *The Maid's Daughter* showcases sociological work on this topic. These texts suggest movement toward the inclusion of the children's voices, but in both cases the children are living with their mothers who perform domestic labor in the U.S.

caregivers, ethical and patient guides who are unwaveringly religious and remain humble, thankful, gracious, mildly assertive, and loyal.

These character depictions likely shape the way readers interact with the novels and affect the development of empathy. Most readers who seek to outsource reproductive labor would happily hire any these women (except Laura Post). In other words, Stockett, Simpson, and Styron avoid portraying a nanny who raises suspicions, has an affair with the male partner/father, or punishes the mother for her absence, which occurs in the novels *A Perfect Arrangement* by Suzanne Berne, *The Good Nanny* by Benjamin Cheever, *Men and Angels* by Mary Gordon, *The Pleasing Hour* by Lily King, *Lady of the Snakes* by Rachel Pastan, and *Substitute Me* by Lori Tharps. Simpson has claimed she wanted to get "beyond the 'extreme stereotypes' of the haughty socialite who bosses around the subservient ethnic" (Rosin). Deviation from stock depictions of nannies should be encouraged, and I would argue that reader empathy in mother-employer/nanny novels may be affected in part by the degree of realism the author achieves. Therefore, fully developed, complex characters not only better represent the multitudes of women who do this work but may encourage readers to question preconceived ideas regarding race and class as they relate to mothering, maternalism, and the ways that power infiltrates the dynamics between mother-employers and nannies. Diversity of representation may be augmented if more women of color produce novels on this subject matter.

Edwards argues it is "Only at the quest's end, when the whole story can be retrospectively revealed, is success or failure measureable. Only then is the hero distinguished clearly from the fraud" (7). Despite her many fine points, I disagree with this aspect of her argument. The quests of the women in these novels do not end per se. Instead, readers witness a conclusion that, in some ways, is only a beginning. Interestingly, Edwards argues along a similar vein when she

states: "Shifting the burden of continuation from themselves to the reader, these authors forge the bond between reader and hero. While denying knowledge, they inspire hope. Their narratives merge with our lives and model them" (145). I have offered throughout this work that the reading experience can be one means of 'world'-traveling and that 'world'-travel can take place via the novel. Some readers, in fact, seem to embody a sense of liminality when they engage fully with a novel. They are, perhaps, betwixt and between the actual and the imaginary. As I argued in the opening chapter, readers have the potential to extend the agency depicted in a novel beyond the pages of the book. This is not to say that this change always happens, but it is in this way that Turner's prophecy becomes possible. He argues in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*: "Yesterday's liminal becomes today's stabilized, today's peripheral becomes tomorrow's centered" (16). For the women in these novels, stabilized is not always the antithesis of liminal. Instead, liminal becomes a way to re-form a traditional life that is not ideal.

Giving Birth to Reform: Reading Empathy, Reading Empathically

I. The I and Why

The initial impetus of this project was not a novel. It was not a love of *Jane Eyre* or *The Nanny Diaries*, nor was it an interest in the social implications of mass market women's fiction that integrate class, motherhood, and labor relations, or even a personal interest in exploring the psychological and political milieu of motherhood. Although an avid interest (that has only grown) in all of these topics certainly helped propel the challenging work required to produce the analysis herein, it began with one article by Joan Tronto that I found while researching another topic several years ago. In this article Tronto argues that childcare should be a public undertaking, not a private burden, and she questions if feminists in the global North have assisted, unwittingly, in the development and maintenance of current patriarchal and capitalist systems as a result of hiring other women to complete tasks associated with the reproductive labor struggle. And there lies the rub. As I have attempted over the past few years to explain why I find this topic so enthralling and important, I have often wound up talking in circles, struggling to connect random thoughts in a jumble of layers. Sometimes I have felt like I am looking for the pea that interrupted the princess' sleep. But, in truth, the issue at its core is cyclical in nature -- an interdependent ecosystem of sorts, formed almost exclusively between women. It is a nanny chain as Arlie Hochschild dubbed it, but it is also more. In this ecosystem, women who often would never meet one other than via the relationship they form as employer and nanny connect in ways that offer benefits to both women. These relationships are often critically important to both women, affecting not only their financial success but their emotional well being. The

children of both women are also part of this ecosystem as are extended family members, romantic partners, and fathers. I, too, am part of this ecosystem of care.

I enter this research from a point of view that is rooted in my white, female, middle-class upbringing in the global North. I belong to a group of women for whom, as Cameron MacDonald phrases it, have adopted and benefitted from "feminist beliefs that had opened doors for them at school and at work [but] did not help them when they tried to balance career and family" (21). MacDonald implies, as others have, that feminism's progress has been curtailed. Although I do not consider feminism to be stalled --particularly since to make a claim about such a wide breadth of ideas and philosophies, some of which are in their infancy, would be unfounded -- I understand the backdrop from which this claim is made. According to Stacey Sowards and Valerie Renegar, many feminists in the global North, particularly those who are white and affluent, believe they are at a juncture where many of the initial goals of second wave feminism have been achieved, or at least have been commonly accepted as issues that need to be addressed. Indeed, many of the current socio-political advances available to women in the global North have been wrested from traditional, patriarchal, and hegemonic structures. I agree with Sowards and Renegar, who claim that third-wave feminism still encounters both a "lack of recognition of contemporary and covert gender inequalities" and a "feminist backlash and negative stereotypes of feminism" (539). These goals seem particularly pertinent to those who have already achieved material security and may seem less crucial to women who face more profound inequality.

I was born in the mid-1970s and came of age in during the height of Regan Economics and the dismantling of the modern welfare state. My father, a union house painter, nearly always worked two jobs since coming to the country as a nine-year-old boy, but there were several lean

winters in which my mother's frugality proved essential. My stay-at-home mother, an avid reader, tended the home, cooked meals, cut coupons, and shared her passion for the humanities and deep compassion for those less fortunate. Like Lugones, I knew I would not be happy with the life she led even though my mother claimed, and claims to this day, that she found mothering to be fulfilling. College, which was not a given for most of my family and many of my friends, felt preordained. Scholarships, work study positions, and my father's unwavering labor helped tuition payments get made. After leaving my working class neighborhood and entering college I often felt (and still feel) like Claire in *My Hollywood* -- a bit mystified by the ease with which those who were raised materially well-off walk through life seemingly knowing how the world works. My father did not graduate from high school and most of my grandparents were forced out of school between fourth and sixth grade in order to earn money. Now, I have received my doctorate. At times I gasp at the educational ground covered in one generation. Incidentally, my husband grew up poorer than I did, even having an outhouse at one point. He started his own manufacturing business after we got married at age twenty three and still manages it. As a result of our individual and joint experiences, labor issues have never been far from my mind.

I did not want to replicate the traditional labor models I saw growing up, but when my husband I started a family I ambivalently resigned from my position as a high school English teacher. My salary would have barely covered childcare and was less than half of my husband's. Still, the decision was not based entirely on economics. Like many mothers, I wanted to be with my new baby, sought to fulfill many tenets of intensive mothering, and sympathized with my husband's claim that my working seventy hours or more a week would not be a good fit with his demanding schedule and an infant. Something, we agreed, had to give, and, as it often happens, I was the one who stepped away from waged work.

Even before giving birth, I realized my life had changed. The onslaught of information placed nearly everything I did as a pregnant woman -- from what I consumed, to the stress level I felt, to the options I selected for delivery and post-birth sleeping options -- into categories marked "good" and "bad." This was simultaneously tantalizing and overwhelming. I immersed myself in the research and internalized many aspects of intensive mothering, the perfectible child, and the omnipotent mother. Nearly everyone had advice to give and many offered a hefty dose of judgment alongside of it. Adding two more children required even more adaptations and reconfigurations particularly as I balanced reproductive labor with the work of being a graduate student. Caring for multiple children, I soon relinquished many of the ideologies I had adopted with my first, mostly as a result of temporal restrictions. My husband became more involved after the second child was born and I realized that I would need to outsource some of our family's reproductive labor in order to fulfill my obligations at the university.

Many feminist mothers, as well as mothers who may not openly align themselves with what they perceive to be feminist goals, have spilled considerable "white" ink on the topic of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering. With my own childcare issues often front and center in my life, the work MacDonald offers is highly identifiable to me, but it does not resonate in the way novels do. I have read a plethora of "mommy lit" novels, memoirs, narratives, and blogs. Many are funny, most are comforting, and nearly all are thought provoking, yet there remains little scholarly analysis of the work in this genre. Andrea O'Reilly's theoretical attention is a key exception; she bridges the personal, political, and academic terrain of personal narrative well. As a result of my reading I see fictional work and theoretical work dovetailing in important ways. In my reading I have also noticed gaps. It has struck me as strange that so little has been written in novels about the nannies whose labor has, in many ways, helped build the successes of second-

and third-wave feminism. Even when this work exists it is barely looked at by academics. Alexandra Styron's novel is a suitable case in point. *All the Finest Girls* is astute, well-crafted, and insightful, but I could not find a single explication of her work. I have sought to give attention to this niche of literature. I have situated this work in a broader examination of how authors construct empathy, how readers may experience empathy, and how these feelings may help construct stronger alliances between women involved in the mother-employer/nanny dyad and perhaps more broadly as well.

II. Reviewing and renewing previous arguments

Throughout the previous chapters I have explicated seven novels and each contributes to this work in a way that has hopefully been elucidating. In chapter two, I argued that class not only strongly impacts the mother-employer/nanny relationship, even in regards to hiring decision, but that similar class and racial-ethnic identification is not enough to build empathy or alliances between mother-employer and nanny. In *A Gate at the Stairs*, via Tassie's middle-class-based descriptions, Moore is critical of the affluent Sarah; however, both women identify rather closely with the other. Sarah wants to groom Tassie to adopt her political and social views and Tassie happily accommodates her out of respect and her desire to please her employer. The limited empathy that develops is not enough for Sarah to put into action the care or affection she verbally claims is present in their relationship. In *Men and Angels*, Gordon creates a rather sympathetic mother-employer and a lower-class nanny whose religious convictions and mental illness prevent close reader identification. Anne feels little empathy for Laura, and Gordon prompts readers to question this lack via Anne's own introspection. Ultimately, most readers will likely agree, at least partially, with Anne privileging her own children's safety above Laura's

well-being, but the construction of another zero-sum game situation remains troubling.

Interestingly, the French novel, *Sans Moi* by Marie Desplechin has a different tone and outcome than Moore's and Gordon's novels, despite a mother-employer character who demographically mirrors Sarah and Anne and a nanny who shares similarities with both Tassie and Laura. In *Sans Moi* the middle-class, divorced, unnamed mother-employer hires a young, lower-class, white woman named Olivia who is a recovering drug addict. While there are moments in which the nanny is quite pitiable, particularly as she describes the sexual assaults she has experienced, Desplechin avoids melodrama. Instead, she creates an egalitarian relationship between a career-minded mother and a vulnerable young woman only to have their roles shift so that Olivia emotionally rescues her employer. It would be intriguing to examine how cultural perceptions of drug use, promiscuity, and child care may factor in to the differences between these novels.⁶⁷

In chapter three, race, which is very much part of the second chapter as well in light of the fact that all primary characters are white, comes forward in terms of difference. In this chapter, three novels show that the depiction of a mother-employer's racial-ethnic difference may be perceived as becoming increasingly complex in relationship to her nanny's racial-ethnic identification. This chapter also shows that power dynamics are not always entirely top-down in the mother-employer/nanny relationship. While consciousness raising is certainly valuable in novels, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* can seem binaristic in its presentation of race and the power structures therein. Kincaid develops strong reader support for the title character, while Mariah can seem bland and her maternal qualities cast her as weak. Mariah grows progressively more ingratiating to Lucy and less satisfied with her life while Lucy grows more confident, independent, and content with the structure of her life, which is increasingly autonomous from

⁶⁷ In *Sans Moi* the film, director Olivier Panchot changes the perspective of the story from the nanny (named Lise in the film) to the mother-employer (who is named Anne in the film), and alters the story to one in which the mother-employer becomes romantically and emotionally obsessed with Olivia after trying to save her from her dark past.

Mariah's. The second novel, *The Love Wife*, is a more nuanced novel than *Lucy* in part because Kincaid's novel includes a single, limited narrator while Jen permits nearly every character she develops an opportunity to talk for him or herself. This shift encourages a sense that there is not an obvious victor at the conclusion of the novel. Moreover, it is not clear which characters earn readers' empathy since all have virtues worth emulating as well as flaws that promote aversion. Unlike Mariah's blatant effort to appease herself to Lucy in order to gain personal and social gratification as a byproduct of her exposure to a woman from the global South, Blondie is clear from the start that Lan is a threat as a direct result of her racial-ethnic identification. Blondie initially tries ingratiating herself to Lan, like Mariah with Lucy, albeit for different reasons; however, when this fails, Blondie chooses to opt-out of her role of wife and live-in mother. She thereby succeeds in claiming the status of outsider, which Lan had previously co-opted in order to secure pity. By positioning herself as a marginal figure Blondie acquires more power in the novel, but her controversial choice may estrange some readers. Complexity in *The Help*, which is the last novel explicated in this chapter, is less apparent than in *The Love Wife*, but I argue still exists via the mother-employer's punishment by Stockett, targeted chastisement from readers, and overall troubling absence from the novel. In *The Help*, the influence of change is given to the daughter rather than the mother-employer. While some readers see Stockett's message as sanguine, I argued Stockett not only relied too heavily on the figure of the white savior but missed opportunities to develop a more complex relationship between mother-employers and the maids they hired.

In chapter four, the concept of world travel as it relates to María Lugones' 'world'-travel comes to the fore via analysis of *My Hollywood* and *All the Finest Girls*. Each of the primary characters in these novels physically travels long distances, but the purpose of their journeys are

not for the pleasure of traveling or even to reach a geographical location at all. Instead, these are journeys toward identity development. Each character designs a quest that aims for a more complete acquisition of autonomy from a home that does not offer solace, while attempting to define how mothering influences and is influenced by the home. Although Chodorow argues that empathy may be particularly fine tuned in women as a result of the symbiotic relationship they experience via the mother-daughter dyad, I argue in this chapter that the process of self-identification and the autonomy that may result could also be an important component to the development of empathy. This argument does not destabilize Chodorow's work but should be perceived as another arm of it. This chapter follows the discussion regarding daughters in the second half of chapter three. The ways in which women are both mothers and daughters and the ways in which nannies' mothering impacts daughters' relationships with both their mothers and themselves is rife with complexity. Unlike the previous novels explicated, Styron deviates from her peers by giving textual space to the children of the nanny. While the nanny, Lou, is not given much space, her sons, particularly Derek, have some room to express their own perspectives. Simpson, too, develops complex characters who interact in meaningful ways. This children of the nanny in this novel are quite peripheral as characters, but their existence strongly shapes the choices Lola makes.

Tangentially, it is interesting to note that each chapter includes novels that differ from one another in terms of polyvocality. In the first chapter *Men and Angels* incorporates two alternating narrators who switch as each chapter concludes. As the novel proceeds, Gordon gives Anne progressively more textual space until she eventually 'drowns' out Laura's voice toward the end of novel. *A Gate at the Stairs* is told in limited first person, with Tassie being the exclusive narrator. In chapter two, *The Help* is told by three women, two are African American maids and

the third is a white woman who recently graduated from college. *Lucy*, like *A Gate at the Stairs*, is told in limited first person with the title character given full ownership of the novel by Kincaid. *The Love Wife* includes five primary narrators. In chapter four, *My Hollywood* again relies on two narrators, but this time Simpson ensures both characters are given nearly equal textual space. Finally, in *All the Finest Girls* readers encounter another limited first person narrator, but in this novel Addy is presented at two points in her life -- as a young girl and as a thirty-two-year-old woman. Had I decided to organize the material differently, it could have proven interesting to examine how a novelist's choice of narrator(s) affects the development of reader empathy. In reference to female-oriented films, such as soap operas, Judith Kegan Gardiner posits that multiple points of view positions the "viewer like a good mother who understands all her children even when she can help none of them" (*Politics* 160). In the novels explicated, even ones that incorporate polyvocality, novelists seem to choose a favorite child and encourage readers to identify with that specific character. This issue may provoke further analysis in the future. As noted earlier, Suzanne Keen also highlights the role polyvocality has in the development of reader empathy, claiming sole narrators of novels often garner increased reader empathy than stories told by multiple narrators or an omniscient narrator. In novels about nannies, the creation of 'competing' narrators often effectively splits readers' sense of identification and empathy. I have argued that this shows a recognition by authors that both mother-employers and nannies have stories worth hearing and may be beneficial to readers' understanding of this complex relationship.

It seems important to reiterate that I remain unconvinced by some of Keen's central arguments in *Empathy and the Novel* and will address a few of the primary difficulties. First, her claim that reading can encourage empathy but does not directly lead to prosocial behavior is an

interesting parsing of words in that her argument permits readers to have an emotional, even empathetic, response from reading that may create internal fluctuations while not necessarily leading to physical participation that would typically be deemed prosocial behavior. I find this perspective to be too limiting and posit that the research Keen determines as inconclusive should not carry the weight of conclusiveness; or, as Gardiner states: "action without certainty about its outcomes" is possible ("Empathic Ways of Reading" 108). While Keen highlights both research that strongly suggests that readers identify in a personal way with some characters as well as the gaps in scientific results that confirm the development of prosocial behavior, it seems somewhat besides the point to claim that a dearth of evidence proves the absence of prosocial behavior. I am not proposing one accepts the existence of this phenomenon as a matter of faith, rather I suggest that a phenomenon may exist despite the lack of scientific testing that proves its existence. Gardiner similarly argues: "Attempts to test empathic behavior in laboratory situations have not succeeded in validating these self reports [that women are more empathic than men], but reading and writing are more likely to be affected by one's self image than by one's testable behavior" (*Politics* 166). I would go even further and suggest that it may be prudent to retain a healthy skepticism of positivism particularly when examining research on rather intangible and unquantifiable areas of research.

Moreover, rather than looking at specific texts and judging the outcomes that are produced, which is how scientific research is often conducted, I argue that readers' sense of empathy and even any ensuing prosocial behavior is an amalgamate of past experiences that include, in addition to many other activities, the specific act of reading novels. It seems Keen has missed a key point, namely that if reading can increase empathy then perhaps the act of reading itself is prosocial behavior. Reading empathetically, as Gardiner suggests, and ultimately *acting*

with empathy can narrow the gap that exists between women of varying races and classes.

Gardiner is convincing when she argues: "Even partially understanding another person requires granting that the other person exists separately from oneself, and such tentative understandings are both the prerequisites and the difficult goals for reading, for analysis, and also for progressive social change" (101). While I deviate a bit from her meaning, it is not amiss to infer that this statement supports my hypothesis.

This point leads to the second aspect of Keen's work that I find difficult to accept. In Keen's effort to maintain consistent support for her argument, she dismisses writers' stated goals, readers' own sense of change, and outlying cases in which novels seem to have directly spurred prosocial behavior. After presenting a handful of novels that Keen contends were products of the Victorian era's emphasis on feeling and emotion -- including *Middlemarch* and *Oliver Twist*, which she argues "permanently tarnished the image of the New Poor Law" -- she quickly notes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "inspire[d] allegiance to [...] the eradication of slavery" (38). She adds that "Charles Dickens' condemnation of the New Poor Law's workhouse system" was so damning that it "prevented the full implementation of the law" as a result of his readers' "prejudic[e] against the system" (52). Keen later states, however, "Whether novels-with-a-purpose actually swayed readers, changed minds, and resulted in different behavior is difficult to ascertain at a far remove" (52). She maintains that these examples are not robust enough because "countless sensation fictions evoked strong but ephemeral reactions that cannot be causally linked to legislation or shifts in popular fiction" (53). She similarly undermines authors' own claims regarding self-admitted goals to increase empathy toward specific characters, groups of people, or causes. Even readers' own reactions and beliefs that a novel has caused them to act more prosocially remain inconclusive. Keen claims few readers are able to isolate specific

behavior that has changed as a result of reading a novel, but in fact, she does cite some cases that seem to contradict her point. She dismisses these as unsubstantial in quantity to sway her primary argument and further argues that if "empathy precedes (and invites) character identification, then empathy may be better understood as a faculty that readers bring to their imaginative engagement with texts -- a default setting -- rather than as a quality gained from or cultivated by encounters with fiction" (70). Other researchers similarly question if reading promotes the development of empathy or if empathic people are more likely to be readers. Keen admits there is a "chicken-and-egg" quality to this argument -- a claim in which I see merit -- but it also seems that landing on either side would be reasonable.

As with many aspects of the humanities, pinpointing certainty can be elusive. Most claims in the field must be buffered with words such as 'if,' 'many,' 'may,' 'most,' 'oftentimes,' and those of the ilk. For instance, Mary-Catherine Harrison states: "If narrative empathy circumvents similarity bias, however, then fiction can play a critical role in facilitating cross-cultural empathy, and literary criticism can help us understand the relationship between narrative form and social change" (257-58). She can be no more certain than Keen, who has subjected empathy to a burden of proof that is nearly impossible to meet. I find Harrison's more hopeful stance worth exploring, if only because it seems futile to squash potential simply because it cannot be quantified. For either side, it seems it is a matter of belief rather than finding or accepting absolutes. I would rather ponder Harrison's point regarding narrative empathy in which she argues that this trait may encourage "readers to identify resemblances that they might not otherwise observe in characters from other cultural groups" (270). Her hypothesis is that "narrative empathy supplants criteria based on demographic similarity, like race or class, with criteria based on shared emotional responses, changing the categories by which individuals

subsequently judge similitude and difference" (Harrison 270). This area of political agency could be quite fertile for women's reading in particular, as Gardiner points out when she argues that empathy as a "reading strategy" is "capable of responding to [the] alienation" felt by women in twentieth-century American culture and "converting it to action" ("Empathic" 92). Like Marilyn Frye, I see novels of female self-identification as more than vehicles that "'represent' the available possibilities in women's lives" (199). It is these premises outlined by Harrison and Gardiner that I have used to inform my argument that places novels as agents of positive socio-political reform.

I commend Keen's effort and appreciate her astute insight, but before concluding this section, I would like to focus on two additional points that remain troubling. Both points are in regard to her purpose for writing. Keen's first purpose is one that is intended to continue the conversation regarding the accused watering down of critical reading and analysis of English literature. She wants literature to stand alone, powerful in its own right, arguing: "We should not fob [our responsibility] off on fiction and risk spoiling a great source of aesthetic pleasure, refreshing escape, and edification with a task it cannot accomplish" (168). I disagree on the basis that literature can be and is pleasurable *and* reforming. I have argued that it can inspire change (even if these changes are not immediate or tangible) *while* it is appreciated for its beauty and form. In this way I find myself more in line with Lou Freitas Caton, who, *In Reading American Novels and Multicultural Aesthetics*, writes: "Idealistic 'human rights' are often ignored by literary critics. And yet they are aesthetical in that they, on one level exist as 'fictions,' unfulfilled dreams; however, at the same time they must be considered incomplete until and unless they are 'filled' with political and social realities" (203).

Keen's second purpose is to shore up what some see as languishing support for professors at institutions of higher education. I agree wholeheartedly in the important power of education and find little that can compare to a great class conversation, which she claims is critical. But Keen troublingly espouses a top-down model of education in which she, and her peers, are the ones who can lead students to the more civic-minded, prosocial conclusions. (She includes parents in the cadre of educators who can lead young people, too, though seemingly to a lesser degree.) According to Keen, "Conscious cultivation of narrative empathy by teachers and discussion leaders could at least point toward the potential for novel reading to help citizens respond to real others with greater openness and consciousness of their shared humanity" (147). This point deserves more attention, but it is not given by Keen. She contends that if, as a society, we continue to foist responsibility for prosocial behavior upon literature then we should "be willing to invest in the teachers who will help readers make connections between their feeling responses to fiction and their subsequent behavior as citizens of the world" (xv). I could not agree more that education deserves society's full backing, fiscally and otherwise, but I firmly disagree that education is only the hands of a few by virtue of age, education, gender, race, class, sexual orientation, or any other marker. This is all the more true in literary studies, which I believe solicits and is enriched by participants' diversity in all aspects listed above and in infinite other ways.

Ultimately, Keen's approach does not give due credence to the existence of feelings and actions that derive from reading yet remain unquantifiable. My suggestion is not that we should stop trying to find scientific support, but that we should accept the existence of what seems knowable even if unproven. If Keen is correct in claiming that the link between empathic reading and prosocial action is tenuous at best, we are still left asking: From where then does empathy

derive? and What *does* spur prosocial behavior? I have contended that one of the primary roots of prosocial behavior and social reform is empathy. There are certainly many other impetuses, often based upon striving for or resisting political stasis, financial gain, and cultural or religious ideology. For those who resist equality, I argue that a deficit in empathic understanding may be one root of their behavior. Our cultural adoption of this model can be traced back to the Golden Rule as it appears in various forms of spirituality and organized religions. How many teachers and parents have asked young children: "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" The Golden Rule is based on a notion that we are not all that different from one another.⁶⁸ In both of these examples, however, an individual continues to use him/herself as the measuring stick from which to judge an emotional or physical act. Literature asks readers to do something different; it asks readers to see the world from an entirely different point of view, to walk, as the proverb says, in another person's shoes. The development of empathy and prosocial behavior likely results from an amalgamate of precursory exposures, information, and contemplation. In this way, one book or even a score of books may not bring forth a measurable difference, but one book may very well nourish introspection, re-examination, and model consequences of potential choices.

Currently, socio-political and cultural changes may foreshadow a decrease in certain opportunities to strengthen empathy. Computer search engines are increasingly being refined to decipher a user's taste and can predict the most suitable matches.⁶⁹ Advertising companies are ever more adept at targeting the 'right' audience for their products via demographics, previous purchases, and online preferences. For the individuals these companies consider worth tracking,

⁶⁸ Interestingly, Keen never mentions the Bible or other religious texts in her work. While certainly not a novel, some would consider these texts, or the stories within them, literature. These stories, most would agree, have resulted in both prosocial and antisocial behavior. While not particularly relevant to this work, it does strike me as a strange omission that is worth considering.

⁶⁹ Conversely, online discussion forums and Facebook may also be venues that help increase empathy by exposure to a broader circle of people who are friends of friends and the such.

exposure to ideas and information that contradicts previously expressed preferences becomes increasingly limited. News organizations have begun to offer reports aimed at micro sections of large metropolises. Moreover, the forward march toward ever more stringent neoliberal policies and stalemates between U.S. political parties, I would argue, demonstrate a diminished sense of empathy. Specific to this research, intensive mothering, which has crossovers with competitive mothering, seems to have roots in neoliberalism and may constrict the development of empathy - or at least prosocial behavior-- in mothers who subscribe to either ideology. With that in mind, I have argued that the novel can be a place that helps foster the development of empathy in part by constructing a reality that resists preconceptions or shows the negative consequences of following certain questionable cultural norms.

III. Expanding the Scope of Themes in Nanny Novels

As noted in the introduction, several commonalities exist in U.S. novels about nannies. This space will be used to expand the focus of the themes, commonalities, and differences from the novels explicated earlier to include a fuller list of novels that address the mother-employer/'nanny relationship, specifically by situating the work that has been done within an international context; however, I was limited to novels that have already been translated into English due to my inadequate experience with foreign languages. Other U.S. novels that had been excluded for various reasons will also be included here. While there may be a handful of novels that address the mother-employer/'nanny relationship beyond those mentioned here, this section includes a vast majority of the novels that comprise this subgenre of literature. Six motifs will be briefly analyzed with this broader scope of novels in mind, including: 1. the lack of racial-ethnic authors and mother-employers portrayed in nanny novels, 2. the prevalence of weak

marriages depicted in nanny novels, 3. the prevalence of nannies of color who are emotionally and/or physically harmed, threatened, or murdered, 4. the prevalence of mother-employers who are cast as saviors, 5. the limited role of male characters, and 6. the insistent acceptance of intensive mothering.

The first commonality has been referenced previously, but bears repeating. In nearly all nanny novels, regardless of the author's racial-ethnic identification, the mother-employer is white and middle- or upper-middle class. Despite shifting demographics in the United States, mother-employers of color seldom appear as the primary narrator or protagonist. When considering a broader scope of novels, most of the U.S. novelists still identify as white and many of these authors also include in their novels white nannies who work for the white mother-employers. These novels include *The Perfect Arrangement* by Suzanne Berne, *The Pleasing Hour* by Lily King, *Lady of the Snakes* by Rachell Pastan, as well as *The Nanny Diaries* and *Nanny Returns* by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus. This pattern of dyads shifts a bit when the novelist is a woman of color. For instance, in *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela, whose parents are Egyptian and Sudanese, the primary narrator is Najwa, a nanny who was previously an upper-class Muslim from Khartoum. The majority of this novel is set in London where Najwa works for an Arab mother-employer who is also Muslim. The mother-employer has little space in the novel, but Aboulela is able to construct an unusual set of tensions as a result of the characters' less stereotypical markers. *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani-born woman who lives in the U.S. and writes in English, depicts a relationship between two Indian women with the mother-employer again cast as a savior and of a more privileged class/caste than the nanny. Published in 1988 in England as *Ice Candy Man*, the novel tells of India's partition by the mother-employer's young daughter. Sidhwa constructs the time and place in a way that

emphasizes difference from that which many readers in the global North would feel familiar. Thrity Umrigar, who was born and raised in Bombay until she was twenty-one, penned *The Space Between Us*, which highlights the deep emotional, yet still hierarchical, relationship between two Indian women, one who is securely upper-middle class and the other who is downwardly mobile.

Unlike the prevalent depiction of white mother-employers, several authors portray women of color as nannies in their novels including *Minding Ben* by Victoria Brown, *The Good Nanny* by Benjamin Cheever, *White Ghost Girls* by Alice Greenway, *The Dry Leaves of August* by Anna Jean Mayhew, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *América's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago, and *Substitute Me* by Lori Tharps. Brown, Morrison, Santiago, and Tharps are women of color. Cheever, Greenway, and Mayhew all appear white, and Cheever is only novelist of this group that identifies as male.⁷⁰ When these authors are added to the women mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is evident that, so far, the only authors who portray a mother-employer who is not white *and* a nanny of color in the same novel are the authors who are women of color and were born outside the United States. In Brown's semi-autobiographical novel, the native Trinidadian author portrays a white mother-employer who garners very little empathy, particularly after readers realize she has no intention of using her national status to sponsor the citizenship of her nanny, Grace, even though she has been using this agreement to secure more labor for less money.

In this regard, as discussed in the introduction, counternarratives may prove critical, at least according to Hilde Lindemann Nelson. Counternarratives, according to Nelson, "aim to alter the oppressors' perception of the group" and relies upon the idea that if the dominant group

⁷⁰ While class is less apparent, many of the authors have been formally educated and have secured considerable social capital. Most can be presumed to be middle- or upper-middle class. This, too, could have significant bearing on the authors' ability to accurately portray women who are depicted as belonging to the lower- or working-class.

is "moved by the counterstory," then this will group will then see "subordinates as developed moral agents" and therefore be "less inclined to deprive them of the opportunity to enjoy valuable roles, relationships, and goods" (7). Ultimately, Nelson claims, this "allows members of the oppressed group to exercise their agency more freely" (7). She later explains:

Rather than *invoking* master narratives as a means of moral justification, counterstories *resist* these narratives by attempting to uproot them and replace them with a better alternative. They operate on the supposition that the norms of the community are to be found not only in its foundational narratives, but also in stories that offer other vantage points from which to assess a community's social practices. Nelson 67

It is possible that inspecting the similarities and differences in various stories about mother-employers and nannies will yield few clear patterns, but regardless, it still seems worthwhile to produce, consume, and analyze these counternarratives. Nelson asks: "Do counterstories engage directly with the moral purpose for which they are told? I argue that they do" (66). I have suggested that the act of reading alone -- and the consumption of narratives that both support and challenge conventional notions about domestic work, mothering, race, and class -- could be construed as prosocial behavior (66). Nelson's question suggests she may be working along similar lines.

While adult readers often are responsible for selecting their own reading material (which may limit the counternarratives to which one is exposed and which are produced), it seems a wider set of options in regards to the race and class of the author, the race and class of the characters, and the format of the relationships depicted would be valuable. While I am not suggesting quantity supersedes quality, there simply needs to be more novels written and published that address this important topic. It seems that these elements of reading can and do

change who we are and often help more compassionate, interpersonal relationships develop. It is here, in this space that fosters empathy, curiosity, and self-introspection, that I argue women can begin more insightful and challenging conversations about class and race, particularly in the context of mothering.

Moving forward from the similarities in the racial composition of mother-employer/nanny dyads in novels, a second similarity surfaces. Nearly all the mother-employers experience weak marriages, many are rife with extramarital affairs and emotional disharmony. I am interested in exploring how Chodorow's model of female attachment and mothering impacts this observation. I am also interested in exploring the many novels that feature nannies who have affairs with the father of the children she tends. In many of these novels, the mother-employer is not particularly distressed by her husband's affairs and often separates or divorces with little fanfare, thereby offering further support for Gardiner's observation that female characters in recent novels "do not fear loss of their lovers" or "seriously resent male infidelity" ("Female Identity" 360). Besides the novels already explicated, other U.S. novels that sustain this argument include King's *The Pleasing Hour*, Pastan's *Lady of the Snakes*, and Tharps' *Substitute Me*. In each of these novels, the husband's affair, or at least one of his affairs, is with the nanny who has been hired to tend the mother-employer's child(ren). On a related note, almost every mother-employer portrayed in novels that also feature a nanny is depicted as nearly asexual throughout the entire novel. This is a troubling continuation of the Madonna/whore dyad. One example of this is Tharps' novel, which portrays an African American nanny and white father-employer whose affairs commences in part, the authors implies, because the white mother-employer works too many hours and is not demonstrating sufficient temporal commitment to her nuclear family. Tharps, who is African American, raises many polemical issues in this chick lit

novel regarding working mothers, connections between race and sexual access, connections between promiscuity and carework, male privilege and stereotypes regarding male ineptness at mothering (or fathering), as well as mother's feelings of guilt (or lack thereof).

A third similarity in nanny novels is that nannies of color are often emotionally and/or physically harmed, threatened, or murdered. *The Good Nanny* by Cheever, *The Dry Grass of August* by Mayew, *Cottonwood Saints* by Gene Guerin, *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, *América's Dream* by Santiago, and *Cracking India* by Sidhwa all portray nannies of color in these situations.⁷¹ Excluding Guerin's novel, the abuse in each of these novels is not perpetuated by the employers, and, in many cases, the abuse permits the employers to either become enlightened about racial politics or step in as the savior. Each of these nannies are from a substantially lower class than the employers. Since the research for this work focuses on the relationship between mother-employers and nannies, it proved too tangential to delve into this motif more fully; however, it may have profound consequences on three interrelated fronts. First, these depictions continue a troubling trend of depicting women of color, and more specifically nannies of color, as prone to abuse. This is linked to the second issue, which was raised in the chapter two, namely that financially secure employers may avoid hiring women of lesser material means because they see these women as having more problematic lives. Third, if one subscribes to the earlier argument about novels affecting cultural consciousness, then these points could impact whether a woman hires a woman of color, alliance building, and even perhaps interracial relationships on a broader scale. As with the previous points that have been highlighted, this, too, warrants further analysis.

⁷¹ Interestingly, the only two male novelists included in this field of research both include a nanny who is harmed physically. In Cheever's novel the nanny is killed.

The fourth point in this section further defines the argument previously made regarding the propensity for mother-employers to be cast as saviors in nanny novels. There are certainly mother-employers who are cast as antagonists, including those in *Minaret* by Aboulela, *Minding Ben* by Brown, and *The Nanny Diaries* by McLaughlin and Kraus, but typically these female characters are not primary characters and/or relatable and therefore yield little empathy from readers. As seen in the previously explicated novels, the permutations of this presentation of a mother-employer as savior is often quite complicated in regards to the degree she acts as a savior, whether the nanny sees herself as needing help, whether the mother-employer is a savior by virtue of self-identification only, as well as a host of other nuances. Sociologists have witnessed this trend in their own research. Anderson, for instance, cites work she had done with Julia O'Connell Davidson in which they found women who believed that by "employing a desperate migrant" from "impoverished lands" they were making a "small contribution" to correcting the "injustices of the world" ("Private Business" 255). Novelists, too, have alluded to a level of cognizance regarding this role. In the essay "Love, Money, and Other People's Children," Simpson writes: "Pity is a satisfying emotion, easy to set off and without the imaginative moral challenge posted by real empathy" (www.nytimes.com). When one considers the troubling placement of mother-employers as saviors, it is all the more important to examine the ways in which nannies are portrayed as requiring help, particularly as a result of the abuse.

A fifth similarity worth considering is the role male characters have in these novels. Too often if the husband of the mother-employer, who is always the biological or adoptive father of the children rather than a stepfather, is present in the novel it is because he has entered a sexual relationship with the nanny. There is not one husband/father in any of the novels mentioned thus far that is simultaneously physically present, sexually faithful, and meets basic criteria of good

parenting.⁷² This is not to say that men are cast as antagonists or villains; as stated earlier, they are often simply not present. Similarly, very few fathers of color and men from the global South appear in nanny novels. Bong Bong in *My Hollywood* is a rare exception and he has scant space in the novel. Moreover, unlike the television shows and movies listed earlier, few novels depict male caregivers. *The Manny*, a marketing-hyped novel by Holly Peterson, is one exception. Sociologists have been following the impact nannies, and domestic workers more broadly, have had on the role men play in their families. Ehrenreich and Hochschild argue that immigrant nannies "enable affluent *men* to continue avoiding the second shift" (9). As cultural critic Caitlin Flanagan writes in a polemical *Atlantic Monthly* article about cultural feminist writer Naomi Wolf's desire to share the labor of parenting equally: "She had wanted a revolution; what she got was a Venezuelan" ("How Serfdom Saved the Women's Movement: Dispatches from the Nanny Wars"). Rosie Cox sees women as complicit in this arrangement, arguing that many women "would rather pay another woman to fill the gaps at home than challenge either the gender division of labour at home or the excessive and unnecessary demands of work" (40). These sociologists are far from the only ones to argue that shifting more of the carework to men would be equitable in that it would be "spread laterally instead of being passed down a social-class ladder, diminishing in value along the way" (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 36).⁷³ According to Uttal, even when women delegate care they remain "responsible for ensuring their children's well-being, including this new executive responsibility of selecting, managing, and monitoring their childcare arrangements" (58). In this sense, Claire in *My Hollywood* and the many other

⁷² The closest example to an exception is the husband/father in Santiago's *América's Dream*, but he is not a primary character and the marriage is rather unstable.

⁷³ It should be noted that marriage and couples therapists often recommend obtaining a domestic worker to avoid common battles regarding reproductive labor. For instance, see Kathy Fitzgerald Sherman's book *A Housekeeper is Cheaper Than a Divorce: Why You Can Afford to Hire Help and How to Get It*. Moreover, some universities and businesses, such as Sony Ericsson in Sweden, offer employment packages that include domestic help.

female characters who assume full responsibility for the hiring, management, and termination of nannies do not deviate from sociologists' findings.

Last but not least, another trend that appears in many nanny novels, and has been a point of discussion in previous chapters, is the issue of intensive mothering. This trend is seldom referenced directly by authors via the characters they depict even when they themselves seem cognizant of the demands this approach toward mothering can cause. Characters, in other words, may struggle with issues of class or race, but these markers appear as a clear point of conflict and can often be easily discerned as a point the author wants to be clear to readers. While heterosexuality is troublingly the default, romantic relationships, too, are a point of contestation and dramatic tension for both mother-employers and nannies -- although, as noted, nannies who are young and white are the characters authors are most apt to depict as engaging in romantic relationships. Intensive mothering, on the other hand, is presumed as the mode of mothering that women adopt willingly; women who do not fully subscribe to the ideology are often punished from other adult characters (e.g., *A Gate at the Stairs*, *The Nanny Diaries*, *Substitute Me*), by their children (e.g., *The Love Wife*), by themselves (e.g., *Lady of the Snakes*, *Men and Angels*, *My Hollywood*), by the author (e.g., *The Help*), or by readers (see customer reviews on Amazon.com for *The Perfect Arrangement* and other novels). In *Of Women Born*, Adrienne Rich argues that the persona of “mother” is so powerful because mothers “exemplif[y] in one person religion, social conscience, and nationalism” while fulfilling the interests of the patriarchy (45). She does not summon the image of the omnipotent mother, per se, but she does provide some language for why this image persists.

As pointed out earlier, however, it is critical to keep in mind that there is a general dearth of novels that pertain to the relationship between nannies and mother-employers. There are

certainly more novels than those explicated in this dissertation and I have identified roughly two dozen novels when the parameters include chick lit novels, translated novels, young adult novels, and novels dating back more than one hundred years. I have tried to show how nearly all of these novels fit into the work I have begun in the previous chapters. When I commenced this project I wanted to study the story of the nanny: how she is depicted, how writers see her role in families, even how former nannies may present their fictionalized doppelgangers. I wanted to hear what she had to say about her experience since it seemed, even in my very limited experience, that her perspective was often left unconsidered by media outlets, including large publishing houses, and even mother-employers. After several false starts that failed to produce enough novels to warrant a thorough examination, Needless to say, I revised my approach and focused more broadly on the mother-employer/nanny relationship and the ways women who differ by race and class negotiate these differences.

In response to the claim that few nanny novels exist, Susan Salter Reynolds, a *Los Angeles Times* book critic, charges in her review of *My Hollywood* that novelists who choose to address the complexities of nannies (which she calls "the other N-word") open themselves up to name calling, including descriptors such as "elitist, bad mother, self-centered, selfish, cold, greedy, cartoonish, [and] un-American" ("Different Roles"). "This is where a writer reveals how little he or she knows about child love, resentment, [and] cultural myopia" she argues, then asking: "Why bother?" (ibid). I have listed numerous reasons for why the difficulty is worthwhile, but if Reynolds is correct then it makes sense that a limited pool of authors would be willing to expose themselves in this way. It seems likely that the pervasive adoption of intensive mothering, particularly amongst members of the middle class, may contribute to this judgmental critique of authors. Moreover, I posit that when authors are accused of the pejorative descriptors

above it may also be because readers sense the author's inability to express empathy in an authentic way, or, as Lugones would claim, that these authors have not 'world'-traveled in a way that permits them to write in a manner readers find realistic.⁷⁴ By making this claim, I suggest that 'world'-travel can occur outside of the real world and with fictional characters. Indeed, in "What To Do About Motherhood: Feminist Theory and Feminist Fiction Negotiate Motherhood's Dilemmas," Joyce Shaw Peterson argues that when women read novels about women "they ma[k]e friends" (266). If true, novels may provide white female readers exposure to women of racial-ethnic backgrounds that differ from their own in an environment that could be construed as both safe and inviting while providing women of color more opportunities to witness women whom they feel more closely mirror themselves as well as women they may not have the opportunity to know more intimately.

It has remained puzzling to me why novels that are designed to speak to the female experience ignore a large swath of women in the United States, diminish complexity, and utilize false caricatures. Susan Davis and Gina Hyams were similarly bothered and claim in their anthology *Searching for Mary Poppins* that they "turned to our local bookstores for answers and found several novels that use nanny characters as an opportunity to poke fun at rich women and an array of scholarly titles that analyze the politics of exploited childcaeworkers" (xxi-xxii). Perhaps it is an aversion to recognizing that one woman cannot have it all, or at least do it all, without help from other people. Or, perhaps it is an extension of class warfare as Reynolds suggests when she offers a warning about including a nanny in a novel. Reynolds writes: "Child care is the petard on which fiction and nonfiction writers regularly hoist themselves. One whiff of elitism these days and a piece of literature no longer deserves a spot on the big shelf"

⁷⁴ The novel I found most realistic in terms of character development and dramatic tension is *My Hollywood*. Simpson claims she spoke with many local Filipina nannies and conducted scholarly research on nannies. These efforts toward 'world'-traveling many have helped differentiate her novel from other, less realistic stories.

("Different Roles"). While there is still the perception that nannies are employees of only the most wealthy, in truth, this has changed quite radically, as MacDonald and others point out. Intensive mothering, decreases in social support offered by the state, an influx of cheap labor from the global South, rising costs of group daycare, and increased demands by employers have all led families to consider hiring nannies. Many of these structures encourage even women of modest means to acquire the care of a nanny.

IV. What can be gained from alliances between mother-employers and nannies?

In light of the recent rancor regarding the implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act, it seems unlikely that high-level changes to publically funded childcare will happen in the near future without tremendous support of the effort by politicians' constituents. This is one reason I have put some onus on novelists, readers, and even stories themselves. With many politicians espousing a philosophy that divorces nation-states' responsibility from its citizens' well-being, political and social awareness may help shape not only the consequences of this agenda but the potentiality of other options. I see individual citizens needing to be both informed and motivated. Keen claims "We unnecessarily boost the role of fiction. It can just be enjoyed for what it is," but I disagree (20). Or rather I perceive the "what it is"-ness of fiction much differently than what Keen infers it is. The stories we select to read, remember, tell, and allow to enchant us are more than just entertainment or a means to pass time. Not every story must have a one-to-one result yielding personal change and political reform, but as a whole, stories have, do, and will continue to affect us by encouraging us to question our values, inciting our empathy, and bridging gaps between the known and the unknown. I cannot help but believe that a broadening of perspective, particularly about an issue as rife with conflict as mothering, will help

alleviate entrenchment, ideologism, and the self-righteousness that can be part of both women's stake in the mother-employer/ nanny dyad.

In response to the verdict regarding Trayvon Martin, President Obama addressed what he sees as a need for more in-depth discussions regarding race in the United States. Conversations among politicians have not been "particularly productive," according to President Obama, largely because they "end up being stilted and politicized, and folks are locked into the positions they already have" (www.whitehouse.gov). "On the other hand," he added, "in families and churches and workplaces, there's the possibility that people are a little bit more honest, and at least you ask yourself your own questions about, am I wringing as much bias out of myself as I can? Am I judging people as much as I can, based not on the color of their skin, but the content of their character?" (ibid). In her analysis of *Men and Angels*, Ruth Perry highlights Jessica Benjamin's book *The Bonds of Love*, which she contends is a text that "claims that women are in a unique position to recognize forms of otherness that do not diminish the self" (217). Chodorow's work supports a similar claim. I have suggested throughout this dissertation that the mother-employer/nanny relationship can be a place in which exposure to those who differ by virtue of class, race, and other markers can ultimately help wring out the bias that President Obama references in light of the female-female dyad, the shared emotional investment in the mother-employer's child(ren), and the unique ways that this relationship bridges commodification of labor and intimacy. Conflicts arise, of course, often it seems, according to sociological research, as result of differences regarding class and race. However, there is also the chance to become better acquainted with someone who may be very different than the people one adopts as friends and the people one claims as family. This is the place where new conversations can take shape; conversations that can significantly alter one's perspective on class, race, and even gender. In

these cases, there is space that is ripe for negotiating, storytelling, and reciprocal gains. Women who are united in the microcosm of raising a child can thereby use this first point of connection to develop new, broader conversations that make a foray into the type of conversation that may help facilitate social change.

Some may criticize this concept of alliance building as one-sided, in fact a woman of color professor in gender studies asked me after I explained my premise: "What's in this for the mother-employer? The employee wants to keep her job," she rationalized, "but why would the mother-employer put in the effort to make this alliance work?" She insinuates in this question the power differentials that reside in the typical employer/employee relationship. For mother-employers and nannies, however, there may be a different terrain that is being navigated. The benefit for many mother-employers is creating a work environment in which the nanny can be her best self and in turn offer the best care to the child(ren) she tends. Some sociologists claim that as a result nearly any altruism shown by a mother-employer is ultimately self-serving. Even looking more broadly, it is easy to see where this form of alliance building could be accused of echoing the usury Mariana Ortega outlines in "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color." Keen references a similar point when she contends, "Making accurate inferences about others' thoughts, feelings, and motives does not at all guarantee that a reader shares, supports, or regards them as anything but tools to be employed in gaining the upper hand over others" (105). There are few guarantees, but I posit that there are robust safeguards, particularly in the mother-employer/nanny relationship since many mother-employers are motivated to maintain a nanny's satisfaction.

I have contended throughout my analysis that despite the supposed inherent power differentials in the employer/employee dyad, the mother-employer/nanny relationship can be a

space in which these power differentials can be challenged. I emphasized this in chapter three, and this point is prevalent in mainstream press articles as well. Vikki Ortiz Healy, a journalist and mother of a two-year-old, writes the following about her nanny: "I get so overwhelmed by the complex, emotional and dependent relationship I have with the woman caring for my pride and joy each day that I end up doing ridiculously trivial things in the hopes of keeping her content and me feeling somewhat OK about my absence" ("When nanny's happy"). Most employees would be foolish to expect fresh-baked cookies and chicken soup delivered to their door, but, if published essays are to be believed, this not rare amongst mother-employers and nannies. To be clear, I am not contending that this relationship does not have many ingredients that makes it fertile ground for exploitation; one does not have to dig too deep to find instances of horrific emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Even in more benign instances many nannies complain of the same issues stay-at-home mothers do including boredom, depression, isolation, and frustration. What I am suggesting is that many mother-employers are cognizant of these emotions as a result of their own social and familial placement and may have the motivation to express appreciation in order to provide continuity of care for their children and repay what they may perceive as a tremendous boon, namely the opportunity to pursue paid labor outside the home while diminishing the guilt many women concurrently experience for doing so. Cookies are not a substitute for subpar financial remuneration, but if economic remuneration is in place, additional kind gestures may help promote goodwill between mother-employer and nanny.⁷⁵

It does seem that a white, middle-class mother-employer who attempts to model the type of alliance building discussed herein could be portrayed as a voracious, unscrupulous consumer.

⁷⁵It should also be noted that the previous line of thinking is more pertinent to mother-employers who are *choosing* to work outside the home and have the financial wherewithal to sustain adequate financial compensation. These are certainly not givens and I do not presume them to be. A worthwhile article that addresses this issue is Susan Dominus' "Paying for Child Care, Unless It's From a Parent" in the *New York Times*.

Buying a woman's labor, in other words, is not enough, critics will contend. Like Mariah in *Lucy*, she wants to possess the cultural capital to which the nanny has access, and perhaps even more critically bestow this exposure upon her child(ren) for the purpose of future achievement.

According to Alison Bailey, "By learning about lives on the margins, members of dominant groups come to discover the nature of oppression, the extent of their privileges, and the relations between them. Making visible the nature of privilege, enables members of dominant groups to generate libratory knowledge" (286). When framed this way, the relationship can be construed as unidirectional. Indeed, in "This Bridge Called My Back," Gloria Anzuldúa claims, "We cannot educate white women and take them by the hand. Most of us are willing to help but we can't do the white woman's homework for her. That's an energy drain" (168). While her reference to homework functions as a synonym of schoolwork, in the context of this research her quote takes on a second meaning -- that of domestic work. Anzuldúa does not use Hochschild's term "emotional labor," but she refers to this rather clearly.

Like Frye's male oppressors, white, middle-class mother-employers may be rightly accused of subjugating women who differ from them in regards to class, race, and overall 'otherness.' Often, this is based on the rhetoric of choice, as in: it is a nanny's choice to work for these wages, it is a choice to hire a nanny, and so on. However, rather than trickle-down economics, trickle-down oppression occurs instead. This is seldom a choice anyone would choose. Due to the lack of information regarding labor management, many mother-employers are not aware of the ways in which they exploit the labor of the women they hire (Hondagneu-Sotelo 211, 241; Cox 132-33, 211). Ironically, some women believe that they are actually benevolent by providing women of a lower class, different race, or unauthorized citizenship the opportunity of employment. I am ill at ease with the commodification of emotional labor as well as selecting a

nanny in order to commodify her social capital, but I am not sure there is a way out of this arrangement in the foreseeable future. I hope that it has been clear that I am not proposing this form of usury, and I have attempted to show ways in which traditional domestic service power differentials can be upended, and, more importantly, mutually advantageous. In some cases, I contend that there may be an even trade of sorts in the sharing of different forms of social capital, particularly when the mother-employer and nanny differ by class, race, or both. With that in mind it seems more judicious to offer fair remuneration for marketable cultural knowledge and maximize the opportunities that are mutually beneficial.

V. Conclusion

Chandra Mohanty, a feminist with whom I often find myself nodding in agreement, writes: "The lives of women are connected and interdependent, albeit not the same, no matter which geographical area we happen to live in" (241). Reading empathically, I have suggested, is a means to maintain and increase these connections. Ultimately, as Gardiner explains, an "empathic reading strategy [...] puts the responsibility not on the text but on the reader for understanding the emotional stakes and consequences" ("Empathic " 108). She adds: "In short, 'empathy' is not a substitute for political action but only an affective and cognitive reading strategy" (108). Novels that show readers through positive or negative examples the ways that alliance building should (not) take shape may model the work that is required of mother-employers and nannies alike in a safe environment. The literary examples explicated heretofore have largely shown by negative example, but that does not mean that novels that highlight nannies do not serve as bountiful fodder for the examination of attitudes regarding mothering; women in the labor force; female/female dynamics; power structures in domestic labor; the role

of government in trade, globalization, and immigration; the dissolution of the welfare state; issues of race, class, and gender; and the division of labor in the home. In "Readers Temperaments and Fictional Characters" Keen writes, "we still know much less than we realize about which techniques effectively invite concord of authors' empathy and readers' empathy in experiences of intense emotional fusion with the imaginary experiences of fictional beings, let alone how narrative empathy might be translated into real-world altruism" (297). This seems true, and while I have called for more literature portraying the mother-employer/nanny relationship by diverse voices there is also a need for more critical examination of the literature that has already been produced. Moreover, novel reading is not the only means of generating conversation. Reading has been and will continue to be labeled as an act associated with specific groups and therefore may be deemed self-limiting in its reach. The purpose of this work has not been to question this aspect of novel reading, but to examine how reading, for those to whom it beckons, can possibly be transformative personally and socially.

I am not blind to the privilege I possess by virtue of my class, race, or sexuality, and I am sure there are many privileges I experience that are not even salient to me. Try as I might I will never fully understand the experiences of those who are considered marginal by virtue of any of these markers. Contributing to the conversation, even at times speaking for women who are demographically quite different from me (although I have tried to avoid this when possible), can be risky and I am sure I have made blunders of ignorance despite my best efforts. I agree with Frye when she concludes "no decision I make here can fail to be an exercise of race privilege" (113). Preconceptions regarding class and class-based identifiers may also shape how characters in this genre of literature are developed by authors who are frequently white, female, and middle-class, as well as how their readers, who often identify with the same markers as the authors, read

the characters that are portrayed. These preconceptions may shade who develops empathy for which characters and why that empathy forms, but it does not have to limit prosocial behavior.

The research proffered herein has been elucidating to me, but I do not want to cast this work as solely self-centered or designed for my private erudition. I see this work as contributing to a critical, larger conversation regarding class, race, feminism, mothering, and alliance building. This last component particularly can prove to be hazardous ground since many women in the global South still struggle to attain basic rights of humanity, including freedom from rape, access to education, reproductive rights, and fair standing in their legal system, culture, and families. While it may be perceived as uninformed and naive, I argue there is still a commonality in the way women in nearly all parts of the world are located. Mother-employers and the women they hire to tend their children are both neoliberal subjects who often consume the dogma of intensive mothering, yet they are also activists who are reforming family and motherhood within capitalistic and patriarchal structures. There is also a commonality of disciplined passivity via legal code, cultural dictum, and even, perhaps, personal philosophy. Men, by and large, remain the global powerbrokers of politics, law, medicine, media, business, and the arts.

I end where I start then, with Joan Tronto. She is one woman. It was one article by her that changed the course of my professional (and personal) life. Her work is not fiction, of course, but it did inspire me to read novels concerning mother-employers and nannies and by reading these works I have questioned the ways I act, react, and interact. Gardiner argues that an empathetic reading style "assumes that emotions often precede and direct thought for change and are thus necessary to analysis, not antithetical to it" (101). Like Gardiner, I am not endorsing sentimentality. My own reading has shaped how I interact with the women who have helped me care for my own children and I believe I am a better employer as a result. My hope is that the

work I have produced may inspire another woman, or many women and men, to think more critically about a topic that affects many men, women, and children around the world in very intimate ways. Chilla Bulbeck calls for this type of reflection in *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* when she reminds readers,

we must walk this tightrope between similarity and difference armed with knowledge, stories told to us by the other; with honest self-criticism, asking what are our interests as opposed to those of the other; with connection, meeting and hearing the other; and with an understanding of the structures of political and economic domination which have made white voices louder and the voices of the other often muted. (56)

This applies in deep ways to the work I have offered herein. The purpose has not been to diminish perceived and defined differences but to foster a blemished hope that the mother-employer/nanny relationship can be one that helps build solid bridges between groups of women that often have limited access to one another's cultural worlds and that reading can provide both fodder for and a reflection of our analysis on this topic. In most cases, the children that nannies care for are loved deeply and I believe that this can be a source of reciprocated joy and enlightened understanding rather than jealousy and domination. With roughly half the world's population composed of women, most of whom have children, and an increasing number of whom work outside the home, the issue of domestic service, and specifically childcare, has profound consequences.

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