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“Amazon of Industry” Maternal Realism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s What Diantha Did

So when the great word “Mother!” rang once more,
I saw at last its meaning and its place;
Not the blind passion of the brooding past,
But Mother—the World’s Mother—come at last,
To love as she had never loved before –
To feed and guard and teach the human race.

—“Two Callings,” Charlotte Perkins Gilman

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the cult of the mother—a central tenet of American domestic ideology—underwent a crisis in cultural discourse. American women writers such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1877), Kate Chopin (1899), and Edith Wharton (1913; 1905) wrote novels depicting the toll taken on women by domestic ideology and interrogating the ideal of motherhood as a woman’s highest calling.¹ Other “official” discourses responded by denigrating the mother and rebutting the claim of these “radical” writers: in contrast to the women writers who suggested that the deeply embedded and institutionalized notions of domesticity limited women by keeping them in the home looking after the children, the masculine voices argued that institutions—from literary art to national progress—were limited or damaged by mothers. Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer identified women as the weaker of the species due to their mothering capacity: “The physical tax which reproduction necessitates,” he asserted, “is . . . a tax which restricts individual development in various directions” (1898a: 533). Describing one of these directions in his discussion of “The Constitution of the State,” Spencer argued against suffrage for women on the grounds that their “love of the helpless,” a trait “concomitant of their maternal func-

tions,” makes them impulsive and unable to make the judgments required of voting citizens (1898b: 195-196). As Magner has put it, Spencer believed that “females came to see all social problems through the distorting medium of maternity” (Magner, 1992: 119).²

Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, similarly argued that women stand in “opposition to civilization,” “retarding and restraining” progress because they “represent the interests of the family and of sexual life.” Therefore, he posited, “the work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men” (1961: 59). And the destructive power of motherhood was not limited to national progress, apparently: William Dean Howells, self-styled theorist of American literary realism, called for writers to “escape the paralysis of tradition” which, like a dysfunctional mother, produced “seeds of death” and “still-born art” (cited in Miller, 1990: 23).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman entered this conversation with her 1911 novel *What Diantha Did*. Indeed, she made her life’s work the theorizing and championing of motherhood. To some extent, Gilman joins the voices critical of the mother. She agrees that the mother as constructed by domestic ideology is an obsolete and debilitating ideal. But she also acknowledges that social institutions and traditions force women to adhere to that ideal rather than adapting motherhood to fit and serve the national progress. She critiques the long-standing perception of the private sphere, describing it as passive, self-involved, and isolated from the concerns of the larger society. In its stead, she calls for an active, empowered, socially responsible and feminized space that combines the private and public. With this configuration, she expands the home to encompass all of society and places the domestic sphere’s commander-in-chief—the mother—at the helm.

This revitalized image of the mother pervades Gilman’s oeuvre. She theorizes it in nonfiction works such as *Women and Economics* and *His Religion and Hers*. She dramatizes its need in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” its success in *What Diantha Did* and *The Crux*, and its utopian possibilities in *Moving the Mountain* and, even more so, in *Herland*, where the private sphere becomes the nation and the mother, the divinity. In these works, Gilman aggressively takes on domestic ideology, criticizing it as “unnatural” and damaging, both to women and to the nation’s progress. With her interest in race progress and her revision of accepted evolutionary theory, she answers voices like Spencer’s (1899) and Freud’s (1961), replacing the “survival of the fittest” model with a maternally organized cooperative model of race progress. Her maternal revision of evolution theory supports Gilman’s breaking down of the separate spheres by allowing her to claim a “natural” connection between home and industry. Declaring women the species’ original agents of industry and progress, she embraces industrialism and capitalism as appropriate areas of endeavor for women as well as men. In *What Diantha Did*, she dramatizes these ideas, bringing technological progress into the home as the natural and appropriate tool of mothers. And, as we shall see, she extends these ideas to literary

"industry" as well, developing a maternal style of realism that serves not only as the appropriate literary vehicle for her social vision, but as one of its important components.

The reality of mothering: Gilman the iconoclast²

So what, exactly, did Diantha do? Ultimately, she single-handedly dismantled the debilitating traditions surrounding the home and the mother. The novel tells her story: when her fiancé postpones indefinitely their wedding due to financial constraints, twenty-one year old Diantha Bell develops a business plan which she believes will allow her to both earn some money—thus speeding their marriage date—and contribute to the nation's progress.³ Based on the belief that the work of household maintenance—including cooking, cleaning, and (for some) supervising servants—is too often conflated with the loving duty of mothering, she sets out to isolate these sites of labor by professionalizing home care and repairing a dysfunctional motherhood. She first tests her theories of domestic economic science as a live-in housemaid for a married woman with a small child who finds herself unable to pursue her profession in architecture due to the demands of her household. The experiment successful (and much talked about), Diantha proceeds to her larger goal of establishing a series of businesses designed to take the work out of the home, culminating in a complete residential community based on her principles. In the end, she marries and becomes a mother herself.

While the novel's plot resembles a domestic novel—the literary vehicle of domesticity that enjoyed its heyday in the first half of the nineteenth century⁴—*Diantha* departs from the domestic tradition in its representation of domestic ideology. In theory, the domestic ideal invested antebellum women with moral influence over the public sphere through husbands and sons. But in practice this ideology imposed a false separation of "public" and "private,"⁵ keeping women in their homes, focused on their own family's well being and (at least theoretically) isolated from the concerns of society. Gilman does not portray the home as a retreat from the public sphere or a check on the ills of society; rather she envisions a home that functions in harmony with growing industrialism and capitalism. Indeed, her vision brings those developments into the home and uses them to improve the lives of mothers and children. She peels away the overdetermined layering of the notions of "mother" and "home," demonstrating that these traditional ideals—adhered to out of an unexamined allegiance to tradition—bear little resemblance to women's reality and cause damage for mothers as well as for the nation. She replaces those old ideas with a new domesticity—an industrialized domesticity—that embraces the social progress valorized at the turn of the century.

Gilman had explored these issues previously in "Two Callings," a poem contrasting time-honored traditions of women's service in the home with her vision of the publicly engaged mother.⁶ The first "calling" in the poem comes from a "deep"—presumably masculine—voice (l 1). It calls the poem's speaker

to submit to “duty” and provide the “allegiance and long labor due my lord” by serving him in the home (ll 19, 21). The voice portrays the home as a safe and comfortable place, a concept justified by its longevity: “So old! so old!” (l 9). It produces images of ancient homes—caves, treetops, leafy lairs—suggesting the naturalness of the concept, in keeping with the “laws of life” (l 38). The voice calls the poem’s speaker to perform her duty not by force but out of love. Evoking the figure of Mary, the ultimate willing mother-servant, the speaker agrees: “I bow—I kneel—the woman soul is willing” (l 29).⁷ Comforted by notions of a safe and comfortable home as the site of duty through mothering, the speaker sleeps peacefully.

In contrast to the first, Gilman prefaces the second calling with a bugle call—a call to action—and the voice, “a clear, keen, ringing cry,” suggests no gender and later identifies itself as “the world” (ll 43, 49). This voice calls the poem’s speaker to see the home as an aspect of life, but not the site for all of life’s work: “Home is the cradle—shall a whole life stay / Cradled in comfort through the working day?” (ll 51-52). In this calling, the voice extends the site of duty beyond the limited sphere of the personal home to the entire world. Like the voice in the first calling, this voice speaks of duty, love, and motherhood, but the object of that service has changed. Rejecting service solely in the individual home as selfish and cowardly, the voice defines the reach of the “Mother” as public and unconfined:

So when the great word “Mother!” rang once more,
I saw at last its meaning and its place;
Not the blind passion of the brooding past,
But Mother—the World’s Mother—come at last,
To love as she had never loved before –
To feed and guard and teach the human race. (ll 85-90)

In its rejection of the “blind passion of the brooding past,” the voice dismisses the tradition of domestic ideology as outmoded, but retains the belief in the value of a distinctly maternal ethic.⁸ By associating domestic ideology with the leafy lairs of the past, Gilman plays upon the nation’s conception of itself as progressive.

Gilman dramatizes this message in *Diantha*. As the first matter of business, she extricates the reality of mothering from the ideal touted by tradition. She opens not with Diantha, but with her fiancé’s mother and four sisters. They, along with Ross Warden, Diantha’s betrothed, live in an extravagant home and employ two servants. The five women are entirely supported by Ross since the death of his father, and they busy themselves with activities that Gilman clearly finds frivolous: painting flowers in the margins of a volume of poetry, embroidering Ross’s shirt pockets, and knitting countless afghans (of particularly questionable value in southern California). An apparently doting mother, Mrs. Warden is aptly named as a woman who, by insisting on ad-

herence to a tradition that places women in the home, has imprisoned her daughters in inactivity and Ross—"reared in the traditions of older days as to a man's duty toward women" (Gilman, 1910: 12)—in a prison of financial obligation. Their financial position allows Mrs. Warden to remain oblivious to the details of home management, thus facilitating her extravagance. For instance, incredulous that the family has again run out of butter, she must be told by their maid the rather obvious fact "dat waffles and sweet potaters and cohn bread dey do take butter" (5). On the other end of the spectrum is Diantha's mother. The Bells are far from wealthy, and Mrs. Bell knows all too well what it takes to run a household. Hers is an endless round of cooking, cleaning, and mending—all work she hates but believes to be her "duty" (23). Diantha perceives her mother's life to be "an interminable dull tragedy; this graceful, eager, black-eyed woman, spending what to the girl was literally a lifetime, in the conscientious performance of duties she did not love" (22). Diantha, too, has suffered from the jobs linked to mothering: "her young strength had been heavily taxed from childhood in that complex process known as 'helping mother'" (31). Her father does not recognize the value of Mrs. Bell's or Diantha's work: "he expected such competence in women, all women; it was their natural field of ability, their duty as wives and mothers. Also as daughters. If they failed in it, that was by illness or perversity. If they succeeded—that was a matter of course" (31).

If Mrs. Warden and Mrs. Bell exist on opposite ends of the financial spectrum, Isabel Porne—the woman Diantha goes to work for in the fictional California town of Orchardina⁹—is in the middle. Prior to Diantha's arrival, Isabel attempts to care for her home, her husband, and her child while continuing her work as an architect, but as she has neither the skill nor the interest to keep the house the way she likes it, and as she resents the time those duties take from the work and family she enjoys, she fails, resulting in an unhappy home for everyone. As she explains to a commiserating friend:

"Give me my drawing tools and plans and I'm happy—but this business"—she swept a white hand wearily about—"it's not my work, that's all."

"But you enjoy it, don't you—I mean having nice things?" asked her friend.

"Of course I enjoy it, but so does Edgar. Can't a woman enjoy her home, just as a man does, without running the shop?" (Gilman, 1910: 75)

Gilman defends Isabel's rejection of housework from charges of unwomanliness with a play on words, explaining that Isabel liked nothing more than making a home; indeed, as an architect, she had "made" the one they currently lived in. By playing with the slippage between home making and making homes, Gilman achieves one of the key points in her argument: that

housework, for most women, is not loving service, and maintaining the physical space of the house does not belong to the sacred classification of “home.” This work constitutes a job or a business like any other, and to expect women to undertake it without pay and regardless of ability or inclination amounts to exploitation, not to mention a waste of valuable labor. Industrial age principles of waste and efficiency are rarely applied to the home, Diantha finds, due the sentiment attached to the ideal. But Diantha subjects the workings of the house to the same rigorous scrutiny as any labor site. Speaking at a meeting of the Orchardina Home and Culture Club, amidst the “shocked silence” and “chill displeasure” of her listeners (Gilman, 1910: 112, 113), Diantha uses the language of labor efficiency to criticize the current system of “domestic economy”:

Even where the wife does all the housework, without pay, we still waste labor to an enormous extent, requiring one whole woman to wait upon each man. If the man hires one or more servants, the wastes increase. If one hundred men undertake some common business, they do not divide in two halves, each man having another man to serve him—fifty productive laborers, and fifty cooks. Two or three cooks could provide for the whole group; to use fifty is to waste 45 per cent of the labor. (113)

Calling, in effect, for an industrial revolution in the home, Diantha proposes a collective team of home care professionals as a solution to the waste of the current situation, and the working out of these ideas forms the substance of the rest of the novel.

Maternal evolution: Progress through mothering

Diantha links her project to the national progress by asserting (in the same address to the Home and Culture club) that domestic labor, far from timeless, was simply one stage in the evolution of labor. In the pre-industrial period, all work was domestic in that it was carried out in the home. As society progressed, various forms of labor moved out of the home for greater efficiency. Weaving and spinning, as well as the making of shoes, candles, soap, wine, and other tasks became socialized as they were performed collectively for the consumer. Bakers and confectioners took over aspects of food preparation; professional window washers and the like provided certain house cleaning services. In this context, Diantha’s plan of, for example, a community kitchen will not “destroy the home” and “strike at the roots of the family” (Gilman, 1910: 122), as her critics would have it, but rather would continue that progress already begun.

Diantha’s critics voiced a common concern. As Alan Trachtenberg has pointed out, many Americans feared the raging capitalism and industrialization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the antithesis to the home and the domestic, feminine values associated with it (1982: 78), but

Gilman facilitates a relationship between domesticity and national, industrial progress through a revision of popular evolutionary theory, a topic she takes up in several of her nonfiction works.¹⁰ Gilman asserts that the notion of home as separate from the public sphere and sites of industry grows out of a masculine evolutionary theory that fails to recognize the inherently feminine nature of industry and facilitates the nation's excessive competition, rampant individualism, and—we shall see—struggle-based literary tradition.

Conventional theories of evolution often served to justify the female's secondary place in the species. As we saw above, Herbert Spencer denigrated the role of women in evolution by arguing that "the attributes of childhood and motherhood were incompatible with the human image demanded by a model of social evolution in which the 'struggle for existence' was the essential motor," and that, because of their maternal instinct, women viewed social problems through "the distorting medium of maternity," making them ill-equipped for leadership (Magner, 1992: 116, 1181-119). However Gilman, influenced by sociologist Lester Ward, praises the superiority of female values of labor, altruism, and community.¹¹ Gilman criticizes evolutionary theory's dependence on the language of fight and struggle, demonstrating that in fact most progress comes about not through fighting but through cultivation, and that the act of cultivation—of nurturing—is a female, mothering act (1976: 93).¹² Men's greater power in contemporary society, she explains, has led to the popular association of evolution with combat; therefore she blames the destructive character of the nation's capitalism and industry on their association with this excessively masculine version of evolution:

Man alone being represented in the main fields of modern industry, [the] male instinct for hunting and fighting plays havoc with the true economic processes. He makes a warfare of business, he makes prey of his competitors, he still seeks to enslave—to make others work for him, instead of freely and joyously working all he can. The best industrial progress needs both elements—ours is but a compromise as yet, something between the beehive and the battlefield. (Gilman, 1903: 90)

The doctrine of separate spheres which keeps women in their homes, Gilman argues, causes imbalance in the fields of industry. Under masculine influence, business becomes warfare—a site of violence and destruction—rather than the female-centered beehive—a site of cooperation and productivity. Gilman acknowledges that industry requires some competition, but the competition she advocates encourages growth and productivity rather than monopoly and individual gain at others' expense. Gilman calls for a balancing of the individualism and egoism of the masculine "survival of the fittest" ethos with a broader social coordination through altruistic service. Challenging Spencer, she posits that this feminine attitude, the "impulses of motherhood ...

altruistic in origin" (1976: 252) is not a "distorting medium" but rather the locus of female superiority and the basis of evolutionary progress.

Gilman's maternal revision of evolution theory significantly impacts her understanding of and relationship to the nation's industrial progress; she credits women with the human tendency to labor and therefore—in a move at once reminiscent of and revolutionary to domestic ideology—claims the nation's industrial progress to be a result of women's influence. Since "the constructive tendency is essentially feminine; the destructive masculine" (1903: 87), men adapted to women's superior lifestyle:

Well is it for the human race that the male savage finally took hold of the female's industry. Whether he perceived her superiority and sought to emulate it is doubtful; more probably it was the pressure of economic conditions which slowly forced him to it. The glaring proofs of time taught him that the pasture was more profitable than the hunting ground, and the cornfield than the pasture. The accumulating riches produced by the woman's industry drew him on. Slowly, reluctantly, the lordly fighter condescended to follow the humble worker, who led him by thousands of years. In the hands of the male, industry developed. (Gilman, 1903: 89)

Thus Gilman overturns popular notions of evolution emphasizing masculine qualities of fight and struggle; she asserts that, in fact, those tendencies had to be—and must continue to be—overcome in order for progress to occur.

Diantha as progressive mother

This vision of evolution forms the basis of Diantha's project. The businesses she develops—home meal delivery service, housekeeping service, lunch counter—are capitalistic in their drive for profit, but that drive is modified/balanced by her motherly concern for "her" girls—the domestic laborers whose working conditions she has vastly improved—as well as for the women she serves in their homes. Eventually Diantha realizes her goal: she establishes an experimental community that separates the work of the home from mothering. Families live in their own homes, but their meals are prepared in a communal kitchen by professional cooks. The homes are kept up by professional housekeepers. Children are tended for a portion of each day by professional childcare providers in what she has called elsewhere a "baby garden."¹³ And all these professionals have their own homes and families that are cared for in like manner. Beyond this professional goal, Diantha has achieved her personal goal, too. She has married Ross and become a mother herself.

It may strike the reader as odd that this novel, so concerned with mothering as an evolutionary force, says relatively little about Diantha as a mother. When her son is born, "She loved it, nursed it, and ran her business at long range for six months. But then she brought nurse and child to the [experimental

community] with her, placed them in the cool, airy nursery in the garden, and varied her busy day with still hours by herself—the baby in her arms" (Gilman, 1910: 243). Gilman believes that mothering becomes more meaningful and positive when the mother is pursuing a career, when she devotes herself not only to her own child, but also to the world in some way. Diantha takes time with her infant son, but soon returns to her work. Earlier in the novel, when Diantha takes the workload of the home from Isabel Porne, Isabel is able to return to her profession. And it is this ability to work that in turn makes it possible to "love [her husband] and baby—as—as I *do!*—Only when I'm tired and discouraged I can't put my hand on it somehow" (93). Thus, in *Diantha*, Gilman is not so interested in the mother-child relationship, except insofar as it is threatened by an outmoded notion of mothering. Her real interest is in a social or public form of mothering described in the second calling—a form of mothering turned toward the world. According to this system, public or professional mothers care for and nurture the community's children while the biological mothers become publicly active by doing work at which they are gifted and which they find rewarding, be it architecture, factory work, city management, or something else. In their collective effort, they mother by participating in the community. Gilman believed that mother-love was the "main current of race-preservation," and this vision of communal care for all the world's children fits that evolutionary goal (Ladd-Taylor, 1994: 111).

We see the beginnings of that evolution in *Diantha*. After extricating the work of home maintenance from the work of mothering, "Orchardina basked and prospered [under Diantha's new system]; its citizens found their homes happier and less expensive than ever before, and its citizenesses began to wake up and to do things worth while" (Gilman, 1910: 243). Certainly, Gilman makes rather grand claims for the results of Diantha's experiment: "domestic bliss increased" and the town's physical health improved as a result of eating a more carefully planned and prepared diet (239). "Citizenesses"—the women lulled to sleep by old domestic ideology in the first of the two callings—now wake up and become actively involved in the race's development. Gilman does not offer this vision as utopian, however; she presents it as an achievable reality according to the possibilities of her maternal evolutionary theory.

Maternal realism

Gilman's revision of evolution theory impinges not only upon her theories of domesticity, but upon her literary theory as well. Just as she judged modern industry to be characterized by the overly masculine focus on battle, she judges literary forms to share this masculine fight and struggle motif. Indeed, Cynthia Eagle Russett (1976), in her analysis of Darwin's influence on American intellectual life, examines the way American naturalist writers such as London, Dreiser, and Norris take up the Darwinian world view. Darwin's theories "revealed the animalistic struggle underlying all human behavior" (Bell, 1993: 109). London's work focused on the rule of "kill or be killed, eat or be eaten"

(qtd. in Russett, 1976: 176)¹⁴ and portrays the wilderness, which London found particularly appropriate for Darwin's theories, as the site of a "ruthless" struggle for existence (Russett, 1976: 181). Dreiser transported Darwinian law into the urban setting, demonstrating that "civilization, whatever its complexities, was no stranger to the law of tooth and claw" (Russett, 1976: 199). And in their adoption of principles of determinism, many naturalists believed that "chance reigned ... and not choice" (Russett, 1976: 185). Thus Darwinian naturalism offers "a tough-minded estimate of humanity as driven by self-seeking compulsions to which terms like 'morality' simply did not apply" (Russett, 1976: 190). Naturalism, although most typically associated with the "survival of the fittest," was not the only genre influenced by Darwinian theory. Realist writers also took up the survival ethic in their portrayal of late-nineteenth century society. Lily Bart, in Wharton's *House of Mirth*, certainly has to resort to "jungle ethics" in her attempt to survive in New York society, and Howells's Silas Lapham, ultimately experiences ruin because he refuses to compete in business according to the dog-eat-dog mentality.

Gilman responds to this literary tradition as she responds to the masculine, combat focus of evolution: with the altruism of motherhood. Since she believed that the individual and the social body exercise agency in the evolution process, she rejects the naturalists' leanings toward determinism and instead presents possibilities for attaining perfection. Rather than focusing on "devolution" and the inheritance of animal traits leading to a "beast within" (Russett, 1976: 178, 184), Gilman revises these notions, proving—albeit questionably—that improvements made in one generation can be passed on to the next, an immensely hopeful theory.¹⁵ The optimism in her work, then, stems from her theory of evolution just as the pessimism of naturalist and realist writing stems from a deterministic understanding of evolution. Gilman would explore the way literary forms are informed by masculinist theories of evolution more fully in her utopian work, *Herland*. In this novel, the male visitors to the highly evolved, all-female nation of Herland find the drama and literature there to be "rather flat. You see, they lacked the sex motive and, with it, jealousy. They had no interplay of warring nations, no aristocracy and its ambitions, no wealth and poverty opposition" (1979: 99). By suggesting that the "law of battle" represented only a small piece of the evolutionary picture, Gilman essentially challenges the literature that depends upon the struggle motif, presenting a new kind of realism that dramatizes the altruistic aspects of evolutionary progress. In this way she opens the door to maternal realism: a genre that realistically portrays the increasingly complex factors of industrialized modern life and their effects on individuals and families, while offering an altruistic, maternal ethic as a means of negotiating these factors.

Conclusion

Gilman acknowledges the potentially negative effects of industry on women's lives, but Diantha's appellation as the "Amazon of Industry" (Gilman,

1910: 230) by one of her admirers underlines Gilman's portrayal of a society in which women master technological progress, using it to their advantage rather than fighting or fearing it. In this maternal-realistic novel, she imagines mothers freed of the work of the home to mother the community at large. She thus depicts a community organized around a maternal, feminine value system. Far from a utopian vision, Gilman's optimism grows out of her evolution theory and is, for her, realistic. She rejects the Darwinian concept of the battlefield both as a tenet of evolution theory and as a basis for realism. In its place, she offers a maternal, altruistic fiction that depicts a maternal order as both the vehicle and goal of evolutionary progress. In her maternal realism, she imagines a domestic setting not threatened by the changing world but operating in harmony with industry.

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¹According to Nina Baym in *Woman's Fiction*, "The home may have come to seem increasingly less tenable as a social unity, let alone a feminine power base (1978: 297), and therefore, "the liberal women who began their writing careers after the Civil War found the redemptive possibilities of enlightened domesticity no longer credible" (50). See, for example, Phelps's *The Story of Avis*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Wharton's *Custom of the Country*.

²See also Lane (1991) for her treatment of Gilman's treatment of Spencer's theories.

³Gilman originally serialized *What Diantha Did* in 1909-1910 in *Forerunner*, the periodical she wrote and published from 1909 to 1916. She published the novel in book form through her own publishing house, Charlton Company, in 1910.

⁴My understanding of the domestic novel is informed by Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction* and Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*. According to Baym's configuration, woman's fiction was a form of Bildungsroman in which a young female protagonist is inculcated into domestic ideology. The optimistic domestic ideal informing these novels offered the hope that mercenary society might be reorganized "on the principle of familiar love" (1978: 49). Tompkins takes a broader approach, extending the domestic classification to novels that don't follow the overplot of woman's fiction. As she explains in her insightful discussion of the cultural work of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, antebellum domestic fiction portrayed a worldview in which mother love was a source of significant power. She argues that "the popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view" by applying feminine values to the situations encountered in daily life. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she asserts, was "a brilliant redaction of the culture's favorite story about itself—the story of salvation through motherly love" (1985: 22).

⁵There has been much attention in recent years to the false dichotomy of the public and private spheres, evidenced with Cathy Davidson's special issue of *American Literature* and with collections such as Monika Elbert's *Separate Spheres No More*. My point here is not to claim that there were separate spheres, but rather to acknowledge that nineteenth-century domestic ideology was built upon the fiction of two distinct spheres. Indeed, Gilman anticipates Davidson by debunking the notion of the separate spheres and demonstrating repeatedly that these two "spheres" spilled into each other constantly.

⁶"Two Callings" served as the opening for her nonfiction treatise *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903).

⁷The line here echoes the language of Mary's response to the news that she will become the mother of Jesus. Mary answers: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1.38).

⁸Gilman fits squarely in the cultural feminist camp in her belief that certain traits are essentially female, or come more naturally to the female. In particular, her work anticipates that of Sarah Ruddick (1995) who argues for a specifically maternal style of thinking and acting in the world. See also Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World* and Molly Ladd-Taylor's *Mother-Work*.

⁹Gilman lived in Pasadena for many years, and her creation of Orchardina seems to be based on that experience.

¹⁰She addresses this issue of the nation's progress and evolution in much of her work. In this section, I'll be referring to two texts: *His Religion and Hers* and *The Home, Its Work and Influence*.

¹¹Gilman was especially influenced by Ward's article "Our Better Halves." *Forum* 6 (1888) 266-275.

¹²Although she articulated these ideas in various nonfiction works throughout her life, in *His Religion and Hers*, she provided one of the fuller treatments of this theory. Published in 1923, this book came in the aftermath of World War I, explaining her focus on the male propensity for battle.

¹³Gilman describes the baby gardens most extensively in *Concerning Children*.

¹⁴Russett quotes London's dog hero Buck in *The Call of the Wild* here.

¹⁵The transmissibility of acquired traits is a scientific project that Diantha's husband Ross takes up once he is out from under the financial burden of caring for his mother and sisters. Although this theory is not defensible scientifically, it suits Gilman's optimistic vision of evolution in which individuals can exercise agency over their own progress.

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