Spring 2011

Competing visions: Women writers and male illustrators in the Golden Age of Illustration

Jason Richard Williams
University of New Hampshire, Durham

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/566

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.
Competing visions: Women writers and male illustrators in the Golden Age of Illustration

Abstract
In "Competing Visions," I examine the works of women writers and male illustrators during what has been termed the "Golden Age of Illustration" (1880–1920). Due to advances in printing technology and the proliferation of mass-market magazines just before the turn-of-the-last century, novels and short stories were often published with images by illustrators like Howard Pyle and N. C. Wyeth, who subsequently gained enormous popularity and developed wide followings. At the same time, women writers enjoyed an unprecedented period of widespread exposure and political influence. Looking closely at the intersection of images and texts from early twentieth century periodical publications reveals where these two groups disconnect politically, socially, and aesthetically. Ultimately, scrutinizing the illustrations in texts by Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Edith Wharton, Pauline Hopkins, and Zitkala-Sa exposes how writers, illustrators, and readers made sense of some of the most important ideological debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Keywords
Literature, American, Art History, Literature, Modern

This dissertation is available at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/566
COMPETING VISIONS: WOMEN WRITERS AND MALE ILLUSTRATORS IN
THE GOLDEN AGE OF ILLUSTRATION

BY

JASON RICHARD WILLIAMS
B. A., Brigham Young University, 1999
M. A., Utah State University, 2003

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

May, 2011
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Dissertation Director
Sarah Way Sherman, Associate Professor of English

Brigette Gabcke Bailey, Associate Professor of English

Robin Hackett, Associate Professor of English

Eleanor M. Hight, Professor of Art and Art History

Lisa MacFarlane, Professor of English

Date: May 2, 2011
DEDICATION

To Chelsea, who put up with the writing of this dissertation for years longer than she should have, and to my children, who prayed nightly for its completion. Your patience, confidence, and love spurred me to the finish line.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Sarah Way Sherman, for her guidance and support throughout this project. She spent many hours reading my chapters with precision and skill, helping me see trouble spots and showing me how to navigate around them. She has provided me with a model of scholarship and teaching that I still aspire to emulate. I would also like to thank my committee members: Dr. Brigitte Bailey, who introduced me to the history of print culture and periodical publishing; Dr. Robin Hackett, who helped me understand modernism; Dr. Eleanor Hight, who was gracious enough to let me sit in on her 20th Century Art History class so I could see what American illustrators were not doing; and Dr. Lisa MacFarlane, who first acquainted me with Pauline Hopkins and the Colored American Magazine.

I wish to thank the Graduate School at the University of New Hampshire for giving me a Dissertation Fellowship and the English Department for providing me with teaching assistantships and summer fellowships. I would also like to thank the following libraries for allowing me to browse their collections of late nineteenth and early-twentieth century periodicals and other materials: The Dimond Library at the University of New Hampshire, the Houghton Library at Harvard University, the L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, the Seattle Public Library, and Robyn
Holderman of the Inter-Library Loan department at Brigham Young University-Idaho, who kept me well-stocked with rare texts from all over.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kendall Grant, Chair of the English Department at Brigham Young University-Idaho, who had the generosity and wisdom to supply me with a week in a cabin at Sky Mountain Lodge during the middle of a busy fall semester. I am confident that without this unique chance to read, think, and write uninterruptedly, I would never have finished my dissertation.

Finally, I want to thank my twin, Trevor Williams, who in our senior year of high school decided to spend his money on Susan E. Meyer's America's Great Illustrators (1989) rather than buy school clothes. At the time, I resented loaning him my wardrobe. Twenty-two years later, I am forced to admit, like Jack's mother, that those magic beans really paid off.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ....................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................. viii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................ xi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE ALTERNATE WESTS OF ELINORE PRUITT STEWART AND N. C. WYETH</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity in the American West</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart’s Feminist West</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. C. Wyeth Envisions the West</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. EDITH WHARTON AND A. B. WENZELL IN THE HOUSE OF MIRTH</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. B. Wenzell and the Art Nouveau Woman</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenzell’s Illustrations Discourage a Nuanced View of Lily</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenzell’s Alternate Ending</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PAULINE HOPKINS, R. EMMETT OWEN, AND J. ALEXANDRE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 N. C. Wyeth, *Gavotte* ...............................................................53
1.2 N. C. Wyeth, *The Last Stand* ..................................................56
1.3 N. C. Wyeth, *The Prospector* ..................................................56
1.4 N. C. Wyeth, *Captain Bill Bones* ..........................................57
1.5 N. C. Wyeth, *Jim Hawkins Leaves Home* ...............................58
1.6 N. C. Wyeth, *My Mother* ........................................................60
1.7 N. C. Wyeth, *The Woman Homesteader* ................................61
1.8 N. C. Wyeth, *Jerrine Was Always Such a Dear Little Pal* ..........63

2.1 *Dinner* ......................................................................................82
2.2 Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Mrs. Lloyd* ...........................................85
2.3 Vittore Carpaccio, *Meeting with the Pope* ..............................86
2.4 A. B. Wenzell, *I Mean to Make You* .......................................87
2.5 A. B. Wenzell, *The Passing Show* ...........................................87
2.6 A. B. Wenzell, *The Woman Continued* ..................................88
2.7 A. B. Wenzell, *She Lingered* ..................................................89
2.8 A. B. Wenzell, *It Was a Good Deal Better* ..............................90
2.9 A. B. Wenzell, *She Turned* ....................................................92
2.10 A. B. Wenzell, *You Don't Seem* ............................................95
2.11 A. B. Wenzell, *Dear Mr. Seldon* ............................................96
2.12 A. B. Wenzell, *Look at Those Spangles* .................................97

viii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, <em>Adam Tempted</em> ................................. 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>A. B. Wenzell, <em>Goodbye</em> ..................................................... 112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>R. Emmett Owen, <em>He Cut the Ropes that Bound Her</em> ......................... 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>R. Emmett Owen, <em>Everybody Was A-Lookin’</em> ................................. 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>E. W. Kemble, <em>Mr. Dilsey in Hoboken</em> .................................... 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td><em>Remington Bicycle Ad</em> ......................................................... 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td><em>Colored American Magazine Cover, Sep. 1901</em> .............................. 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td><em>Colored American Magazine Cover, Jun. 1904</em> .............................. 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td><em>The Young Colored American</em> .................................................. 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td><em>Merry Christmas</em> ..................................................................... 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>J. Alexandre Skeete, <em>After the Meats</em> ...................................... 146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>J. Alexandre Skeete, <em>Did it Ever Occur to You</em> ........................... 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>J. Alexandre Skeete, <em>With a Cry Jewel Staggered</em> ........................ 153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>J. Alexandre Skeete, <em>With One Bound</em> ...................................... 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13</td>
<td><em>The Death of Clotel</em> .............................................................. 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14</td>
<td><em>Laura Nelson and Son</em> ............................................................. 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15</td>
<td><em>Laura Nelson</em> .......................................................................... 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>E. W. Kemble, <em>Coontown’s 400</em> ................................................ 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>F. Holland Day, <em>Armageddon</em> .................................................... 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>F. Holland Day, <em>Menelek</em> ....................................................... 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>W. A. Rogers, <em>A Meeting of Colored Republicans</em> .......................... 167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.21 W. A. Rogers, A Little Missionary Work ..................................167
3.22 W. A. Rogers, On the Way to a Political Meeting ..................167
3.23 W. A. Rogers, Judge Nash Holds a Reception ......................169
3.24 J. Alexandre Skeete, Colored American Magazine Cover, Oct. 1901 ..172
3.25 J. Alexandre Skeete, Zulu Prince ........................................173
3.26 F. Holland Day, Ebony and Ivory ........................................174
3.27 J. Alexandre Skeete, Zulu Prince (Endpiece Illustration) ............175
4.1 Gertrude Käsebier, Zitkala-Ša in New York Society Dress ..........189
4.2 Gertrude Käsebier, Zitkala-Ša in Native American Dress ..........190
4.3 Frederic Remington, At My Feet a Dead Man Lay ..................206
4.4 Howard Pyle, On the War Path .............................................211
4.5 F. Luis Mora, The Coming of Winter ....................................214
4.6 Angel De Cora, The Sick Child ............................................220
4.7 Angel De Cora, Gray Wolf’s Daughter (Header) .......................223
4.8 Angel De Cora, Gray Wolf’s Daughter (Footer) .......................224
4.9 Angel De Cora, The Muskrat Began to Feel Awkward ..............231
4.10 Angel De Cora, Over a Bed of Coals ....................................234
ABSTRACT

COMPETING VISIONS: WOMEN WRITERS AND MALE ILLUSTRATORS IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF ILLUSTRATION

By

Jason Richard Williams

University of New Hampshire, May, 2011

In “Competing Visions,” I examine the works of women writers and male illustrators during what has been termed the “Golden Age of Illustration” (1880-1920). Due to advances in printing technology and the proliferation of mass-market magazines just before the turn-of-the-last century, novels and short stories were often published with images by illustrators like Howard Pyle and N. C. Wyeth, who subsequently gained enormous popularity and developed wide followings. At the same time, women writers enjoyed an unprecedented period of widespread exposure and political influence. Looking closely at the intersection of images and texts from early twentieth century periodical publications reveals where these two groups disconnect politically, socially, and aesthetically. Ultimately, scrutinizing the illustrations in texts by Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Edith Wharton, Pauline Hopkins, and Zitkala-Ša exposes how writers, illustrators, and readers made sense of some of the most important ideological debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
INTRODUCTION

Every time I explain to someone that my dissertation is about writers and illustrators at the beginning of the twentieth century, they always ask, “You mean, like in kids’ books?” The implication of the question, of course, is that illustrated fiction doesn’t really sound like the proper topic for academic inquiry. For most people, illustrations in fiction function a little like training wheels on a bike: they hold the reader’s attention and keep her focused on the story while she is too young to follow the plot on her own, and then gradually disappear as she gains experience and proficiency in reading. The thought of making the conjunction of pictures and text the focus of a sustained piece of literary analysis, then, strikes most people as either pointless or juvenile.

What many modern-day readers don’t realize, however, is that much of the fiction written for adults during what has been called the “Golden Age of American Illustration” (1880-1920) was initially published with pictures. Nearly all of Mark Twain; most of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Charlotte Perkins Gilman; much of Kate Chopin, Mary Austin, Jack London, and Stephen Crane (to name just a few) appeared for the first time before the reading public with illustrations. Rather than simply helping the reader follow the plot, these illustrations interact with their texts in complex ways: reinforcing particular readings, ameliorating or shutting down others, taming radical ideas, or complicating superficial ones. In each case, looking carefully at a text with its accompanying illustrations provides...
a window into how at least one contemporary reader understood the text. Often, close analysis of how illustrations (re)present a given piece of fiction exposes fault lines where author and illustrator conflict or disconnect, revealing fundamental differences in the culture at large. Ultimately, scrutinizing the intersection of images and texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides a deeper understanding of the social ideologies and cultural concerns that occupied readers and writers of the time: immigration, racial strife, economic upheaval, changing gender roles, and a growing sense that the certainties of the Victorian era couldn’t be depended upon to make sense of the modern age.

It has become commonplace to say that between the years of 1880 and 1920 the United States experienced a period of unprecedented change. Between 1879 and the First World War, the population of the United States more than doubled, reaching a total of over 100 million (Winship 47). The size of the economy grew by more than seven fold between 1880 and 1920, fueled by an increase in industrial manufacturing and an influx of immigrant workers (Sutch 24-25). In Creating Modern Capitalism (1999), Thomas McCraw notes that between 1879 and 1916, “most Americans were either nonwhite, immigrants, or the children of at least one immigrant parent” (306). During this period women fought successfully for the right to vote, urbanization replaced an agrarian lifestyle, and the United States became a dominant global power. An expanding print culture both resulted from and contributed to these larger social changes. In the fourth volume of A History of the Book in America (2009), Carl Kaestle and
Janice Radway argue that book and magazine publishers sought to homogenize an increasingly disparate nation in order to market their products to as many consumers as possible. They also point out that the resultant publishing opportunities gave voice to previously marginalized populations such as women and minority groups, driving “wedges of dissent” into the national conversation (8). The rise of periodical publication that made it possible for the women writers and male illustrators of this study to take part in that conversation was brought about by a remarkable confluence of technological, social, and economic changes.

The nationalization of corporations, along with increased production and transportation capabilities, changed the way that products were advertised and distributed. Rather than selling to small, localized markets, companies could target multiple sections of the country at once. Part of the reason that periodical publications were able to reach so many potential buyers is that magazine prices in the 1890s dropped from 35 to 15 to 10 cents, ramping up circulation numbers and providing an attractive avenue for advertisers (Tebbel and Zuckerman 66). Suddenly, the types of content that encouraged readers to buy magazines (fiction, general interest articles, and illustrations) became very much in demand. The increase in publishing opportunities provided by greater magazine circulation at the end of the nineteenth century was a mixed blessing for women writers. While writing fiction had been a woman-centered field since at least the middle of the nineteenth century (one thinks of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s invective against that “damned mob of scribbling women”), it suddenly had the potential to be a
very lucrative one (Person 24). Michael Winship notes that yearly revenues for periodical publication (including both newspapers and magazines) grew from $61.5 million in 1879 to $352.2 million in 1916 (47). New economic opportunities encouraged writers and publishers to think of themselves as being involved in a modern business rather than in an amateur pursuit. While some women felt excited at the freedom that a wider marketplace offered them, the increased professionalization of the editorial field (along with journalism, illustration, and other occupations associated with magazine publication) also made it more difficult for women writers to enter a field that was becoming increasingly masculinized.

Frank Luther Mott, Christopher Wilson, and others have documented the change in the profession of magazine editing during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Up to the 1880s and even into the early 90s, magazine editing had been seen primarily as a genteel profession (Coultrap-McQuin 194). Editors of Scribner’s and the Atlantic Monthly would sit in their studies and wait for submissions to come to them to be either accepted or rejected. By the mid 1890s, however, the days of the gentleman editor were rapidly coming to a close. The proliferation of mass-market magazines, new ideas about how an editor should work, and changes in the ways that periodicals were marketed and advertised made the older model seem archaic and irrelevant. While some literary magazines like the Atlantic Monthly tried to hold on to traditional editing practices, by the beginning of the twentieth century nearly all of the older magazines had switched over to the newer methods and dozens of newer
periodicals sprang up every year. This change in the way that fiction-oriented periodicals functioned had a significant impact on the careers and writing of the women authors who published during the period. While older magazines had offered a kind of security and stability, newer mass-market periodicals gave many women writers greater exposure, more money, and a chance to try new styles.

In the years directly following the Civil War, magazine editors tended to treat the writers who contributed to their magazines like members of an extended family. Josephine Donovan, for example, describes the large group of women writers who had social and friendship connections with Annie Fields, the wife of the publisher James T. Fields. She describes a social gathering that took place under the auspices of the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1879 that included Annie Fields, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rose Terry Cooke, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Sarah Orne Jewett, Julia Ward Howe, Helen Hunt Jackson, and others (1). Donovan notes that Annie Fields had remarkably close ties and influence with dozens of other women writers, including Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Davis, Celia Thaxter, Willa Cather, and Edith Wharton (38-49). While it may be that in the 1860s and 70s many of these writers considered themselves “professionals,” as Ann Douglas suggests, they were not necessarily professional in the same way that Edith Wharton would be thirty years later. According to Douglas, women could come into the field of writing just before and after the Civil War because “it was very much a profession, but [...] could be made to look unprofessional” (6). As she goes on to put it, women writers “could do a man’s job, for a man’s pay, in
women’s clothes,” but only because writing was something that could be done from home.

Not surprisingly, the periodical fiction that women wrote during this period was often conceived of as simply an extension of what they ought to be doing in their own homes. Charlotte Porter, writing for Century in 1885, describes serialized fiction as she would a multi-course meal, noting that “the flavor of the component parts of the novel is more distinctly appreciated when it is served up in a series of judiciously related courses.” She continues her comparison between reading and eating by claiming that “the hungry curiosity to follow the events, discover the plot, and swallow the book whole, which belonged to the world’s younger days and long nights of novel-reading, is turned into the discriminating attention of a patient public” (quoted in Okker 13). In Porter’s formulation, the writer, editor, and readers function like a mother, father, and children sitting down together for a family meal. If the author “judiciously” decides how to apportion and serve the novel, the editor must be equally judicious about selecting and placing the accompanying side dishes. She describes a reading public that is “discriminating” enough to appreciate the subtleties of a fine meal, either because they come from a class that is used to eating in such a manner, or because they have sufficiently evolved beyond the readers of the “world’s younger days” to cultivate patience.

Even as the numbers of periodical publications and people who read periodical fiction increased, magazine circulation was still thought of in domestic terms. Periodicals were often described as “visitors,” for example, and readers
kept in close enough contact with writers to function as collaborators (Okker 11). Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, who published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) in forty weekly installments in the *National Era*, continued to add to the novel as readers urged her not to finish too quickly but to “keep it going all winter” (20). In her epilogue to the novel, Stowe says goodbye to “a wide circle of friends, whose faces she has never seen, but whose sympathies, coming to her from afar, had stimulated and cheered her work” (21). Even though *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was enormously popular and engaged in the public sphere as few other novels of the nineteenth century had been able to do (it was outsold only by the Bible and was allegedly credited by Abraham Lincoln for starting the Civil War), Stowe insists on seeing it as a private, domestic enterprise (Smith 221).

With the tremendous proliferation of mass-market magazines in the 1890s, however, publishing long, serialized novels was no longer practical. When Frank Munsey dropped the price of his monthly magazine to ten cents, other publications followed suit. Within six months, the circulation of *Munsey’s Magazine* went from forty thousand to five hundred thousand. During this period of rapid expansion, it no longer made sense to ask new readers to jump into the middle of a long, protracted narrative. Instead, magazines began to publish entire novels in a single issue or to rely on short stories. In fact, *Munsey’s* declared in July of 1893 that the short story was the “one form of literary work of which the public never has enough […] The demand always exceeds the supply (135). Because magazine installments were now purchased singly, rather than by subscription, periodicals could no longer be relied upon to create a community
of readers (159). Furthermore, as the readership expanded beyond the confines of the relatively homogeneous New England upper class, it became more and more difficult to imagine readers that all shared the same mores and tastes.

Larger groups of readers meant changes in how magazines worked their finances, as well. In *The Adman in the Parlor* (1996), Ellen Gruber Garvey states that rather than relying on subscriptions and the sale of individual copies as older magazines had done, newer magazines depended on the money they received from advertisers, which, in turn, was tied to their circulation numbers (11). This had some interesting effects on the working lives of the writers who contributed to these magazines. Since they depended primarily on fiction to attract readers, the editors of newer magazines began to actively seek out and solicit new work from authors rather than simply waiting for those authors to come to them. Because newer magazines tended to pay more than the older, more literary magazines, it became possible for writers to actually make a living solely by contributing fiction to periodical publications. The passage of the International Copyright Act in 1891 ensured that authors would get paid for their work (Wilson 2). It also gave publishers a reason to invest in individual authors (in the form of contracts, advances, and advertising), since they could be sure that the return would come back to their magazines.

Suddenly, American authorship was beginning to become a legitimate full-time job. Rather than relying on an inner muse that could strike at random, writers who contributed regularly to periodical publications were expected to churn out a high quantity of stories on demand. Frank McClure, for example,
typically asked writers contributing to his syndicate to plan on submitting between 300 and 400 stories a year (Johanningsmeier 63). Becoming a professional writer meant more than simply gaining full-time employment. It also meant participating in the larger community of professionals that packaged, advertised, and sold one’s fiction. Book reviewers, in distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate fiction, bestowed a kind of accreditation on the field; the presence of authors’ leagues and literary agents solidified writers as a self-regulating group; and authors began to stress their expertise and commitment to public service, often comparing themselves to physicians (Glazener 110).

While Christopher Wilson notes that professional authorship mirrored the larger move toward occupational specialization in all industries, not all groups of authors became professionalized in the same way. Although by the end of the nineteenth century women writers accounted for more than two-thirds of the novels published in the United States, magazine editors began to speak of the mass marketplace in increasingly masculine terms (Kaplan 70). According to Wilson, by the beginning of the twentieth century, American authorship was deliberately masculinized in order to counter the “feminine” literary traditions of sentimental fiction. He quotes Frank Munsey’s declaration that he wanted “stories […] not washed out studies of effete human nature, not weak tales of sickly sentimentality, not ‘pretty’ writing” (58). What Munsey wanted, in other words, was a type of journalistic realism that he felt men were most likely to give him. While he thought of fiction by women as “sentimental” and “pretty,” Munsey felt that male writers could deliver stories with linear plot structures and exciting
events. The prevailing attitude among the editorial establishment made it difficult for women writers to be accepted as professionals. Glazener argues that “the construction of realist authorship as professional authorship […] was simultaneously the construction of sentimental and sensational authorship as unprofessional” (14). Kaplan points out that the assumption by male editors that women writers naturally churned out sentimental prose made it difficult for writers like Edith Wharton to get the publishing world to accept them as professionals (66).

Granted, the changing role of the professional editor had the potential to weaken the positions of all writers, male and female. When Frank Munsey stated that he wanted “stories,” he meant the term in the journalistic sense: a newsworthy event that the author simply had to go out and pick up off the street. As the 1890s progressed, editors increasingly saw it as their job to generate ideas, not just to accept or reject manuscripts as the editors of older magazines had done. Frank Munsey, for example, confidently declared that “good writing is as common as clam shells,” but “good stories are as rare as statesmanship” (Peterson 15). Walter Hines Page similarly announced that writing was “mere mechanical stuff—just like a trade. Anybody could do it” (Cooper 86). For these editors, writing may very well have been a profession, but it was not a particularly skilled one. In fact, Okker points out that many editors felt perfectly justified in altering their writers’ stories as they saw fit (22). Due to the deadline pressures of serial publishing, editors often had more direct control over an author’s text than they might in other kinds of publication. For example, an editor might cut
out pages or sections in order to fit a piece to a certain length, or an editor might choose to break a story in the middle of a sentence. Of course, authors and editors had not always seen eye to eye, but the new breed of magazine editor gave writers even less control than usual. Sometimes authors didn’t even find out about cut sections until after the publication had gone to print.

Some women writers naturally felt uncomfortable in the newer publishing environment. Others, however, took advantage of the increased salaries and autonomy that publishing in mass-market magazines offered. Louisa May Alcott and Rebecca Harding Davis, for example, largely abandoned their careers in elite literary magazines and published almost exclusively in middle-class periodicals. Richard Brodhead shows how Alcott began her career by taking advantage of the increasingly rigid stratification between the upper and lower classes by publishing both “story-paper fiction” (potboilers for mass-market magazines) and more “literate” pieces for the Atlantic Monthly (78). After the publication of Little Women (1868), however, the Atlantic Monthly no longer welcomed her due to its own increasingly exclusive policies about the kind of fiction it accepted, while she herself declined to write more “story-paper fiction” for lower class magazines. From then on, Alcott published almost exclusively in a third category—juvenile-domestic fiction, or what she called “heavy moral” literature—that Brodhead argues is a barely differentiated version of the domestic tradition that characterized antebellum literature.

Rebecca Harding Davis, on the other hand, may have had a smoother transition. While Brodhead claims that Davis was forced to endure “the drudgery...
of popular-commercial writing” after being dropped by the  *Atlantic Monthly* (87), Okker takes a more positive view. She argues that by publishing in mass-market periodicals, Davis was able to pursue two types of careers: one as a literary elite novelist in the *Atlantic Monthly* and another as a writer of popular stories for  *Peterson’s Magazine*. While the first brought her literary acclaim, the second brought her a salary two or three times the amount offered by the *Atlantic Monthly*, and a reading audience five times as big (115). Okker notes that Davis continued to get published by monthly magazines into the twentieth century. In fact, of the more than five hundred literary works that Davis published during her lifetime, only one came out initially in book form (her 1904 autobiography  *Bits of Gossip*).

While the changing nature of print culture at the close of the nineteenth century may have offered writers like Rebecca Harding Davis more opportunities to publish, it also complicated their ability to engage in the literary marketplace. In  *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (1991), Elizabeth Ammons argues that women writers from 1890 to 1920 flourished because of an “intensified and pervasive feminist political climate” (vii). This is not to say, however, that their feminism went unchecked. In spite of providing larger audiences and a more visible forum in which to debate women-centered issues, the professionalization of literary production in the 1880s and 90s added layers of masculine involvement that made it impossible for women writers to engage in unmediated political discourse. One of the central concerns that this analysis seeks to address is how the professionalization of another
component of periodical publication—magazine illustration—obstructed, filtered, or enhanced the feminist and political aims of women writing during the period.

In “The Coming of Age of Illustration in America,” Walt Reed discusses the combination of events that led to the proliferation of American illustration at the turn of the last century. Primary among these was the invention of a photomechanical engraving method that allowed for the cheap and accurate reproduction of visual images. Reed argues that while the public’s demand for images from the front during the Civil War fed the growth of illustration as an industry, the technology for creating and reproducing the images was still slow and costly (19). According to James Carrington, reproducing an image through wood engraving might take up to four weeks and cost as much as $250 (648). The half-tone engraving processes available at the end of the century enabled magazine and book publishers to reproduce a drawing or painting in just a few hours for as little as $9.

John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman argue that the “Golden Age” of magazine illustration reached its peak at the turn into the twentieth century because technological innovations made it possible to create and reproduce full-color paintings with remarkable accuracy and very little cost (71). In half-tone engraving, a screen is placed between the camera and the painting or object to be photographed. The screen is made up of two plates of glass upon which intersecting lines (as many as 300 per inch) create a series of miniature dots that transfer the negative to the copper plate used for printing (Carrington 647; Gaskell 270). By aligning a succession of red, blue, and yellow filtered lenses,
printers could combine three negatives into a full-color image. With both black-and-white and color reproduction, the half-tone process allowed publishers to reproduce gradations of tint without a significant loss of fidelity to the original or the high cost of hand engraving.

The ability to reproduce high-quality images drew American artists to magazine illustration in droves. So did higher salaries. The drop in paper prices (from $138 per ton in 1880 to $42 per ton in 1900), a postal act in 1879 that made it possible to ship reading material for less than cost, and a dramatic increase in magazine circulation encouraged publishing companies to pay illustrators more and more for their services (Emery 410). According to Ruth Copans, the average income for an illustrator at the turn of the last century was around $4,000 a year, while popular illustrators could earn as much as $75,000 (244). Ermoyan Arpi places that number even higher, noting that Hearst Publications offered famed illustrator Dean Cornwell a contract for $100,000 (which Cornwell subsequently turned down because he wanted to paint murals instead) (14). American magazine publishers weren’t just offering illustrators more money; they were also featuring them more prominently in their magazines. According to James Best, who analyzed the content of Century, Harper’s, and Scribner’s from 1906 to 1910, each issue contained an average of twenty-five illustrations—some of them full pages and many in color.

As a result, illustrators were often as famous, or more famous, than the authors whose works they illustrated. Harper’s and other publications included two bylines for each article: one for the author and another for the illustrator.
That the writers and illustrators sometimes viewed themselves as co-creators of the final product is evident from a letter that the writer Margaret Deland wrote to the illustrator Alice Barber Stephens in 1908: “I am sure your pictures will go far to make up for the shortcomings of the story, although I hope that when I have worked over the proof I can improve it somewhat, and make it more worthy of your steel—so to speak” (quoted in Copans 251). Other famous pairings include Owen Wister and Frederic Remington, who collaborated in the pages of Harper’s Magazine to create the character of the Virginian, and Frank Baum and W. W. Denslow, who held a joint copyright on The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (Tatum 3; Halley 178). For William Hobbs, a book reviewer for the Atlantic Monthly, this new marriage of image and text signaled a change in how the reading public ought to value illustration. Arguing in 1901 that artwork could no longer be considered subsidiary to writing, Hobbs announced that illustration had attained “the dignity of a literary performance. It can no longer be regarded as a mere accessory to, but rather as a part of, the book itself” (quoted in Harris 341).

Of course, it is this very confluence that prompts my analysis. If images and text can be thought of as being part of the same “performance,” then in order to more completely grasp how illustrated texts were received, we need to pay as much attention to the pictures as we do to the words. Furthermore, if we are to understand how women’s writing was modulated by the larger corporate and publishing structures of the period, then we cannot ignore the layers of meaning that the presence of those illustrations superimposed onto their texts. The exposure, money, and prestige offered by periodical publishers to American
artists at the turn into the twentieth century resulted in a flowering of book and magazine illustration that Walt Reed and others have referred to as the “Golden Age of American Illustration.” Similarly, the “intensified and pervasive feminist political climate” that Elizabeth Ammons argues characterized those same years caused a generation of women writers to imagine new ways of experiencing and constructing womanhood while encouraging their readers to do the same. The fact that the majority of American illustrators during this period were men complicates the convergence of the texts and images in this study and underscores the conflicting ideologies and worldviews held by both camps.

Of course, not all American illustrators at the beginning of the twentieth century were men, just as not all American writers were women. By that same token, not all women writers held progressive political views and not all male illustrators tried to squelch them. Still, the general makeup of both professions indicates that the gender divisions of writers and illustrators should not be ignored. In “Dream Blocks: American Women Illustrators of the Golden Age,” Ruth Copans explains why the field of professional illustration was largely occupied by men. For one thing, the same kinds of structures that grew up around writing and editing (professional associations, arbiters that barred entrance to certain contributors but not others) also developed around book and magazine illustration. For another, the central figure that dominated American illustration during its “golden age” did not think that women should become professional illustrators.
According to Walt Reed, Howard Pyle (1853-1911) was America’s “foremost illustrator” (*The Illustrator in America* 62). This was partly due to the quality and proliferation of his illustrations, but it was also because of his carefully cultivated contacts within the magazine publishing industry and the influence he had on generations of students. The “Brandywine School,” as Pyle’s coterie of acolytes called themselves, produced some of most noted illustrators of the early twentieth century, including N. C. Wyeth, Maxfield Parrish, and Frank Schoonover. John Tebbel and Mary Zuckerman state that by 1907, at least half of the successful magazine illustrators in the United States had been instructed by Pyle (71). While Reed notes that Pyle did teach Jessie Wilcox Smith, Elizabeth Shippen Green, and Violet Oakley (Ermoyan 6), Alice Carter points out that the three women were already established artists by the time they took any of his classes (38). In an article that he wrote for *The North American* in 1904 entitled “Why Art and Marriage Won’t Mix,” Pyle explained that he would no longer take on female students because learning how to illustrate “interferes with a girl’s social life and destroys her chances of getting married. Girls are, after all, only qualified for sentimental work” (quoted in Copans 249). Of course, Pyle’s insistence that young women restrict themselves to domestic pursuits was not his opinion alone, but one that had been part of the broader culture for some time. His idea that painting and drawing was not a suitably feminine activity, however, was a relatively new development.

In her study of art education in the nineteenth century, Diana Korzenik explains that in the 1850s learning to draw was a gendered activity. Young
ladies were taught crayon drawing to beautify their homes, while young men were taught how to draw the machines that populated mills and factories (24). The Civil War would change this dynamic. Young women who were interested in supporting themselves during the war while their husbands were away or after the war if their husbands had died turned to drawing, particularly illustrating, as a viable alternative. Theoretically, one could illustrate stories and novels from home while taking care of children. The School of Design for Women, which had opened in New York in 1852, saw an uptick after the Civil War in applications from young women wishing to learn to illustrate and engrave (31). During this same period, however, Americans began to think that learning to draw was an indispensable step toward manufacturing and fabrication, and as such a more masculine activity (22). At the Exhibition of Industry of All Nations, set in New York in 1853, art played a vital role in demonstrating how raw materials were turned into products (23). Visitors to the exhibit began to get the idea that if more young men learned how to draw machinery, American companies wouldn’t have to pay European artists to create manufacturing schematics or advertising artwork. This wasn’t traditional landscape painting. It was “art labor,” a skill for working-class laborers akin to turning a lathe or surveying acreage before construction. When mass-market magazines began to rely more heavily on artwork to provide content and advertise products at the end of the century, illustrating fiction went from being something that a woman could do from home to something a man ought to do at work.
Just as writing for periodical publication went from being coded as a domestic pursuit to a job that actively engaged in the public sphere, illustrating fiction also became entangled in sociopolitical concerns. Led largely by Howard Pyle, magazine illustration became steeped in patriarchy and nostalgia. Pyle and his students gravitated toward images that seemed to reflect a simpler time when neither the racial makeup nor the gendered identity of the country threatened what they thought of as the status quo. Knights, pilgrims, cowboys, and colonial revolutionaries populated their compositions, reinforcing a narrative of nation building that was both male-centered and racially homogenous. At the same time, women writers were moving toward narratives that questioned patriarchy and their own roles on the national stage. Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman produced narratives in which women’s struggles for personal independence highlighted the restrictive and damaging doctrines of separate spheres. Frances Harper, Sui Sin Far, and Mary Antin showed how those struggles could be inflected or complicated by racial identity and social class. In this study, the political aims of the four women writers I look at closely—Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Edith Wharton, Pauline Hopkins, and Zitkala-Ša—often conflict with the aims and worldviews of the male artists that illustrate their texts. While these women write from different social positions, ethnicities, and geographical regions, they have in common the experience of attempting to present a particular vision through their fiction and then sharing that presentation with editors and illustrators who aren’t necessarily sympathetic to their views.
Taken together, Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Edith Wharton, Pauline Hopkins, and Zitkala-Ša offer an increasingly complex view into the relationship between women writers and male illustrators at the turn of the last century. Chapters One and Two present relatively straightforward cases of radical texts by beginning women writers being filtered and controlled by well established male illustrators. Elinore Pruitt Stewart had no previous publishing experience when the *Atlantic Monthly* printed her stories about homesteading in Wyoming, so she was not in a position to object when her publisher selected N. C. Wyeth to illustrate her letters. Wyeth, who was well-known for his Western scenes of masculine conquest, would produce illustrations that disguised Stewart’s feminist portrayal of the American frontier. Similarly, A. B. Wenzell was used to depicting glamorous scenes of high society New York and superimposed images onto Edith Wharton’s text that didn’t fully mesh with her social critique. Although Wharton may have been more socially privileged than Stewart, neither of their texts is able to completely resist the more traditional portrayals imposed by their two illustrators.

Chapters Two and Three complicate the question of what happens when women writers are paired with male artists, since both Pauline Hopkins and Zitkala-Ša had significant publishing experience while three of their respective illustrators had relatively little. Both of Pauline Hopkins’s illustrators were novices when they started working on her fiction, while she had been the chief literary editor and principle contributor to the magazine in which their work appeared. Zitkala-Ša had also published in a number of literary magazines and later
became a magazine editor herself as well as a highly influential political activist in Washington, D. C. In spite of these accomplishments, her status as a woman and as a partially-blooded Native American made it difficult for her to counter the negative stereotypes about Native Americans that flooded the contemporary press. Adding the question of race to the question of gender further complicates the last two chapters. Pauline Hopkins, who was black, presented her fiction alongside both a white male illustrator and a black male illustrator, while Zitkala-Ša was illustrated by the well-known white male painter Frederic Remington and a less-known Native American woman named Angel De Cora. Examining four case studies that pair women writers and male illustrators, then complicating those studies by adding questions of experience, class, race, and political activism offers insight into the difficulty that all of these artists, both writers and illustrators, had in trying to make meaning in a publishing environment that was increasingly more crowded and chaotic.

When Elinore Pruitt Stewart moved to Wyoming and began writing about her experiences as a "woman homesteader" for the *Atlantic Monthly*, eastern magazines had already shaped readers’ notions of what the frontier was like. The stories and images that male writers and illustrators like Owen Wister and Frederic Remington produced conditioned subscribers to see the West as a masculine arena where cowboys patterned after knights errant of the past reassured the American public that it was still vigorous and virtuous. While Stewart worked hard to convince her readers that the American frontier was a place where a woman could "prove up" on her own (demonstrating both her
independence and her desire to reconfigure a budding genre), the painter that
the Houghton Mifflin company selected to illustrate her stories had a vested
interest in maintaining the West's preexisting mythos. N. C. Wyeth's drawings,
juxtaposed with Stewart's text, demonstrate the limitations that both writer and
illustrator faced in trying to conceptualize alternative behaviors for men and
women in the American West.

Edith Wharton was also interested in exploring alternative modes of being
for women, or at least in how New York society policed and regulated their
comportment. In *The House of Mirth* (1905), Wharton condemns the
objectification of women by showing how Lily Bart succumbs to society's
demands by turning herself into a piece of art for others to gawk at and admire.
Wharton's nuanced portrayal of a protagonist who is both artist and artwork is
considerably flattened by A. B. Wenzell's illustrations, however, which uncritically
celebrate Lily's Art Nouveau womanhood. Just as N. C. Wyeth's paintings of
Elinore Pruitt Stewart's woman homesteader reasserted traditional gender roles
in spite of her feminist text, A. B. Wenzell's illustrations radically diminish
Wharton's social critique by superimposing a cookie-cutter version of
womanhood onto an unconventional heroine.

J. Alexandre Skeete's illustrations for *Hagar's Daughter*, the novel that
Pauline Hopkins serialized in *Colored American Magazine* from 1901 to 1902,
also sought to reinscribe traditional gender roles onto a more radical text. While
Edith Wharton could more overtly question the tenets of True Womanhood that
bound Lily's behavior, as an African American author Pauline Hopkins had to
mask her critique behind a veneer of sentimental conventions. Because white supremacists used the myth of black women’s lasciviousness to justify lynching and rape, Hopkins was careful to create female characters that at least outwardly conformed to expectations of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. A careful examination of both *Hagar’s Daughter* and *Contending Forces* (1900), however, reveals Hopkins’s assertion that True Womanhood was actually complicit in the subjugation of black women by requiring them to behave in a way that circumstances and culture disallowed. While acknowledging the reality of lynching and the social forces that encouraged it, J. Alexandre Skeete responded by illustrating *Hagar’s Daughter* with images that dampened their radicalism, particularly in terms of gender. Part of Skeete’s reluctance to endorse Hopkins’s feminism was due to his desire to portray African-American men as strong, capable providers and part was due to his commitment to Booker T. Washington’s political agenda—an agenda that Pauline Hopkins stridently opposed. Interestingly, R. Emmett Owen seemed far more in tune with Hopkins’s political goals in *Contending Forces* than Skeete would be in *Hagar’s Daughter*, perhaps because as a white man he was not as invested in their ramifications for the African American community.

In her brief foray into publishing fiction in literary magazines, Zitkala-Ša also had multiple illustrators. Frederic Remington, who had been publishing “Indian stories” in *Harper’s Magazine* for years, illustrated “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” in a way that adds nuance and meaning to the text, but also reaffirms an image of Native Americans that Zitkala-Ša worked hard to counteract.
Remington’s stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans contrast sharply with Angel De Cora’s illustrations for *Old Indian Legends* (1901), which like Zitkala-Ša’s stories employ a variety of sentimental tropes that indicate the complexity of interacting simultaneously with Native American and Anglo cultures.

The difficulty that both women had in presenting positive portrayals of Native Americans in a magazine culture that offered a multiplicity of competing narratives exemplifies a struggle common to all four of the authors of this study: in each case, their texts were published in periodicals that threatened to mitigate their artistic and political goals because of the myriad of alternate viewpoints that accompanied them. Obviously, illustrations provide one example of this, but so do the advertisements, adjoining articles, and editorial opinions that appeared alongside their stories. Paying close attention to the illustrations and other surrounding apparatus is one way to investigate what Hazel Carby calls “intertextual coherence” (160). While Carby applies the term to the purposeful borrowing by black women writers from one another’s work in order to comment on shared experience, it begs the question of intertextual incoherence—or what happens when readers encounter adjacent texts that compete, jar, or contradict one another.

Following Stanley Fish’s formulation that it is the act of reading that shapes the meaning and significance of texts, historians of the book examine the socio-historical contexts of reading practices (Goldstein and Machor xix). In *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Readers since 1880* (1991), Carl Kaestle explains that one of the problems with the methods of early practitioners
of reader response was that they “didn’t concentrate very much on real readers,” relying instead on their own imaginations to deduce “what readers go through” to interpret a text (44). Of course, part of the reason for this neglect is simply that it is very difficult to tell how “regular readers” read. While literary scholars and book reviewers leave behind plenty of published material about a given work that can be subsequently mined by critics, rank-and-file readers rarely leave any record of their reading experience or what they may have thought about what they read. Although scholars have made some effort to recover how ordinary readers constructed meaning by looking at private letters, diaries, marginal annotations, and fan mail, the results have been limited by the paucity of available artifacts.

One advantage to examining texts and illustrations together, then, is that illustrated fiction leaves behind a large body of evidence of how at least one reader—the illustrator—understood and interpreted the text. Because the artist’s interpretations are bound together with the author’s words and presented as a whole to the public, they influence how the later readers encounter and make sense of the work. Simon Cooke likens this to “a process of endless revision” in which “our understanding of the novels is perpetually expanded and enhanced by designs that are often provocative and challenging, demanding that we read and read again” (8). Of course, Cooke is imagining illustrations that are of sufficient quality or interpretive power that they succeed in augmenting the work. In his examination of modern illustrated editions of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Cooke is careful to select illustrations that “uncover
perspectives that exist in linguistic [...] forms” already put in place by the Brontë sisters (22). What do we do, however, with illustrations that don’t provoke the reader or automatically enhance the reading experience? What about illustrations that don’t align with the author’s designs or that aren’t well-executed enough to apparently warrant critical investigation?

For practitioners of “history of reading” scholarship, these questions are beside the point. One of the things that Janice Radway demonstrated in Reading the Romance (1991), for example, is that a work doesn’t necessarily need to be aesthetically advanced or part of the accepted canon in order to shed light on a historical era or movement. Indeed, less sophisticated or more popular works may even be more apt to lend insight into the cultural moment that produced them. Similarly, images created by novice illustrators (like R. Emmett Owen) or artists better known for mass production than for nuanced interpretation (like A. B. Wenzell), can provide insight into how texts are received and made to signify. In their introduction to Reading Acts (2002), Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas call for more studies about different kinds of readers, using “creative analytical approaches and new research methods” (xiv). Examining the relationship between images and text in an era in which the practices of periodical publication made such pairings common provides key insights into how women writers of the period negotiated the gender and racial politics of literary magazines even as they critiqued them.
CHAPTER ONE

THE ALTERNATE WESTS OF ELINORE PRUITT STEWART AND N. C. WYETH

Introduction

In his comparison of Elinore Pruitt Stewart’s Letters of a Woman Homesteader and Heartland, the 1979 film starring Rip Torn and Conchata Ferrell, Peter Rollins argues that the cinematic version of Stewart’s letters provides a much bleaker, darker vision of the American West than the 1914 text. He states that the difference between the two visions is the result of four intervening American wars and a host of other twentieth-century phenomena that made the early and latter parts of the century so different from one another. The film version, he writes, “breathes of the year 1979 as much as its literary base radiates the glow of pre-World War I optimism” (33). According to Rollins, this change in vision is only natural given the sixty-five years of history and culture that separate the two mediums. Rollins does not, however, adequately take into account how radically distinct Stewart’s vision of the West was from that of many other writers and artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how even her contemporaries failed to grasp the full scope of her literary and political intentions. By 1909, when Stewart moved to Burnt Fork and began sending letters back home about life on a Wyoming ranch, the conventions of the
Western frontier writing were already firmly established. Teddy Roosevelt, Owen Wister, Frederic Remington and others had accustomed Eastern readers to reading about a West that was violent, lawless, and deeply masculinized. Stewart, on the other hand, deliberately counters this masculine Western literary tradition by constructing a feminine version of the West filled with community and cooperation.

However, if Stewart’s letters superimpose a female voice on a typically masculine genre, N. C. Wyeth’s illustrations for the 1914 edition attempt to re-impose a stereotypically masculine version of the West onto Stewart’s text. Purposefully or not, Wyeth ignored Stewart’s efforts to challenge the way that other writers had described frontier life. Instead, he filled his paintings with images that reinforced the conventional vision of the West that dominated art, film, and fiction. Viewed together, the text and pictures of Houghton Mifflin’s Letters of a Woman Homesteader present competing, gendered versions of the early twentieth-century frontier literature of the American West. Stewart’s letters and Wyeth’s illustrations provide an interesting glimpse into the creation of what Richard Slotkin has called an “essential part of American mythology” (“Gunsmoke and Mirrors” 107). Although Letters of a Woman Homesteader is just one of thousands of texts about the West that Americans produced and consumed at the turn of the last century, the disconnect between its text and illustrations represents the larger struggle over what the American West was supposed to mean and who was permitted to determine that meaning.
Masculinity in the American West

Slotkin argues that the apparent closing of the frontier in the 1890s coincided with a shift in the way Americans perceived the socioeconomic possibilities open to them. While the frontier was still open, America had an easier time thinking of itself as a classless society. Anybody, or so the thinking went during the first century of the country’s existence, could access the free land and limitless resources offered by the frontier if they were willing to work at it, and in that sense the poor had just as much opportunity to succeed as the rich. While the vast majority of Americans didn't actually go West (by 1900, 87% of the U.S. population still lived east of the Mississippi), the fact that it remained a possibility in theory became a vital component of the American Dream. Around the time that Frederick Jackson Turner declared that the pioneer era of American history had ended, however, capital and power were becoming increasingly consolidated into the hands of a few wealthy elite. Many Americans saw this new social order and the closing of the West as somehow linked (Gunfighter Nation 31). The West of popular imagination, then, became the stage upon which working-class Americans could play out their anxieties about urban life and their fears that socioeconomic mobility was no longer available to them.

Unlike Turner, Stewart did not consider the western frontier closed, nor did she think it was necessary to invoke a mythic Western past in order to counter current social problems. Instead, she saw Western homesteading as a viable alternative to Eastern city life. Thousands of Americans agreed. During the seventy-three years that the Homestead Act was in effect, nearly half a million
families claimed 285 million acres of Western land (Hine and Faragher 334).

Under the Homestead Act, Western settlers had two options for gaining the title to their 160 acres: They could “prove up” the land by living on it for five years, raising crops, and building a house or a barn; or, after living on it for six months, they could buy the claim for the low price of just $1.25 per acre (333-34). The truth is, however, that only about half of all legitimate homesteaders managed to gain title to their land. The harsh conditions, expensive equipment, and the fact that large corporations still managed to snap up most of the profitable land made it extremely difficult for small farmers and ranchers to actually acquire ownership of the acres they lived on. Many ended up returning to the East to compete for the vacancies left by hopeful pioneers still moving West. In spite of the offer of free land, the move from rural areas to urban was a much larger trend during the years of the homesteading movement.

In spite of the extreme difficulties of turning the Western landscape into profitable farms, Stewart still saw homesteading as a legitimate option for working women struggling in the urban environments of the East. One of the purposes of her letters, in fact, is to assure her readership that the West was still open for settlement and that anybody who was willing to work hard could make a success of themselves. “When I think about the hard times among the Denver poor,” she wrote in 1913, “I feel like urging them every one to get out and file on land” (214). While some critics have complained that Stewart’s descriptions of frontier life are distortedly rosy and overly optimistic, it is important to remember that the urban working conditions of many who lived in the East were even more
intolerable than the difficulties of living in the West. Indeed, Stewart is careful to point out to her readers that working on a ranch is "much more pleasant than to work so hard in the city and then to be on starvation rations in the winter." For Stewart, homesteading was "the solution of all poverty’s problems," particularly for women (215). Declaring that she is "very enthusiastic about women homesteading," Stewart points out that as hard as ranching is, it is less difficult and more satisfying than working as a washerwoman in a big city (214).

Stewart wasn’t alone in recommending Western ranching as a healthier, more profitable alternative to urban life. Following the recommendations of doctors like Silas Weir Mitchell, who sent Owen Wister to Wyoming to recover his health, or of boosters for frontier expansion like Horace Greeley, who popularized the phrase, “Go West, young man,” the West was increasingly seen as a panacea for Eastern problems. As Greeley’s phrase suggests, however, this type of Western cure-all was not generally thought of as an option for women as it was for men. In “Rewriting the West Cure,” Jennifer Tuttle demonstrates how neurasthenic complaints were treated differently depending on a patient’s gender. While Mitchell sent Wister to a ranch in Wyoming to recover his health after complaining of exhaustion and hypersensitivity, he prescribed domesticity and rest for Charlotte Perkins Gilman even though their symptoms were virtually identical (104). The literary productions resulting from both of these treatments are well-known. Wister wrote *The Virginian* (1902) based on his summer rounding up cattle and leading hunting expeditions, while Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) in response to the summer she spent trying to follow
Weir’s advice. Weir’s divergent prescriptions (the “West cure” for men and the “rest cure” for women) reflect the anxieties that the culture at large held about the proper roles for men and women. The principle cause of Wister’s ailments, according to Weir, was that as an effete Eastern intellectual, he had abandoned the frontier traits that embodied manliness. Similarly, by exercising her brain rather than her wife and mothering skills, Gilman threatened to become less of a woman and suffered accordingly.

In addition to exposing an underlying commitment to distinct gender roles at the end of the nineteenth century, Weir’s alternate treatments gender the geography of the nation in a way that Wister would continue in *The Virginian*. While the East became coded as civilized and feminine, the West was increasingly thought of as a place that encouraged and demanded manliness. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, felt that Western life required “that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone” (White 91). Frederic Remington thought that “if a man is to hold down a big ranch […] he has to be ‘all man,’ because it is ‘a man’s job’ ” (106). Owen Wister won praise from Roosevelt for his portrayal of the “great virile virtues” required for “strong men” to tame the West (“A Teller of Tales” 1216). Elinore Pruitt Stewart’s *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, however, runs directly counter to the idea that the West was an exclusively masculine province. By reclaiming the Western experience for women, Stewart directly counters the hyper-masculine vision of the West that Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister had spent the previous twenty-five years inventing.
Edward White acknowledges that Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister didn’t change the nature of the West itself during this period, but they did affect how Eastern readers thought about Western life. According to White, the three Eastern men were “heavily responsible for a sudden and dramatic restatement of the western theme and a reexamination of the American West” (51). White catalogues a number of influences that Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister had on the generations of writers, illustrators, and movie makers that followed them, including turning the cowboy into a cultural hero, equating the West with True America, and using the West to promote territorial expansion. Underlying each of these conceptual constructs, however, is the creation of the ideal inhabitant of the West: the Anglo-Saxon male, par excellence.

The reading public didn’t always conceive of Western men as ideal examples of masculine excellence. In fact, for much of the nineteenth century, frontier inhabitants were depicted as savage brutes with few redeeming qualities. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg cites the hero of the Davy Crockett almanac in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s as a prime example. In one episode, Crockett has a debate with the cultured Senator Everett of Massachusetts. Rather than beginning with words, Crockett starts his argument by grunting, growling, and barking. “I’m [...] the savagest creature you ever did see,” he roars to the Senator. “I can walk like an ox, run like a fox, swim like an eel, yell like an Indian, fight like a devil, and spout like an earthquake, make love like a mad bull, and swallow a nigger whole without choking if you butter his head and pin his ears back” (96-97). While the
Crockett of these almanacs may be admired for his ability to break social codes in public, he is not held up as a figure to be emulated. Instead, Crockett’s inarticulate savagery serves as a reminder of everything an Eastern gentleman (typified by Senator Everett) should not be: crude, bestial, and violent. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, frontier figures were routinely portrayed in newspaper and in fictional accounts as defenders of civilization rather than threats against it. According to David Hamilton Murdoch, the shift in Eastern newspapers from describing cowboys as violent, crude, and lawless to describing them as heroic, honorable, and upright happened over the space of just two or three years in the mid-eighteen-eighties (51). He ascribes this change to the influx of British aristocracy in Wyoming ranching, the immense popularity of Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show, and the writings of Theodore Roosevelt.

Theodore Roosevelt fled from New York to a Dakota cattle ranch in 1884 after a series of personal tragedies: the death of his wife in childbirth, the death of his mother from illness, and a crippling political defeat in the Republican national primaries (Hine and Faragher 495). Two years later he launched himself once again into political life, buoyed by the success of his lectures, articles, and memoirs about the West. Roosevelt saw his two-year exile as a test of manhood, a test he passed by hunting mountain goats, winning bar fights, and capturing horse thieves. In addition to rejuvenating his own political career, Roosevelt felt that the qualities of the Western men he found in Dakota could reinvigorate the rest of the nation. In an article he wrote for Century magazine in 1888, Roosevelt claimed that “[w]e still live in an iron age that the old civilized
world has long passed by” (831). “The men of the border,” he wrote, “reckon upon stern and unending struggles with their iron-bound surroundings; against the grim harshness of their existence they set the strength and the abounding vitality that come with it.” For Roosevelt, a man’s endurance and vigor are dependent on the harshness of the landscape that surrounds him. As an Easterner, Roosevelt was defeated by personal grief and political losses; as a Westerner, Roosevelt regains the strength to return to the spotlight and fight for the causes he believed in.

The hunters, trappers, and cowboys who battle Roosevelt’s harsh landscape embody what he saw as the masculine qualities that would allow men to succeed in an urban-industrial environment or in Eastern politics. The hunters are “frank, bold, and self-reliant [...] marvels of bronzed and rugged strength” (832). The cowboys are “brave,” “hardy,” and “adventurous” (843). In his autobiography, Roosevelt wrote that Western hunters naturally possessed the “supremely masculine” qualities of an ideal politician: self reliance, hardiness, and resolution (White 91). He identifies George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln as examples of other political leaders who gained their strength while hunting on the frontier. According to Roosevelt, the frontiersmen who conquered the American West were able to do so precisely because they possessed these masculine qualities. Daniel Boone was “dauntless and self-reliant”; James Robertson was “robust” and “masterful”; John Sevier had “dauntless, invincible courage”; George Rogers Clark had “far-sighted daring and indomitable energy” (92). Even Western settlers who didn’t make names for
themselves were generally “hardy, resolute, [and] strenuous” (93). For Roosevelt, the West was a place where men could attain those masculine attributes that were unavailable to them in the East.

If the West allowed men to be men, then it also allowed women to be women. In “Frontier Types,” Roosevelt defines frontier women as carefully as he defines hunters, trappers, and cowboys:

[A]s a rule, the grinding toil and hardship of a life passed in the wilderness, or on its outskirts, drive the beauty and bloom from a woman's face long before her youth has left her. By the time she is a mother she is sinewy and angular, with thin, compressed lips and furrowed, sallow brow. But she has a hundred qualities that atone for the grace she lacks. She is a good mother, and a hardworking housewife, always putting things to right, washing and cooking for her stalwart spouse and offspring. She is faithful to her husband, and, like the true American that she is, exacts faithfulness in return. Peril cannot daunt her, nor hardship and poverty appall her. Whether on the mountains in a log hut chinked with moss, in a sod or adobe hovel on the desolate prairie, or in a mere temporary camp, where the white-topped wagons have been drawn up in a protection-giving circle near some spring, she is equally at home. Clad in a dingy gown and a hideous sun-bonnet, she goes bravely about her work, resolute, silent, uncomplaining. (842)

Roosevelt's portrayal of frontier women is remarkably different from his depiction of the hunters and cowboys he lauds earlier in the article. With the possible exception of “bronzed,” Roosevelt doesn't describe the physical bodies of the men he describes, preferring instead to list their mental or emotional attributes. The frontier woman, on the other hand, is immediately broken into parts; her bloomless face, thin lips, and sallow brow are all casualties to the hardship and toil of living in the wilderness. Where Roosevelt's men are invigorated by the harsh landscape, the bodies of his women are diminished. As their bodies are ravaged, however, their essential feminine attributes become even more
pronounced. The “hundred qualities” that Roosevelt’s frontier woman possesses seem to be taken straight from Barbara Welter’s tenets of True Womanhood. Her submissiveness is evident from the silent and uncomplaining service she performs for her family, her piety from her determination to be both “good” and “hardworking” in the face of adversity, and her purity from the faithfulness she both gives and demands from her husband. Roosevelt pays particular attention in this passage to her domesticity, probably because the simple fact of being outdoors rather than in makes that quality the more threatened one. In addition to frequently mentioning her familial relationship to her husband and children, Roosevelt is careful to list all of the homelike shelters that protect her from the environment: the log hut, adobe hovel, or encircling wagons. Unlike Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Roosevelt does not see the West as a place where a woman could live expansively or independently. Instead, Roosevelt creates a West in which gender roles and attributes are more rigidly defined than ever.

Spurred perhaps by Roosevelt’s insistence that individuals and nations cultivate the “vigorous manliness” offered by the American West, readers and writers of frontier literature were eager to claim that genre as a primarily masculine milieu (White 91). Churchill Williams, for example, in a literary review for The World’s Work entitled “Red Blood in Fiction” (1903), begins his article by countering the claim that American fiction had become “emasculated” (3694). While Williams acknowledges that the literary market was currently flooded with the “so-called romantic novel which aims at picturesqueness” or “the novel of ‘character’ which submits the emotional or intellectual gymnast to minute
analysis," he feels confident that American readers would soon turn to "fiction which is infused with red blood—the red blood that stimulates men to the vigorous exercise of body and mind in the making of a place for themselves in the working world." Williams' celebration of this new kind of "red-bloodeed" fiction presents a solution to Roosevelt's fear that the nation was in danger of losing its masculine qualities. Rather than having to actually travel West in order to regain their manly vigor, Williams implies that Eastern readers could revitalize themselves simply by reading fiction based on Western life. That act of reading, in turn, would inspire them to make a place for themselves in the working world and revitalize the economy as well. In order to be effectively stimulating, however, it is important that this western fiction be written by men who are actually from the West. Williams names five writers that he feels are capable of portraying the "Western man" precisely because they are either Western men themselves or have spent enough time in the West to be sufficiently inspired by it: Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Stewart Edward White, Jack London, and Owen Wister.

According to Williams, the frontier could only be effectively portrayed as long as it was used as the backdrop for manly exploits. "Man is the measure of the play, the torrent, the mountain," he writes. "The length of his stride, the power of his arm determine their greatness" (3697). Nature, according to Williams, was simply "a foil for [man's] figure." By featuring men of action rather than empty landscapes, Williams felt that frontier fiction could pass on some of its vigor to its readers. His description of reading Stewart Edward White's The
Westerners (1901), for example, contains an interesting interplay between the novel and those who read it: “Stalwart, too, is the word which best fits ‘The Westerners,’ from the same hand, a big book in the rough. Three hundred and odd pages, with characters crowding one another and the reader wrestling with a plot that is all loose ends, and swearing but reading on” (3699). First of all, Williams is careful to describe the book itself in masculine terms. The novel is “stalwart,” “big,” and “rough.” Second, he draws a connection between active characters and active readers. When the characters in the novel crowd one another, the reader responds by wrestling and swearing. If the readers of the “so-called romantic novel” by women were supposed to respond by weeping onto the page, as Karen Sánchez-Eppler suggests, then the readers of “red-blooded” fiction by men were supposed to respond with violence and profanity (26-27).

**Stewart’s Feminist West**

When Elinore Pruitt Stewart began writing letters from southwestern Wyoming to her former employer in Denver, she recognized that very few women writers had written firsthand about the American West. In *My Blue and Gold Wyoming: The Life and Letters of Elinore Pruitt Stewart* (1992), Susanne George [Bloomfield] includes a list of literary works that Stewart refers to in her published and unpublished letters as well as a list of works that Stewart evidently owned (George found a list of titles on the back of a handwritten manuscript and assumes that Stewart’s daughter Jerrine copied the list from the family bookshelves as a way of practicing her typing) (200). In the list of titles compiled by George Bloomfield in her dissertation (submitted under the name Lindau),
frontier literature written by male authors figures prominently. Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Jack London, and Zane Grey are among the authors whose books Stewart either owned or quoted from (Lindau 384-389). According to this list, the only piece of frontier literature written by a woman that Stewart owned was Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), and that was published eighteen years after Stewart arrived in Wyoming. As she constructed her own written account about living in the West at the turn of the last century, Stewart was conscious of working in an overwhelmingly male milieu.

In fact, Stewart often describes her reaction to the West in terms of the masculine literature that precedes her. In her chapter “Filing a Claim,” for example, she states that her trip to the land office was “more fun to the square inch than Mark Twain [...] ever provoked” (8). Later in that same chapter, a howling animal makes her think of Jack London’s “The Wolf” (10), and in “A Charming Adventure,” killing rabbits makes her feel like “Leatherstocking,” James Fenimore Cooper’s frontier hero (26). Of course, if the frontier literature that Stewart had available to her was predominantly written by men, it is no surprise that she views her experience in the West in terms that those authors had already laid out. It was not uncommon for writers from the East to filter their Western experiences through the frontier literature that they encountered before ever leaving home. Richard Slotkin has shown that Theodore Roosevelt’s descriptions of Western life in *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885) and *The Winning of the West* (1889) were rhetorically indebted to the Cooper’s
Leatherstocking tales. Similarly, the West that Owen Wister chose to write about was heavily influenced by Theodore Roosevelt’s descriptions of the frontier and his theories of what the West meant to American culture. This is not to say that the many references to frontier literature in Stewart’s letters indicate a simple retread of ground that Roosevelt, Wister, and other Western writers had already gone over. Instead, Stewart engages with those works in order to show that alternate visions of the West were still possible.

Stewart undoubtedly recognized that Western expansion had largely been perceived as a masculine endeavor, and that the literature of the American West, from the expedition journals of Lewis and Clark to Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*, had been largely constructed in the typically masculine terms of exploration, conquest, and rugged individualism. Rather than shy away from a literary tradition dominated by tales of masculine exploits, however, Stewart shows that she is capable of negotiating the genre on its own terms. In *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992), Jane Tompkins states that “[w]hen women wrote about the West, the stories they told did not look anything like what we know as the Western” (41-42). Stewart’s stories, however, at least outwardly look very much like the traditional Westerns she invokes. In them, she stakes out land, kills game, and feels like Leatherstocking doing so. In her letters at least, Stewart is able to occupy the place of both the frontier writer and frontier hero.

Stewart had planned to be a frontier writer long before she decided to homestead in Wyoming. She taught herself to read in the Chickasaw Nation,
Indian Territory (what is now southern Oklahoma) after her schoolteacher was hanged for stealing a horse (George 2). As a means of supporting herself and her sisters after their parents died, Elinore published “how-to” columns and advice letters in newspapers. After separating from her husband, she traveled further West in 1906 with her 10-month-old daughter and two of her sisters in order to write an article on the Mesa Verde Cliff dwellings for the Kansas City Star (5). Six years later, she wrote to her friend Mrs. Coney of all the things she had set out to do: “I had planned to see the old missions and go to Alaska; to hunt in Canada. I even dreamed of Honolulu [...] I aimed to see all the world I could, but to travel unknown bypaths to do it” (188). Stewart’s literary ambitions in 1906 indicate not just that she wanted to write, but that she set out to have an adventure and write Western expeditionary literature, much like Jack London or Owen Wister or any number of her male contemporaries who used their travels to fuel their writing.

Stewart’s literary plans were cut short by illness, however, and she was forced to hire out as a washwoman in Denver to stay alive. City life disagreed with her. In March of 1909, when she saw a want ad for a live-in housekeeper for a bachelor rancher named Clyde Stewart in southern Wyoming, she jumped at the chance to go (George 11). Later that spring, she filed on 160 acres of land adjoining Clyde’s ranch under the 1862 Homestead Act and began the five-year process of “proving up” (George 13). She was to chronicle this process in her letters back to Mrs. Coney in Denver, which would eventually be published
serially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and later in a single bound volume by Houghton Mifflin in 1914, illustrated by N. C. Wyeth.

Although Stewart had at one point planned to write Lewis and Clark-like expeditionary literature, in her letters to Mrs. Coney she rewrites the typically masculine “Western” in an unconventionally feminist way. Even as she invokes Twain, London, and Cooper, Stewart fills her vision of the West with powerful women characters, like Mrs. Louderer, who owns cattle and employs a gang of cowboys. She privileges stories of female heroics, such as giving birth in a blizzard, and makes fun of the clichéd tropes of Western adventure stories, including chasing horse thieves and shoot-em-up violence. She also focuses on frontier women engaged in community building. These women organize sewing circles, potluck dinners, and charity work among the impoverished; they don’t fight over water rights or protect stagecoaches from violent attackers. In her introduction to the 1988 Houghton Mifflin edition, Gretel Ehrlich writes that *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* “is not a book about the breathtaking difficulties of solitude and struggle,” instead, it is an account of frontier life that “demonstrates the meaning of neighborliness and community, of true, unstinting charity, of tenaciousness charged not by dour stoicism but by simple joy” (xx). Stewart saw herself as a strong, accomplished woman who had been empowered by the hardships and freedom of living in the West and through her letters to Mrs. Coney encouraged other women to do the same. If the conventional Western novel constitutes the “male realm of public power, physical ordeal, [...] and the rituals of the dual,” as Tompkins suggests, then Stewart’s West is a place where
women are allowed to have their own displays of power, ritual, and physicality (42).

One of the most overtly physical things women did in the frontier was giving birth without any of the hospitals, doctors, and other amenities of the East. In “Sedalia and Regalia,” Stewart tells of a “Mis’ Lane” who gave birth to a set of twins as she and her husband traveled West from Missouri in the winter (47). When Mis’ Lane started contracting, they were in the middle of a blizzard and there wasn’t a house in sight. After her husband put together a make-shift bed a few feet from the wagon, Mis’ Lane gave birth to one girl then another. It was so cold that Mis’ Lane and her husband had to melt snow in a frying pan in order to get the water to wash the babies. Stewart is careful to point out that not only was Mis’ Lane hardy enough to bear two baby girls in the middle of a snowstorm, but that the girls were hardy enough to survive it (48). Meanwhile, her husband figures only peripherally. Evidently this was common. According to George, the night that Elinore’s last child was born, the midwife that had been hired to help her eloped and Clyde was called in to assist with the delivery. After a night of hard labor, Elinore awoke Clyde when the baby started to emerge. There were complications and the baby wasn’t breathing, so Elinore asked Clyde to slap the baby to get his lungs working. Unfortunately, Clyde was “too tenderhearted” to act and Elinore had to do it herself (George 18). Afterward, Clyde told Elinore that he was too weak to continue helping and needed to make himself a sandwich. In both of these stories, Stewart flips the standard Western image of protective men and protected women on its head. For Stewart, pregnancy and
delivery in the West meant strong women and weak husbands. In Stewart’s version of the West, the men cower in the background while the women perform heroically in the foreground.

In typical Western stories, the female figure is a prize to be won by the hero after proving himself against attacking Indians, evil cattle barons, or the Western landscape. Marriage, in which the ownership rights of the female are transferred to the vanquishing male as a sort of prized trophy, generally takes place at the end of the novel as a sign that the hero has emerged victorious. In her letters, however, Stewart glosses over her wedding as if it weren’t at all important. She deliberately doesn’t tell Mrs. Coney about her marriage to Mr. Stewart until more than a year after it happened—and even then, it comes at the center of the book rather than at the end. Granted, Stewart had complicated reasons for not telling Mrs. Coney about the wedding, including the possible existence of another husband (who hadn’t died as Stewart let on) and the legal necessity for homesteading women to be unmarried. That Stewart made a fiction of the events surrounding her wedding, however, makes her rewriting of the typical marriage plot all the more striking. Her wedding announcement is anything but conventional. In “A Confession,” Stewart tersely tells Mrs. Coney that, “the thing [she has] done is marry Mr. Stewart” (79). Her wedding is not the token of triumph at the end of a long struggle, but something that she almost appears ashamed of; something that will complicate her struggle as much as help it.
Elinore’s wedding isn’t the only Western plot convention that she rewrites. In “The Horse-Thieves,” Stewart tells of a trip she takes with a friend to see her cattle ranch. As if Stewart is trying to jam together as many Western thematic elements as she can, the trip happens to coincide with a cattle drive, a roundup, a robbery, a posse chase, and a shooting. Although the story begins conventionally enough, with promises of “a pitched battle,” “bloodshed and death,” Stewart soon turns convention on its ear by switching standard gender roles (158). The cattle baron is a baroness, a German widow named Mrs. Louderer, who bosses the cowboys around mercilessly, threatening to fire anyone who doesn’t perform to her liking. None of the cowboys mentioned by name are particularly adept at outdoor living, and many of them perform roles more traditionally assigned to women. Herman does all the cooking (165). A cowboy from Tennessee is nicknamed “Daisy-Belle” because he couldn’t do much other than whistle and got nosebleeds all the time (167). “Tex” bawls like a baby (170). Even though “N’Yawk” (named after his home state) frequently brags about being able to “wade in bloody gore up to his neck” like his father had, he makes his bed in the wrong place and is accused of pretending to be a woman in order to avoid a fight (169). It is clear from N’Yawk’s frequent boasting that Stewart means him to be a ridiculous figure, not a heroic one. Like Tom Sawyer, who in the penultimate chapter of Huckleberry Finn claims to want to “wade neck-deep in blood” simply for the adventure of it (262), N’Yawk is more interested in reenacting dime-novel heroics than he is in enduring the actual
hardships of ranching life as Stewart has shown the female figures in her letters more than capable of doing.

Eventually, N’Yawk gets his chance to wade up to his neck in bloody gore and panics. One of the wounded horse thieves is chased into camp by a posse and climbs into bed with N’Yawk to wait out the search party. Since N’Yawk has made his bed on the women’s side of camp, his tent isn’t searched and the wounded man is able to evade the Sheriff (but not until after soaking N’Yawk up to the back of his neck in blood). By morning, N’Yawk, along with the rest of the camp, is in hysterics. Mrs. Louderer is the only one calm enough to make a “rational suggestion,” and she accepts N’Yawk’s resignation while serenely sipping on coffee (178). By the end of her letter, everything about Stewart’s cowboy story has been turned upside down. The horse thief gets away and the cowboys act like supposedly typical women while the women act like supposedly typical cowboys.

“The Horse-Thieves” isn’t the only story in which Stewart blurs the boundaries between acceptable male and female behavior. For one thing, Stewart frequently feminizes the men in her stories. While on her way to file a claim on her land just a few weeks after arriving in Wyoming, Stewart meets a sheep herder whom she repeatedly calls “Little Bo-Peep” (8-9). After he makes her supper, Stewart promises to send him a shepherd’s crook tied with pink ribbons. Later she admits that it may have been “plumb bold” to address the shepherd in such a manner, but she doesn’t stop calling him Bo-Peep (21). What this example and others show is Stewart’s willingness to defy the rigidly
defined gender norms that Roosevelt and others had conditioned readers to expect about the West. In “Filing a Claim,” Stewart doesn’t cower inside a protective circle of covered wagons like Roosevelt’s frontier woman. Rather than being intimidated by the land, she travels across it “whenever [she] like[s]” and pays the necessary fee to own it (13). Instead of performing domestic services for her husband and children, she asks a man to cook for her. Unlike Roosevelt’s “Frontier Types,” Stewart’s men and women are not confined to their expected gender roles. Jerrine “eats like a man” while a man does the cooking (10). Stewart gives directions while the Shepherd recites poetry.

Another strategy that Stewart uses to question conventional gender roles is to tell stories in which women save the day while men look helplessly on. Stewart provides one of these examples in “A Busy, Happy Summer,” when Clyde is unable to find enough ranch hands to help him mow hay. After returning home once again without the necessary hired hands (making him literally “manless,” in Stewart’s words), Stewart jumps on the mower and performs the work herself (17). She admits that such activities make her hands “hard, rough, and stained,” but vastly prefers that to having some Prince Charming “reverently kiss her lily-white hand” (16). Another story featuring helpless men and capable women is “The Efficient Mrs. O’Shaughnessy,” a woman of “great courage and decision and of splendid sense and judgment” (221). In her letter, Stewart recounts how one of the men working for Mrs. O’Shaughnessy developed gangrene in his hand and arm but was too clueless to notice. Without giving him any indication of her intentions ahead of time, Mrs. O’Shaughnessy is able to
chop off his finger, slice open his arm, and leech out the poison before the man has time to react. She then bundles him into a buggy and drives him forty-five miles to the nearest doctor.

In order to propagate her thesis that the West was a place where any woman who was willing to work at it could attain a life of independence and autonomy, Stewart had to counter the idea that the West was simply a masculine playground. There is plenty of evidence in “The Horse-Thieves” that she set out to do precisely that. The letter begins with Jerrine looking at just the sort of images of the West that Remington and Wyeth were famous for. While Clyde talks of cattle rustling and a posse chase, Jerrine looks at “pictures in a paper illustrating early days on the range, wild scenes of roping and branding” (158). In response to a question about whether such scenes still existed, Mrs. Louderer promises to take both Elinore and Jerrine out to see what life on the range was really like. From the beginning of the letter, then, Stewart sets up a contest between two different types of Wests: the West depicted by illustrations in the paper, and the West that Mrs. Louderer could show her first hand. Later descriptions of a female trail boss, feminized cowboys, and a botched job of catching horse thieves are meant to be the antithesis of the hyper-masculine, capable cowboys portrayed in the “wild scenes of roping and branding” that Jerrine found in her newspaper, or that readers of Western literature encountered in the opening chapters of The Virginian. Indeed, if we are to understand that Mrs. Louderer is a more competent cowboy than Daisy-Belle, Tex, and N’Yawk, the literary descendents of the Virginian, then perhaps we are to assume that
Stewart herself is a more accurate transcriber of Western experience than Roosevelt, Wister, or Remington.

While Stewart may have set out to rewrite the standard Western, her publishers continued to treat her as an unassuming, uneducated woman. When her letters first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the editors prefaced every batch with the note, “These are genuine letters, written without thought of publication, simply to tell a friendly story” (433). The magazine is careful to avoid the appearance that Stewart is purposefully occupying the masculine sphere of publication, or that her letters have any other purpose than to be “friendly.” The note indicates that her status as a wage-earning author is accidental, her letters are ingenuous rather than consciously crafted, and she has no complex literary aims. Significantly, the poet William Vaughn Moody’s letters from the West, published just one month before Stewart’s in the *Atlantic Monthly*, contain no such caveat—even though they, like Stewart’s, had not been intended for publication (Mason 404).

In addition to implying that she should not naturally be writing for profit, Ellery Sedgwick, Stewart’s *Atlantic Monthly* editor, felt she needed extra instruction. He sent her long letters of advice on how to write. “You need not try to write regularly,” he assured her after *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* had already been published in book form. “I have an idea that you are one of the geniuses who write best when the spirit moves them; so when the blind madness of writing (as my old Latin book used to say) comes over you, give way to it” (quoted in George 30). Sedgwick’s letter betrays a number of chauvinist biases.
First of all, he presumes to instruct Stewart how to write, perhaps in an effort to retain his influence after she had been published in book form and praised so widely by other sources. Second, he reminds her that he has had an education (as his old Latin book used to say) while she hasn’t. Finally, he panders to the idea that women are not responsible for their writing in the same way men are, and therefore cannot be thought of as similar breadwinners. If an outside spirit moves a woman to write, Sedgwick implies, she remains a passive vessel rather than an active wage earner.

As Sedgwick had done, Houghton Mifflin’s editor treated Stewart as if she had no business interacting in the publishing world. He lectured her on “verisimilitude” and how to spell “cackle-berries” (quoted in George 28). Even though his firm had paid Stewart $500.00 for the rights to her letters, he didn’t trust Stewart to be able to attract book buyers on her own (28). Instead, the publishing company asked popular illustrator N. C. Wyeth to accompany Stewart’s text with a number of illustrations that would increase the marketability of Letters of a Woman Homesteader. While Wyeth would, in fact, add allure to Stewart’s book (even modern editions are printed with “illustrations by N. C. Wyeth” on the cover), he would also superimpose his own masculine view of the West onto the letters, creating a series of paintings that jarred sharply with Stewart’s feminist text and her views of the West.

**N. C. Wyeth Envisions the West**

In 1914, when Houghton Mifflin asked him to create six illustrations to accompany Stewart’s letters, N. C. Wyeth was arguably one of the most popular
Western painters in the United States. Since his professional debut in 1903 with *The Bronco Buster*, a cover for the *Saturday Evening Post*, Wyeth had at least two illustrations in print a month, nearly all of them Western in theme (Michaelis 130). Pictures such as *The Prospector* (1906), *The Ore Wagon* (1907), *On the October Trail* (1908), *The Pay Stage* (1909), and *McKeon's Graft* (1912) for *McClure's Magazine*, *Scribner's*, *New Story Magazine* and dozens of other publications made “Wyeth” and “West” inseparable in the public’s mind (Allen and Allen 42). *The Saturday Evening Post* claimed that Wyeth had “no equal in his field.” *Scribner’s* called him “one of our greatest, if not our greatest painter of America outdoor life” (Michaelis 155). Elizabeth Custer, widow of General George Armstrong Custer, felt that Wyeth’s paintings were such authentic documentation of the American West that she kept copies of his illustrations in a fireproof safe along with many of Custer’s papers (Nemerov, “N. C. Wyeth’s Theater,” 40).

Although Wyeth claimed to do his best to create illustrations that were “sympathetically submissive” to the author’s vision, the artist inevitably created pictures of the West that were more indicative of his own (Wyeth). Rather than reflect the communal, cooperative West that Stewart had portrayed, the male figures in Wyeth’s version were as he always painted them: defiant, conquering, and alone. Artistically, Wyeth was immensely attracted to isolated, outcast figures, such as those he imagined populated the West. The Deerslayer, Robin Hood, Captain Nemo, and Robinson Crusoe were among his favorite protagonists. Wyeth inevitably portrayed these men by themselves, struggling
with the landscape around them, such as in his paintings of *The Prospector* (1906) and *The Frontiersman* (1912) (Allen and Allen 128).

In *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, Wyeth stays true to form, painting Gavotte and Zebulon Pike by themselves, while all of the women in his illustrations—Elinore Pruitt Stewart, her daughter Jerrine, Mrs. Louderer, and Mrs. O’Shaughnessy—are pictured in the company of others. *Gavotte* is especially indicative of Wyeth’s Western vision. In it, the trapper stands majestically at the top of a mountain, just like dozens of Wyeth’s heroes had before him. Everything about Gavotte suggests that he is master of his surroundings. His stance on the peak is wide-legged, as if having just conquered it, he is claiming the mountain and all beneath it. His hat and boots are made from animal skins that he has presumably killed himself so that his entire persona, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, proclaims his supremacy in the wilderness. Wyeth prominently features Gavotte’s rifle and pipe as symbols of his occupation: the first to kill game and the second to smoke after a job well done.
While Wyeth would paint Gavotte standing on top of a mountain peak, Stewart’s descriptions of the trapper are deliberately domestic. Gavotte’s most distinguishing characteristic, according to Stewart, is not his hunting prowess or keen marksmanship, but his extraordinary ability to keep house. After entering into the cabin that Gavotte had watched over for some months, she is struck by how clean everything is: the floor is sparkling white, the windows shine, blue and white checked curtains decorate the windows, and a jar of pink and green thistles appear to her “so pretty” and “so clean” that they “had a new beauty” (108). Later, Stewart will point out how Gavotte helps her hang blue and white calico curtains to beautify her own room (139). Stewart does acknowledge Gavotte’s role as a hunter, but only to point out how well he uses the implements of his trade to decorate his home. The black eagle is carefully arranged over the mantelpiece, complete with arrows in its claws; the fishing tackle is placed carefully behind the washstand; the rifle and shotgun hang over one door, and a set of deer antlers hang over the other (109). It is notable that each of the weapons that Wyeth would normally use as props to symbolize manly vigor and potency (arrows, a fishing pole, a rifle) are instead used to indicate domestic order and decorative capability. Clutched in the eagle’s claws, Gavotte’s arrows no longer represent savagery or lawlessness but the civilized decorum of the U.S. national seal. The fishing pole is similarly subdued behind the wash stand, while the rifle hangs tastefully above the doorway rather than as some sort of phallic symbol protruding from the center of Gavotte’s body.
By associating Gavotte with such domestic chores as scrubbing the floor or decorating windows, Stewart divorces him from other literary trappers such as Natty Bumppo who are almost never pictured indoors. When Stewart does compare Gavotte or Zebulon Pike to Cooper’s frontier hero, it is almost always to stress the domestic nature of the hunters and trappers in her version of the West. For example, in “The Stocking-Leg Dinner,” Stewart describes a dinner the two men put on in order to commemorate the foods described in the Leather-Stocking tales. In their introduction to Looking Far West: The Search for the American West in History, Myth, and Literature (1978), Frank Bergon and Zeese Papanikolas explain how Westerners often patterned their behavior after dime novel descriptions or other literary representations of Western life. Kit Carson emulated a novelized version of himself he found in a paperback salvaged from a burned out wagon train in 1849, for example, and Theodore Roosevelt describes capturing Dakota outlaws in the 1880s who were carrying dime novels full of the kinds of dangerous exploits in which they themselves had been engaged (Cook 18-19). Pike and Gavotte had been introduced to their literary predecessor when Stewart loaned them a set of James Fenimore Cooper’s novels (154). After Gavotte read the novels out loud to Pike, they decided to thank Stewart by inviting her to a dinner at which they served as many of the dishes mentioned in the Leatherstocking stories as possible. Instead of simply patterning her frontiersmen after Natty Bumppo, Stewart creates a deliberate disconnect between her characters and those of Cooper. First, she inserts herself as the mediating figure. She provides the novels that contain Leatherstocking’s exploits...
and then proscribes the means by which Pike and Gavotte interact with them (not by acting the novels out, as Roosevelt’s Dakota bandits had done, but by reading them indoors). Second, when Pike and Gavotte do emulate Leatherstocking, they do so in a decidedly domestic fashion: by preparing and then hosting a meal in his honor.

In spite of Stewart’s deliberate attempts to create a mountain man that doesn’t conform to commonly held notions of masculinity, Wyeth painted Gavotte just as he had countless other outdoorsman. Wyeth’s Gavotte, in fact, looks remarkably like the figure he painted for the September 1906 cover of McClure’s (titled The Last Stand), poised at the top of a mountain, pointing his gun down one side in case of attackers; or like the prospector he painted for C. P. Connolly’s “The Story of Montana. Part Two” (September 1906),

Fig. 1.2. The Last Stand.

Fig. 1.3. The Prospector.
standing at the top of a peak with a pipe in one hand and a pickaxe in place of a

As is often the case, Wyeth has
gun (450), or like dozens of Wyeth’s Western men who stand atop their own

painted Gavotte’s gun extending from his

conquered mountains, weapons in hand. Connolly’s version of Montana’s

midsection, so that it, along with the

settlement, billed as “the most thrilling fact story that has ever come out of the

mountain peak, stands for phallic potency

West,” clearly foregrounds masculine enterprise while assigning a peripheral role

and masculine vigor. Wyeth frequently
gave his male protagonists something that

women to in order to reflect

their children. In his illustrations for *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, Wyeth

they could hold on to in order to reflect

followed Connolly’s vision rather than Stewart’s. Stewart is never pictured

their masculinity. Natty Bumppo’s gun,

without her daughter while the frontiersmen Pike and Gavotte dominate their

Fig. 1.4. *Captain Bill Bones.*
Robin Hood’s staff, and King Arthur’s sword all figure prominently in Wyeth’s illustrations, most often extending from the centers of their bodies. In *Treasure Island*, which he had illustrated just three years before *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, Wyeth is almost embarrassingly explicit. In the first illustration of the text, with the caption, “All day he hung round the cove, or upon the cliffs, with a brass telescope” running beneath the image, Captain Bones stands, feet apart, on the top of a sea cliff, holding a huge, brass, extendible telescope against his belt buckle (2). Everything, from the subject’s name to the geography to the material and mechanics of the telescope, remind the viewer of the Captain’s potency.

In another illustration from the same edition, *Jim Hawkins Leaves Home*, Jim sets out to make his fortune, his mother crying in the background (51). Jim holds a sack and a stick, protruding from the top of his right leg. The composition, with Jim advancing into the foreground and his mother standing beside their home and receding into the background, is meant to separate the masculine world from the feminine and to emphasize Jim’s newfound manhood. In “The Illustrator as Interpreter: N. C.
Wyeth’s Illustrations for the Adventure Novels of Robert Luis Stevenson” (1991), Susan Gannon notes that in Stevenson’s text, Jim’s mother was cheerful rather than bereaved at his departure (100). In fact, Stevenson specifically states that Jim left his mother “in good health and spirits” (56). As he does for Stewart’s text, Wyeth projects his own views of womanhood (fraught with powerlessness, domesticity, and maternal emotion) onto Jim’s mother. Jim, on the other hand, retains his budding manhood. Jim’s stick, like Gavotte’s rifle and Pike’s fiddle bow, serves as an additional reminder of the distinction between masculine and feminine spheres.

For Wyeth, who grew up in Victorian-era New England, masculine and feminine spheres were sharply divided. His parents lived completely distinct lives. Wyeth’s mother rarely left the town in which she grew up and died; in fact, she rarely left the home her husband built for her 150 feet away from her parents’ house (Michaelis 16). His father worked outside the home, in a neighboring town, seven days a week, for thirty years (22). Wyeth’s view of separate, gendered spheres was reinforced by his famous mentor, Howard Pyle. When Wyeth came of age and decided to become an artist, Pyle ran the most prestigious school for young illustrators in the country. While he initially admitted female students, by the time Wyeth joined the Brandywine School, Pyle decided that it wasn’t worth the effort to train young women who would only abandon him and the profession when they married. Instead, he admitted just twelve young men at a time and ran the school like a part medieval guild, part boy’s club (71). He did not permit his students to associate with females, as he felt it would sap
them of their artistic vigor. Pyle was a monumental figure in Wyeth's young life. Although he regretted it as a mature artist, as a young man Wyeth tried as hard as he could to imitate Pyle's style of painting, speech, and dress. At one point, he even wore Pyle's second-hand clothes.

Pyle's distrust of women also wore off on Wyeth. To the end of his life, Wyeth maintained that a woman had no place in the working world. She could be her husband's "spiritual aide"; she could "bless [him] with a spirit of love and faith that supersedes all other stimulus or encouragement," but she couldn't "enter into [his] special work and stand before [him] to lead—to take the initiative."

According to Wyeth, women were supposed to be like his Swiss mother, obsessed with "Kirche, Küche, Kinder—church, kitchen, children" (Michaelis 209).

The portrait Wyeth painted of his mother four years after her death exemplifies his feelings about a woman's proper domestic role. In My Mother (1929), Hattie Wyeth stands at the center of her kitchen, holding a pie pan in one hand and touching a table full of pie dough preparations with the other. A teapot boils on the stove in the right-hand corner. There is a window in the background, showing the sun, sky, trees, and a working man, but Hattie faces the viewer, looking away from the outside world and toward the center of

![Fig. 1.6. My Mother. 1929.](image-url)
the home. Her Puritan-style collar is done up tightly around her neck. While Wyeth’s men hold swords and guns at the centers of their bodies, his mother holds a pie plate. Hattie’s apron serves as an appropriate symbol of protection and domesticity, as does the apron worn by Jim’s mother in the *Treasure Island* illustration. Although the walls, doors, and windows of the house are constructed at improbable angles, creating the feeling that they might come crashing down at any moment, she stands firmly in the center of the room. The line of one wall frame looks as if it extends straight from the spine of her back up to the ceiling, making Hattie’s own body the anchor that holds the house together. The impression that her home actually grows around her body is strengthened by the blue checks of the table cloth that extend partly up her apron and the color of her dress repeated in wide brush strokes on the walls of the room. For Wyeth, a woman and her home are inextricable.

At first glance, the frontispiece for *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* seems antithetical to Wyeth’s portrait of his mother. Elinore Pruitt Stewart is pictured at the door of her very straight home looking outward, not inward. Her clothing is windswept and the sun beats down on her; unlike Hattie at the center of her kitchen, Stewart interacts directly with the
elements of the outdoors. The picture of Elinore and Jerrine looking out from the
threshold of their cabin is the very first illustration that the reader sees. In
Houghton Mifflin’s 1988 edition, an exact reprint of the 1914 edition with all of
Wyeth’s illustrations, the reader doesn’t even have to open the book to view the
image. It is repeated twice on the front cover, once in light sepia tone spreading
out over the entire cover, and then again in a darker, smaller window at the
center. The reader’s first impression is of two Elinores looking out on the West,
one exploding from the other as if to embody, as the advertising copy on the
back cover suggests, “the [...] possibility that [...] a woman could live
expansively.”

At second glance, however, the prospects of Wyeth’s The Woman
Homesteader don’t seem nearly as expansive as Stewart might have intended.
Wyeth’s Stewart is leaning up against the doorframe of her house, connected to
it at her right shoulder and hip. Rather than braving the elements, she is bracing
against them, using the house as support. The expression on her face as she
looks out on the wilderness is one of apprehension. With her left hand, she holds
back her daughter Jerrine from the outdoors, pulling her toward the house. With
her right hand, she shields her eyes from the sun, protecting her face and vision
from the unfiltered Wyoming light. Even then, her eyes are squinted so that she
lets in as little of her Western vision as possible. All around her, tokens of
conventional femininity flesh out the composition of the picture. There is a
washing basin hanging on the wall; potted flowers stand up against the side of
the house; she holds a child against her body, who in turn shields her own body
with a doll. Just as Gavotte's figure, from his animal-clad head to his animal-clad feet, indicates mastery of the outdoors, Stewart's figure indicates fear of it. Indeed, Wyeth's Woman Homesteader has much more in common with Jim Hawkins's mother, shrinking against her home in the background of the picture, than she does with Jim, marching off into his own outdoor adventure.

Of course, that's not the vision that Stewart has of herself at all. In "A Charming Adventure" she ignores the pleadings of her husband, gathers up her daughter and a little food onto a horse, and sets out on a three-day journey into the wild, just because she can (23). She shoots rabbits, sleeps with the coyotes, catches fish, crosses the Uintah Mountains, weather a snowstorm, and spends the night with a strange man—hardly the fearful stay-at-home pictured in Wyeth's frontispiece. In spite of all Stewart's indications to the contrary, however, Wyeth cannot seem to shake his view of conventional, Victorian womanhood.

In his illustration of Stewart's outdoor adventure, titled Jerrine Was Always Such a Dear Little Pal, Wyeth paints Jerrine and her mother on top of "Jeems McGregor," their packhorse (25). Although she is out in the wilderness, Stewart presents a strikingly
different picture than does Gavotte or the prospector or the gunman in Connolly’s “Last Stand.” Rather than striding a mountain, Stewart and her child are pictured in a valley; the horse is doing all the walking. No gun is visible, even though Stewart clearly states that she shot a rabbit (which made her feel like “Leatherstocking”), two squirrels, and had “sixteen loads for [her] gun and [...] reasoned that [she] could likely kill enough food to last twice that many days” (26, 29, 34). As if subtracting all his standard symbols of masculinity weren’t enough, Wyeth is careful to picture her in a conventionally feminine light. Instead of gazing manfully in the distance, surveying all she has conquered, Stewart’s gaze is turned backward, into the eyes of her daughter. In spite of the treacherous road and rocky terrain, Jerrine and her mother are looking directly at one another, as if to emphasize that nothing is more important than Stewart’s motherhood. Not even the Uintah Mountains can interrupt her motherly gaze. If, for Wyeth, mountain peaks and phallic symbols signify paternity, then the locked gazes of Stewart and her daughter, in spite of the outdoor terrain, signify the all-encompassing bonds of maternity. Their Western surroundings are rendered moot; Stewart and her daughter might as well be sitting in Hattie’s kitchen.

Pyle once told his students that “every picture should portray one great idea, and one only,” since it would be “utterly impossible [...] to go to all the newsstands and explain your pictures” (quoted in Michaelis 51). Wyeth agreed. In an article he wrote for the New York Times shortly before he was commissioned to illustrate Letters for a Woman Homesteader, he explains that “[a] picture is the briefest method known to communicate an idea to the human
mind.” For Wyeth, the vision of the West that he wished to convey to his viewers was the same one he garnered for himself by hoarding Remington pictures as a teenager and later traveling West as a temporary cowboy. Even though Stewart’s text called for a drastically different view of the frontier, Wyeth was unable to envision anything other than the what he saw when he “roped horses, rode the range, drove cattle, crossed the Rockies, slept in the open desert, [...] grubbed with cowpunchers, bedded down with the Navajo, ate horsemeat, gambled with traders, exaggerated the number of kills he made with his Colt 41, had his money stolen by Mexican bandits” (118). Whether purposefully or helplessly, Wyeth superimposes his own vision of men, women, and the West onto Stewart’s *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* in spite of her more feminist vision. While he confesses that it is “a usual and fatal blunder” for an illustrator to “choose for his motives the parts of a story which most fire his imagination,” he also recognizes how difficult, if not impossible, it is to do otherwise (Wyeth). Even at the risk of confusing the public by giving “two widely separated conceptions of the same character,” he felt that falling back on his own vision was sometimes “inevitable” (Wyeth).

**Conclusion**

The truth is, Wyeth’s version of Stewart’s West was no more artificially constructed than Stewart’s own letters had been. Sherry Smith points out that despite her triumphant self-portrait of a single woman making it alone in the West, Elinore married Clyde Stewart just one week after filing her claim on 160 acres of land and only six weeks after moving to Wyoming (167). Elinore had
more to be worried about than the appearance of impropriety. Since married women could not officially claim land under the Homestead Act, she would have been unable to become a landowner while married to Stewart. In fact, although Elinore told her Atlantic Monthly readers that she had been widowed before marrying Clyde, this was not the case, since her previous husband wasn’t dead (George 6). Elinore engineered her accounts of both marriages in order to qualify for her own land under the Homestead Act. In 1912, the Stewarts deeded the 160 acres over to Clyde’s mother, a 73-year-old widow who spent most of the year in Colorado (Smith 169). Despite her claims to the contrary, Stewart didn’t actually “prove-up” the land according to the regulations stipulated by the Department of the Interior, since she did not live in a dwelling separate from her husband. Instead, she and Clyde did what was necessary to acquire enough land to survive in the harsh climate of Wyoming. As she wrote to Mrs. Coney, “[We] both agreed that the trends of events and ranch work seemed to require that we be married first and do our ‘sparking’ afterward” (185).

Although the practicalities of ranch work may have led her to marry soon after arriving in Wyoming, the trajectory of Stewart’s narrative required that she “prove-up” as a single woman. She wrote her last letter to Mrs. Coney to be published by the Atlantic in November of 1913, just five months before the five-year anniversary of her arrival in Wyoming and shortly before the legal deadline to demonstrate that she had improved her land enough to claim it. Although she doesn’t explicitly say that she has met all the legal requirements for gaining title to her land under the Homestead Act, she includes plenty of clues to indicate that
that is exactly how she wants her readers to interpret what has done. “This is the letter I have been wanting to write to you for a long time,” she says. “Until now I had not actually proven all I wanted to prove” (279). Stewart’s repeated use of the word “prove” is meant to remind her readers that she has “proved up” on her homesteading claim. In an earlier letter, she had indicated that the two-room addition Clyde had added on to his house for Elinore and Jerrine was her own (“The New House”). Now she lists all of the produce she has cultivated on her property: more than two tons of potatoes, half a ton of carrots, and a large amount of beets, onions, turnips, parsnips, cabbage, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, and gooseberries. In addition, she was able to raise cows, turkeys, and flowers. In all of this, she had “no help but Jerrine” (282). Although she admits that Clyde covered her potatoes, she is careful to point out that that is all he did, declaring, “and that ends the man’s part” (280). As she had when she obliquely mentioned her marriage to Clyde in a post-script, she deliberately downplays her husband’s involvement in order to stress the idea that the West was a place where women could survive on their own.

Of course, Stewart’s vision of a West full of independent, successful women is probably just as artificially constructed as Roosevelt’s West full of self-reliant, stalwart men. Smith states that during the years that Stewart lived in Wyoming, nearly 12 percent of the state’s Homestead patents were issued to women (164). We have no way of knowing, however, how many of those women were actually the sole owners of the land they filed on. Dee Garceau notes that over half of the claims issued to women in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, from
1880 to 1929 increased the acreage of an existing ranch (122). The fact that so many women may have been filing claims to increase their husbands’ ranches doesn’t imply that women were less capable of homesteading than men. Few men or women were capable of ranching on their own. As Robert Hine and John Faragher put it, “homesteading was not something easily accomplished by lone individuals—whether men or women—but required the cooperative work of the whole family” (347). Despite her rosy pronouncements to the contrary, it would have been next to impossible for Elinore to survive for five years in Wyoming without Clyde’s help, just as Clyde couldn’t have survived without hers. As George [Bloomfield] points out, Clyde wrote the advertisement for a housekeeper that brought Elinore out to Wyoming precisely because he couldn’t ranch on his own (11).

According to Smith, “What Elinore did made abundant sense in the arid West. What she wrote appealed to urban, and perhaps especially women, readers” (175). Stewart’s main thesis, one she expresses explicitly in her letter entitled “The Joys of Homesteading” and implicitly in the dozens of other installments describing western life, is that West was not just an exotic locale where Eastern men like Theodore Roosevelt or Owen Wister could go to reclaim their manhood. Instead, it was a place where women slaving away in urban environments like Chicago or New York could go to attain livelihoods and independence. “I am only thinking of the troops of tired, worried women,” she wrote, “sometimes even cold and hungry, scared to death of losing their places to work, who could have plenty to eat, who could have good fires by gathering the
wood, and comfortable homes of their own, if they but had the courage and
determination to get them” (216-17). Even though Stewart did not actually “prove
up” her Wyoming acreage on her own, she takes pains in her narrative to hide
Clyde’s involvement in order to give the impression that the West was good for
women. Despite its hardships, or perhaps because of them, her West is not one
in which women are required to shrink against their doorframes; instead, they
ably thrive out in the open.

The West that Stewart envisioned, however, is not one that has stuck in
popular imagination for much of the last century or so since Letters of a Woman
Homesteader was first published. While she takes pains to downplay the
importance of her wedding, for example, some readers seem determined to
conventionalize her narrative by making Elinore’s union with Clyde her crowning
achievement. In the 2004 Benchmark Books edition of Stewart’s letters, editor
Ruth Ashby places the story of Stewart’s wedding at the very end, as if getting
married were the ultimate mark of success. In a similar fashion, Gretel Elrich
ends her introduction to the 1988 edition by recalling the “marvelous description
of [Stewart’s] own wedding” in order to demonstrate that despite its hardships,
life in Wyoming really did make her happy (xx). By reconstructing Stewart’s
narrative so that it ends with her marriage to Clyde rather than with her
conspicuously proving up without him, Elrich and Ashby undermine her efforts to
convince her readers that the West was a place where women could live
independently.
Although dozens of female frontier writers such as Lydia Maria Child, Mary Hallock Foote, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart have, in Victoria Lamont's words, “contested the prevailing myths of the frontier as a masculine proving ground,” the Western has remained an almost exclusively masculine genre, in literature and in film (172). Representations of the West that most Easterners were comfortable viewing and reading about were already firmly entrenched before Stewart ever wrote her letters. Remington’s Western illustrations are a case in point. Alex Nemerov has pointed out that Remington took great pride in the fact that the images in his paintings were drawn from personal knowledge and ridiculed other artists whose renderings of cartridge belts, saddlebags, and war bonnets weren’t as accurate as his own (“Doing the ‘Old America’” 290). Eastern viewers also prized the sense of historical accuracy they felt when they looked at his paintings, yet that sense was highly self-referential. Before viewing one of his exhibitions, they would have already encountered countless paintings, bronzes, and fiction (many by Remington) that encouraged them to define the reality of the West in a certain way. In 1892, one art critic pointed out that “Eastern people have formed their conceptions of what the Far-Western life is like, more from what they have seen in Mr. Remington’s pictures than from any other source” (quoted in Hine and Faragher 496). According to Nemerov, the viewer’s expectations had been “thoroughly conditioned” before stepping into the gallery (294). For that matter, Remington’s responses to scenes, objects, and people encountered during his trips to out West were also conditioned by images of the West that he had seen as a child in New York (297), just as Wyeth’s
understanding of what the West should look like was dependent on reproductions of Remington’s illustrations that he saw as a young boy (Michaelis 32). Rather than being realistic depictions of frontier life, then, pictures by Remington and Wyeth could only be imitations of images by other artists.

When Houghton Mifflin attached Wyeth’s pictures to Elinore Pruitt Stewart’s text, the company did so because his version of the West was one that Eastern readers and viewers had already grown to accept. There is no indication that Houghton Mifflin valued Wyeth’s contribution more than Stewart’s; in fact, their account ledgers indicate quite the opposite: Houghton Mifflin paid Wyeth $150.00 for the six illustrations he did for Letters of a Woman Homesteader, less than a third of what Stewart received for the rights to her text (Houghton Mifflin 128). Still, the West that dominates Wyeth’s pictures proved to be far more enduring in the minds of the public than Stewart’s version of a feminine utopia. Although Stewart may have intended for her readers to view the West as a place where “a woman could live expansively,” N. C. Wyeth did not. Rather than countering the masculine West as envisioned by Roosevelt, Wister, and Remington, Wyeth’s illustrations help mask Stewart’s feminist intentions.

In 1912, the same year that Stewart describes the death of her ten-month-old Jaime to Mrs. Coney, Carol Bockius Wyeth gave birth to a son, N. C. Wyeth Jr. Wyeth Sr. wrote about the birth in his typically masculine fashion, superimposing a masculine text onto a feminine event. “Treasure Island brought an eight-pound boy,” he telegraphed his editor in New York, effectively erasing his wife’s involvement in the delivery and replacing her with the product of his
own illustrations (Michaelis 212). His editor wrote back, completing the transformation of the birth into a commercial exchange between two men: “Heartiest congratulations, (signed) Capt. Bill Bones, Silver, and Hawkins.” Two months later, Stewart described her own child’s death in a letter to Mrs. Coney: “I could not bear to let our baby leave the world without leaving any message to a community that sadly needed it. His little message had been love, so I selected a chapter from John and we had a funeral service, at which all our neighbors for thirty miles around were present” (190-91). In many ways, Stewart’s account of her baby’s death is the antithesis of Wyeth’s account of his son’s birth. Where he writes instantaneously by wire in the East, she writes years after the fact, by post, from the West. Where he appropriates the place of the female, she is forced by geography and circumstance to take the part of the clergyman. Where Wyeth’s West is full of isolated men standing heroically astride mountaintops, Stewart’s West is populated by a community of neighbors standing around a baby’s grave.

In “History, Gender, and Origins of the ‘Classic’ Western,” Victoria Lamont argues that Western genre became “insistently masculine” not because of a lack of women writing about the West, but because “the place of women in the mythological West is a crucial point of contention” (150-153). In other words, artists like Wister, Remington, and Roosevelt deliberately erased feminine involvement in their representations the West because by doing so they could reconstitute their own masculinity and that of the nation. Of course, complete erasure of women living in and writing about the West is simply not possible, not just because plenty of women did both, but because in order to define the frontier
as “not feminine,” Western myth makers become dependent on the very thing they wish to suppress. (The most famous example of this practice is Wallace Stegner’s *Angle of Repose* (1971), which relies heavily on Mary Hallock Foote’s descriptions of her life in Western mining towns but does not overtly acknowledge that debt.) While Wyeth’s illustrations don’t mask Stewart’s text in quite the same way that Stegner obscures Foote’s letters, they do exhibit a similar tendency. By representing Stewart’s unconventionally feminized West as a predominantly masculine proving ground, Wyeth doesn’t reinforce rigid gender lines so much as expose their contested nature. Similarly, as I will show in Chapter Two, when A. B. Wenzell uses his illustrations to minimize the unconventionality of Edith Wharton’s main character, Lily Bart, he does so precisely because Lily’s “new womanhood” is so threatening.
CHAPTER TWO

EDITH WHARTON AND A. B. WENZELL IN THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

In a letter she wrote to William Brownell on August 5th, 1905, Edith Wharton indicates her distaste for popular illustrator A. B. Wenzell’s pictorial additions to The House of Mirth. Brownell, a literary consultant for Charles Scribner’s Sons, had written to Wharton asking her to approve the choice of frontispiece for the novel version that was to come out later that year. Wharton had seen Wenzell’s illustrations in Scribner’s Magazine’s serial edition of The House of Mirth beginning in January of 1905, but was not very impressed. While she ultimately signed off on Brownell’s choice of frontispiece (in a terse postscript at the end of the letter), it is clear from the body of the letter that Wharton would rather not have included the illustrations at all. After admitting that she regretted having “[sunk] to the depth of letting the illustrations be put in the book” in the first place, Wharton adds, “oh, I wish I hadn’t now!” (Letters 94).

Wharton’s reluctance to allow the publisher to include Wenzell’s illustrations in the book version of The House of Mirth is puzzling. For one thing, Wharton didn’t seem to object when Scribner’s hired other artists to illustrate those of her novels and short stories that came out immediately before and after The House of Mirth. At least four books written by Wharton and published by Scribner’s between 1903 and 1907 were printed with illustrations by some of the publishing house’s most popular artists, as were a number of shorter works...
published in *Scribner’s Magazine*. *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907) was illustrated by Alonzo Kimball, *Sanctuary* (1903) was illustrated by W. Appleton Clark, and *Italian Backgrounds* (1906) was illustrated by E. C. Peixotto. Wharton didn’t even seem to mind when Wenzell illustrated her other novels. Although the serialized version of *Madame de Treymes* was illustrated by Alonzo Kimball when it came out in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1906, the book version published a year later was illustrated by A. B. Wenzell, just as *The House of Mirth* had been. In none of her published correspondence with William Brownell or other members of Scribner’s staff does Wharton express dissatisfaction or regret over the illustrations in any of these works. Why, then, did Wharton react so negatively to the illustrations that Wenzell completed for *The House of Mirth*?

Of course, it is possible that Wharton objected to Wenzell’s illustrations simply because she found them aesthetically displeasing. Wharton’s views on art were well known during her lifetime and have received plenty of critical attention since. Cynthia Wolff, Reginald Abott, and Eleanor Dwight have all noted Wharton’s affinity for classical European art and her distaste for modern American painters, particularly those whose works were mass-produced. In “Wharton and Art,” Dwight attributes Wharton’s aristocratic background and her affinity with European culture for the fact that Wharton was “unable to appreciate American art” (182). Indeed, Wharton frequently expressed distaste for art created by American painters. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934), Wharton describes how unimpressed she was with the patriotic paintings of John Trumbull, even though one of them contained a portrait of her grandfather (8). “If
anything,” she wrote, “I was vaguely sorry to have any one belonging to me represented in those stiff old-fashioned pictures, so visibly inferior to the battle-scenes of Horace Vernet and Detaille” (8-9). According to Wharton, she couldn’t help her ability to distinguish between what she considered good and bad art. “My visual sensibility must always have been too keen for middling pleasures,” she wrote. “I was always vaguely frightened by ugliness” (28). A page later, Wharton describes her overall aesthetic response after having traveled from America to Italy. “The chief difference,” she writes, “was that the things about me were now not ugly but incredibly beautiful” (29). Wharton would continue to think of contemporary American art as ugly, and of classical European art as beautiful, throughout the rest of her writing career.

In addition to disliking American art, Wharton also disapproved of mass-produced art. In *The House of Mirth*, depictions of reproduced art almost always indicate poor taste. Lily’s cousins, for example, “lived like pigs” in “dingy houses with engravings from Cole’s Voyage of Life on the drawing room walls” (26). While Wharton states in *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) that it is an “open question how much the mere possibility of unlimited reproduction detracts from the intrinsic value of an object of art,” she admits that for the most part mass-produced reproductions are “distinctly inferior” (187). According to Elizabeth Ammons, Lily would have recognized the *Voyage of Life* prints as cheap engravings that had become synonymous with the newly rich American middle-class (footnote on 26). For Lily, Cole’s engravings are a social marker akin to
“slatternly parlour-maids” who don’t know how to properly reflect the dignity and respectability of the families they serve (27).

In *The House of Mirth*, reproduced art is a sign of the poverty and the limitations of the middle class. When Lily is forced to move into a boardinghouse, her sitting room is decorated with “discoloured steel engravings of sentimental episodes,” and a mass-produced copy of a Rogers statuette (232). While pieces by John Rogers were once fashionable, Elizabeth Ammons claims that by the early twentieth-century they were indicative of an “old fashioned, shabby-genteel lack of imagination (footnote 1). When Sim Rosedale hangs his hat on the statue with “unconcealed disgust,” it is a sign of Lily’s social descent. That Rosedale (who spends most of the novel as the embodiment of crassness and vulgarity) is horrified by the dinginess of Lily’s décor is an obvious indicator to the reader of how far down the social ladder Lily has fallen.

Even the rich could own cheap reproductions, however. Much like Lily’s middle-class cousins, Mrs. Peniston displays steel engravings on her walls, on top of old wallpaper (86). For Wharton, this is the height of bad taste. In *The Decoration of Houses*, Wharton states emphatically that pictures should not be hung on top of a patterned background (47). Furthermore, wallpaper itself is to be mistrusted. “[W]all-papers,” she states, “have little, in fact, to recommend them” (45). Wharton found them unsanitary, cheap, easily faded, dingy, and felt that they obliterated the architectural lines of a room. Wharton particularly despised bronze reproductions of statuettes because the details had to be chiseled out by untrained workmen (188). Mrs. Peniston’s bronze copy of the
Dying Gladiator, then, is objectionable to Lily not just because it is common, but also because it represents inferior workmanship and antiquated taste (77).

If Wharton disapproved of Wenzell’s paintings because she considered them inferior or common, however, that doesn’t explain why she didn’t object to his illustrations of her other work, or of the illustrations of similar Scribner’s artists that appeared frequently with her texts in the first decade of the twentieth century. Wharton’s vehement reaction to Wenzell’s illustrations for *The House of Mirth* was noted by George Ramsden, who catalogued the portion of Wharton’s library that was passed on to her godson, Colin Clark. Ramsden notes that in her personal copy of the novel, Wharton crossed out the notice on the title page announcing A. B. Wenzell’s illustrations. She also removed the table of illustrations and carefully cut out each of the corresponding pages that included his artwork (137). Ramsden records no such alterations to Wharton’s copy of *Madame de Treymes* (the 1907 version illustrated by Wenzell); *The Fruit of the Tree*, illustrated by Alonzo Kimball; or *Sanctuary*, illustrated by Walter Appleton Clark.

It appears from her expression of regret for having permitted the inclusion of illustrations in the first place, and from her determination to excise the illustrations from her copy of the novel after its publication (but not from her other words), that Wharton didn’t object so much to illustrations in general or to Wenzell’s illustrations in particular, as she did to having any illustrations at all in *The House of Mirth*. A closer examination of Wharton’s text and Wenzell’s illustrations reveals that Wenzell’s illustrations work against one of the main
thrusts of the text. In order for the reader to feel the full measure of Wharton’s critique of New York society, it is important that Lily’s attempt to achieve a stable self-hood be frustrated. By rendering her abstract beauty in specific terms, Wenzell “crystallizes” Lily, undermining her final disintegration and denying the destructive nature of the society that oversees her downfall.

A. B. Wenzell and the Art Nouveau Woman

Although Wharton had already published eleven books and a series of articles by 1905, the publication of *The House of Mirth* marked her first widespread critical and popular success as a novelist (Colquitt). According to Helen Killoran, in *The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton*, the novel sold 140,000 copies in its first year of publication (27). According to Sheri Benstock, the novel sold 80,000 copies in the first two weeks alone (34). Immediately, Wharton’s portrayal of Lily Bart and the New York society in which she circulated sparked a diverse range of opinions about the novel’s literary and moral value. Not surprisingly, much of the debate centered around the character of Lily Bart, whom some reviewers saw as “capable,” “well poised,” and “morally sane,” and other reviewers saw as “coldly corrupt [...] spoiled, and selfish” (“Contemporary Reviews” 307, 313). If nothing else, the literati’s vastly disparate opinions of Lily Bart illustrate that she does not submit easily to a single reading, a quality that many reviewers were quick to point out. Writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Mary Moss called Lily a “complete study” who is both “aggressor” and “victim,” “utterly sordid” but also “fastidious” (309-310). *The Saturday Evening Review* called Lily “a masterly study of the modern American woman,” precisely because she is a
“thorough woman of the world, spoilt and selfish and yet withal intensely loveable” (313).

Despite these multi-faceted portrayals of Lily Bart, A. B. Wenzell seemed to notice only what he was prepared to see: the Art Nouveau siren that he and other illustrators like Charles Dana Gibson made their living portraying. From his first depiction of Lily descending Selden’s staircase to his final image of Lily kissing Selden goodbye, Wenzell’s heroine is a cookie cutter cutout of stereotypical womanhood: either vampish or virtuous, but little else. Wharton’s complicated and nuanced vision of Lily contrasts sharply with Wenzell’s flat, superficially rendered rendition. Despite Wharton’s multi-faceted portrayal of a complex, conflicted heroine, A. B. Wenzell’s illustrations present a single, superficial vision of Lily Bart that reinforces conventional stereotypes rather than questioning them.

Given the opinions she expressed in The Decoration of Houses, it is easy to see how Wharton may have balked at A. B. Wenzell’s mass-produced depictions of upper-class society. By 1905, Wenzell was arguably one of the most widely reproduced illustrators in the country. In the years surrounding the turn of the last century, Wenzell produced hundreds of illustrations for publications like Collier’s and Scribner’s Magazine. He reproduced those, in turn, in collections of prints with titles like Vanity Fair and The Passing Show (Reed 46). Wenzell’s prints repeat virtually identical scenes of fashionable society, showing well-dressed men and women lounging around in their drawing rooms. Even today, a search on Google.com for “A. B. Wenzell Passing Show” yields
hundreds of hits of auction houses selling Wenzell’s prints for just a few dollars each.

Wenzell’s illustrations, then, became synonymous in the public’s mind with “fashionable society and drawing room subjects” (Reed 46). In addition to producing the same kind of scenes over and over again, Wenzell uniformly reproduced the same kind of New Art woman that had become popular in turn-of-the-century illustrations: flat, unnatural, and superficially decorative. While critics like Cynthia Wolff and Reginald Abott have noticed the influence of the Art Nouveau movement on A. B. Wenzell’s illustrations, neither of them address how Wenzell’s superimposition of flat, unnatural, and superficially decorative drawings on Wharton’s text conflict with a more nuanced reading of the novel’s gender politics. Wolff, for instance, relegates her observation about Wenzell’s illustrations to a footnote and doesn’t address them again (325). Abott treats Wenzell’s drawings more directly, but only to establish that they do, in fact, constitute a kind of American Art Nouveau (75). In reality, Wenzell’s illustrations perform a much more complicated function in the text. By rendering Lily Bart superficially, Wenzell reinforces a superficial reading of the heroine. Furthermore, by constantly directing the viewer’s gaze to the visual spectacle of Lily’s body, Wenzell forces the reader into the position that Lawrence Selden occupies at the beginning of the novel: a spectator who can claim that “there is nothing new about Lily Bart” (5).

 Granted, Wharton does open the novel by dwelling on the spectacle of Lily’s body, but she does so from Selden’s viewpoint. In the very first sentence,
his eyes are "refreshed by the sight of Lily Bart" (5). While the reader's first exposure to Lily is conspicuously visual, the narrator is also careful to point out that Selden is the one doing the looking. His impressions of her are of a spectator looking at a painting in an art gallery. He is struck by her "vivid head," "girlish smoothness," "purity of tint," the "modelling of her little ear," and the "crisp upward wave of her hair" (which he suspects has been "brightened by art"). While he is vaguely dissatisfied with the analogy, he thinks of Lily in entirely superficial terms: "as if a fine glaze of beauty and fastidiousness had been applied to vulgar clay" (7). Selden continues to think of Lily in superficial terms throughout the rest of the novel. When he meets her again in France, for example, he is struck by her "impenetrable surface" that suggested "a process of crystallization which had fused her whole being into one hard brilliant substance" (149). For Selden, the "real Lily Bart" is the one who literally turns herself into a painting at the tableau vivant (106).

Wenzell was not the only turn-of-the-century illustrator to reinforce a view of women as the objects of male gaze, of course. At that time, professional illustration was more or less a man's game. Howard Pyle's influential painting school admitted only twelve young men at a time, no young women. The Society

Fig. 2.1. Dinner. One of the all-male monthly dinners hosted by the Society of Illustrators.
of Illustrators (Wenzell was one of its founding members and, when *The House of Mirth* was published, its second president) did not admit female artists until 1920. Due largely to Pyle’s influence, American illustrators tended to be staunchly conservative when it came to gender politics. N. C. Wyeth, for example, felt that women were supposed to be like his Swiss mother, obsessed with “Kirche, Küche, Kinder—church, kitchen, children” (Michaelis 209). The business of illustration, then, often functioned like Edwardian drama and other turn-of-the-century art forms: their main purpose was to “please and placate the male audience” (Wolff, “Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity” 73).

Scribner’s decision to publish Wenzell’s illustrations alongside Wharton’s text was undoubtedly financially motivated. Wharton, a comparatively unknown author at the time, could not be expected to sell nearly as many magazines as could Wenzell. The January 1905 edition of *Scribner’s Magazine* opens with a full-color reproduction of Wenzell’s illustration of Lily Bart descending Selden’s staircase—many pages before Wharton’s text appears. Scribner’s determination to push the illustrator to the forefront instead of the author ensures that the reader’s first vision of Lily Bart is Wenzell’s. Granted, Wharton also ensures that the reader’s first vision of Lily is from a male’s point of view, but she spends much of the rest of the novel complicating and questioning that view. Wenzell’s final vision of Lily, as we shall see, is identical to his first.

A century after the initial publication of *The House of Mirth*, A. B. Wenzell’s illustrations continue to affect how readers view the text. In a review of the 2000 cinematic version for MSNBC, Sarah Bunting’s principle objection to the lead
actress is the color of her hair. “How dare director Terence Davies use Gillian Anderson for the lead role?” Bunting asks. “She looks nothing like Lily Bart. Lily Bart is blonde” (italics included). Of course, nowhere in the text does Wharton indicate that Lily’s hair is blonde. She does point out, however, that Mr. Rosedale, Percy Gryce, Mrs. Trenor, and Miss Sneddon are all blondes. The charwoman outside Selden’s building has “straw-coloured hair,” and Lily’s mother’s hair is yellow (13). Lily, however, is most likely meant to be dark-headed. She has black eyelashes, after all (7, 20) and is said to be the spitting image of Joshua Reynolds’ Mrs. Lloyd, another dark-headed lady. In fact, the similarity between the two women is evidently so striking that Mrs. Lloyd has a type “so like her own that [Lily] could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself” (106). Despite her insistence that Davies did not stay true to the novel when he cast a red-headed actress to play Lily, Bunting’s vision of Lily Bart undoubtedly comes from A. B. Wenzell’s rendition of the heroine—not Wharton’s.

Bunting is not the only critic to see Lily as A. B. Wenzell drew her. In “Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death,” Cynthia Wolff identifies Lily as an “Art Nouveau woman” (323). Noting that the Art Nouveau movement tended to portray women in “flowing, sentimentalized, visual renderings,” Wolff makes the case that The House of Mirth presents Lily in just that way. Lilies were the flowers of choice in the Art Nouveau decorative style, after all, and for Wolff, Lily proves again and again that her primary function is to be decorative. Stating that Lily has “nothing more to offer than a superb capacity to render [herself] agreeable,” Wolff claims
that Lily has no capacity to “make choices, draw difficult distinctions, or bear hardship” (324, 326). The novel, however, takes pains to demonstrate that Lily has capacity to do all three. She makes the choice to burn Selden’s letters even though she knows they can allow her to reenter society (241); she clearly understands the differences between Rosedale’s business proposition and a love-based marriage (233); and she suffers social ignominy and eventually death because she refuses adopt the corrupt morality of the upper class. It is possible that, like Lawrence Selden and A. B. Wenzell, Wolff misses Lily’s interiority because she is so intent on seeing her as a New Art woman.

When Lily has the chance to actually render herself as an artistic creation, however, she does not pick an Art Nouveau-influenced artist like John Singer Sargent or A. B. Wenzell to emulate. Instead, she chooses the more traditional portrait artist Joshua Reynolds. Her choice demonstrates that she is more than simply an object to be looked at and admired, rather she is herself an artist and a creator. Reynolds’ portrait, after all, is of a woman doing something: Mrs. Lloyd Carving Her Husband’s Name on the Trunk of a Tree. The title of the painting

![Fig. 2.2. Sir Joshua Reynolds. Mrs. Lloyd. 1775-76.](image)
indicates an active rather than a static subject. Furthermore, her choice of action makes it clear that she wishes others to see her not just as an object, but as a writer. Lily’s choice to appear in a tableaux vivant aligns her even more closely with Wharton. According to Eleanor Dwight, Wharton did not draw her inspiration from Art Nouveau, but from tableaus like those created by classical painters such as Giovanni Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio (190). Italian Tableau artists such as placed their subjects against a “dynamically populated backdrop” in order to set off their particular qualities. In Meeting with the Pope by Carpaccio, for instance, the Christian virgin Ursula meets with the Pope in an effort to stave a marriage with a pagan king. Ursula’s piety is meant to be contrasted with the sword-wielding soldier standing behind her, while her simplicity is set off by the ornate clothing of the Pope and his cardinals. In a similar manner, Wharton illustrates Lily’s qualities by comparing her with the tableau of characters surrounding her. Selden’s shallowness highlights Lily’s depth, for example, while Mrs. Dorset’s penchant for slander highlights Lily’s discretion.

Wenzell’s illustrations, on the other hand, do little to emphasize Lily’s unique qualities. Instead, he repeats the same stock scenes and characters that he has used hundreds of times before. Take, for example, his illustration of Lily’s
confrontation with Gus Trenor. Rather than distinguishing Lily from other women who might have succumbed to Trenor’s attack, Wenzell allows Lily to fade into the tapestry behind her. Although they are difficult to make out in reprinted versions, the 1905 edition clearly displays the Oriental buildings and designs in the tapestry, turning Lily even more completely into an object to be conquered (see fig. 2.4). The scene as Wenzell portrays it is startlingly similar to scenes he had painted for other publications. In *The Passing Show*, Wenzell includes an almost identical scene of a man confronting a woman against a tapestry. In it, the male figure occupies the same pose that will be later adopted by Trenor. His head is inclined, one foot juts out in front of the other, and his hands rest in a similar manner against his body and the
furniture. The female figure is also quite similar to how Wenzell will portray Lily. She has backed up against a floral tapestry, her dress splays out along the floor, and her hair is done up in an identical style. Rather than distinguishing Lily from his other female figures, as Carpaccio might have done, Wenzell simply repeats his standard Art Nouveau woman.

In many ways, of course, Wenzell’s version of Lily complements the picture Wharton has drawn of her. In The Woman Continued to Stare, which was used as the frontispiece in the serialized version and makes up the cover of Norton’s 1990 critical edition, Wenzell’s Lily is descending a stair case after visiting Selden’s apartment (14). Lily’s pictorial descent in the picture prefigures her social descent that will take place gradually in the text. By juxtaposing the image of Lily with that of the charwoman, Wenzell hints at the possibility that Lily might even become the charwoman. Indeed, Wharton will have her do just that as she takes possession of Selden’s letters and then considers selling them to Mrs. Dorset when she becomes financially desperate enough to do so (236). In order to climb down the stairs, Lily has had to walk through the charwoman’s muddy water. She becomes, in effect, the dingy woman she had always abhorred. Wenzell is careful to show the stain from the mud creeping up the lower right-
hand corner of Lily's white dress in order to mirror the taint of having been in Selden's apartment.

Wenzell continues to utilize stair imagery in his other illustrations of the novel, just as Wharton returns repeatedly to visions of stairs to indicate the upward and downward social mobility of her characters. In *She Lingered*, Lily stands on a landing looking down upon the party at Bellomont. Here Wenzell has flipped the earlier significance of stairs.

Descending from Selden's apartment, Lily encounters two representatives of the lower social strata: the charwoman and Mr. Rosedale. At the bottom of the stairs at Bellomont, however, the moral lowground is represented by members of the upper class: Percy Gryce and Miss Van Osburgh, feeling only the dulled sensations of their set (40). From her perch on the terrace, Lily feels above the crowded selfish world of pleasure," and decides not to descend into it yet (41).

In "It Was a Good Deal Better" (see fig. 2.8), Lily no longer has control over when she will enter the society of her peers. Instead, she is in danger of being pushed out of it entirely. Like the first two images on the stairs, Lily is shown at a transition moment that is reflected in the architecture around her. Wenzell has placed her on the far left-hand side of the frame, with the wind
blowing from the right. Lily’s hair and
dress are windswept, fueling the
perception that Lily is about to blow right
off the edge of the set. Her precarious
position is made even more evident when
she is contrasted to the sturdiness of the
column that stands next to her. Compared
to the dresses that Lily wears earlier in the
novel, her outfit here is rather plain—a
plainness that Wenzell emphasizes by
placing it next to a flowered pillow. The
composition, weather, and fabric in this
painting make it clear that Lily is on her way out.

Wenzell’s vision of a helplessly blown-about Lily complements Wharton’s
text nicely. As she sits on the verandah, Lily imagines herself carelessly swept
up on a crowed express train (182). While other women have clearly defined
roles (Mrs. Gormer is the conductor and Carry Fisher is the porter), Lily herself is
no more than a passenger, helplessly carried along to wherever the train takes
her. Wharton makes careful use of train imagery throughout the text in order to
illustrate Lily’s slipping social status. At the beginning of the novel, Lily appears
in Grand Central Station (5). While she has tellingly missed her train to
Bellomont, at this point she still has plenty of other options (Lawrence Selden
among them). Like the station itself, Lily is well decked out and still occupies a
central place in her friends’ society. By the end of the novel, Lily is forced to live in a dismally furnished flat underneath the L-train (249). Lily’s mental image of getting swept up in a passenger train at some point between Grand Central Station and an apartment below the L-train, then, is consistent with Wenzell’s illustration of Lily losing her place.

Despite these few images of Lily that complement or complicate the text, more often than not, Wenzell’s vision of Lily is a simplified one in which she is reduced to being the object of male gaze. In his opening illustration of Lily descending Selden’s steps, in fact, Wenzell places the reader in Rosedale’s position, viewing Lily from the landlord’s point of view. Like Selden, Rosedale sees Lily as an object of art. Unlike Selden, Rosedale converts his aesthetic response to Lily’s beauty into social capital, much like the millionaire who buys a picture-gallery of old masters in order to secure dinner invitations with New York society (96). According to Maureen Montgomery, this was a common response. In *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton’s New York*, Montgomery explains that women’s bodies reflected class and social respectability, which in turn reflected the wealth of the men who viewed them. Because the display was “concentrated on the sexualized body of the woman, spectatorship was a predominately male activity” (117). Wenzell’s version of Lily’s body has become an ornament for men to look at. As such it is decorated with flowers, ruffles, and textured material. As Abott points out, one of the major elements in Art Nouveau design was the “S-curve,” particularly in women’s bodies (79). From bust to bustle, Lily’s figure in Wenzell’s opening illustration is
a perfect representation of an S-curve, which was meant to be both sensual and decorative, like the curved stem of a flower.

Wenzell continues to portray Lily as a decorative object to be admired by men in the rest of his illustrations. In She Lingered, for example (see figure 2.7), Lily’s figure is again presented as an S-curve, with exaggerated bust and hips (2). That Lily is part of scenery is evident from the way the flowers on her dress blend in with the flowers on the balustrades. A vine hanging from the column is repeated in the strands hanging from Lily’s shawl. Wenzell, who was known for his “preoccupation with the rendering of the sheen of a silk dress,” frequently blends portions of Lily’s clothing into the floral background of the picture (Reed 46). In I Mean to Make You (see fig. 2.4), the floral pattern of Lily’s dress matches the decorative pattern of the tapestry hanging behind her (115).

Similarly, in “Goodbye,” the flowers on Lily’s dress and hat match the floral pattern on the tapestry in Selden’s rooms. By blending Lily’s body with the decorative objects that surround her, Wenzell reinforces the illusion that she is a decorative object to be looked at and admired by men.

Outdoors, the melding of nature and Lily’s clothing is even more
pronounced. *She Turned*, included in the serialized version but not in the book, illustrates Lily’s visit with Selden at Bellomont (see figure 2.9). Wenzell surrounds Selden’s body with a thick outline, firmly separating him from the surrounding scene. Lily’s figure, on the other hand, is surrounded by a broken line, meaning that at places her body seems to blend with the trees, rocks, and grass. The indistinct outlines of the lace on her hat are not clearly distinguishable from the indistinct outlines of the leaves on the tree. A break in the outline where Lily’s body meets the rock gives the impression that her dress actually springs from ground. Wenzell gives the rock hues and fissures which are repeated in the dress, further blending the patterns of one with the patterns of the other. Like the rock she sits on, the blades of grass in the lower portion of the painting also incorporate themselves into the folds of Lily’s dress. Wenzell paints Lily as if she is growing from the ground itself. Like the landscape, she is to be gazed at and admired. Significantly, Lily’s eyes are closed. In “Picturing Lily: Body Art in *The House of Mirth*,” Emily Orlando notes the penchant for Art Nouveau Painters to depict sleeping or convalescent women (91). With her eyes closed, Lily slips more easily into John Berger’s formulation that men look at women and women are to be looked at (47).

**Wenzell’s Illustrations Discourage a Nuanced View of Lily**

Wharton, on the other hand, presents a much more complicated view of Lily’s agency and of her ability to see. For one thing, she refuses to portray the landscape as simply decorative. As Lily and Selden ascend to the resting-place that Wenzell depicts in *She Turned*, the narrator begins to describe the
decorative nature of their surroundings, but then immediately complicates such a reading (see fig. 2.9). At first, the narrator creates a picture using the color, shade, and patterns of a painter. The environment is full of “purpling sprays of bramble,” “glossy verdure,” and “shade deepened to the checkered dusk” (51). In the next paragraph, however, Wharton allows the reader to see the landscape through Lily’s eyes. Rather than gazing upon the surface of the landscape to see colors, shades, and patterns, Lily’s aesthetic sense translates nature into what it is capable of producing. Instead of purple bramble and checkered hillsides, Lily sees sugar maples to be tapped, orchards to be harvested, and a farming community that will benefit monetarily from the production (51-52). Lily is capable of looking beyond the surface of things in a way that Selden cannot. “Money stands for all kinds of things,” she tells him as they gaze upon the landscape (57). Although John Clubbe claims that Lily “never penetrates beyond surface signs,” she has a far more penetrating gaze than Selden (545). Just as she looks beyond the visual aesthetics of the countryside to recognize its economic potential, Lily sees that money can buy more than just “diamonds and motor-cars.” In addition, it can buy her cultural capital and social mobility. Lily recognizes that particularly for women, the spiritual freedom that Selden advocates is not possible without the economic freedom to go with it.

Selden, however, refuses to look beneath the surface of his naïve utopia or of Lily herself. For him, Lily is a “wonderful spectacle” (53), something to be “watched […] with lazy amusement” (54). Despite her rather nuanced critique of his “republic of the spirit,” Selden continues to see Lily’s role as someone to
provide “aesthetic amusement” and his to provide “admiring spectatorship” (55). Even after he convinces himself that he has seen a new side of Lily, Selden continues to think of her as an object to be looked at. Her face is “pale and altered,” her beauty diminished, and his keenest insight (the one marked by italics and an exclamation point) has to do with what she looks like when she is alone.

If Wharton wishes to emphasize Lily’s inner complexity by juxtaposing it with Selden’s shallowness, Wenzell misses the point entirely. Instead, he encourages the reader to misread Lily just as Selden had done by placing the viewer squarely in the latter’s shoes. In *She Turned*, Wenzell insists that the reader see Lily as an object of art to be gazed at and admired by men (see fig. 2.9). He utilizes a triangular composition that forces the reader’s eye to travel up the folds of her dress and rest upon her face. The reader mirrors Selden’s insistent gaze, then, encouraged by the lines of the picture to look at Lily’s face. Wenzell makes use of this triangular composition to similar effect in other illustrations as well. In *You Don’t Seem to Remember*, the lines of Lily’s dress, the slope of the other woman’s shoulder, and the direction of Trenor’s gaze all point to
Lily’s face (96). Because readers tend to view objects from left to right, the slope of Lily’s dress cause the viewer’s gaze to move up Lily’s body, from her feet to her face, just as it will in *Oh, Gerty, the Furies* (130).

In pictures such as *She Turned*, Wenzell places the reader in the position that Selden occupies in the opening scene of the novel: “As a spectator, enjoying Lily Bart” (6). The reader, like the men in Wenzell’s picture, gazes upon Lily’s body as a piece of art. Wenzell ensures that we see Lily as a decorative object, either as a jewel in Rosedale’s theater box in *You Don’t Seem* (see fig 2.10) or as an ornament on Selden’s arm in *Dear Mr. Selden* (171). In the latter picture, Lily is again the object of male gaze as all the men in the picture (with the exception of Selden) stare at her. Of course, the other woman in the picture stares at Lily as well, but this does not detract from her status as an object of masculine desire. As Maureen Montgomery points out, women in Wharton’s New York most often gazed at other women in order to establish a sort of pecking order—to judge the degree to which other women were also being gazed upon by men (117). In other words, the woman staring at Lily Bart in “Dear Mr. Selden” only reinforces the gazes of the males around her.

96
For Wenzell, Lily only ceases to be looked upon as an object of male desire after she begins her fall from society’s graces. In *Look at Those Spangles*, there are no men in the picture to look at Lily. Furthermore, none of the women look at her either. Instead, they either stare at the hat in Lily’s hand, or in two cases, attempt to catch the viewer’s gaze by staring directly out of the painting (220). Unlike many of his other portraits of Lily, Wenzell does not employ a triangular composition here in order to draw the viewer’s eyes up Lily’s body. Instead, the heads in the painting form more a less a straight line placed horizontally across the upper half of the picture frame, making it difficult for the viewer to settle long upon one or the other. Although Lily’s hair is lighter than the rest, the viewer is distracted from that distinguishing characteristic by the two other faces that gaze so pointedly back (the only figures among all of Wenzell’s illustrations for the novel to do so). Lily completes her fade into obscurity by wearing a plain, black dress instead of a light-colored dress filled with frills and flowers. In this picture Lily no longer acts as a decorative object. Instead, she creates decorative objects for other women to wear.

*I Am Ready* also pictures Lily after her fall (see fig. 2.13). While the viewer is clearly meant to compare this picture of Rosedale and Lily under a tree
to the earlier outdoor scene of Selden and Lily at Bellomont, Wenzell no longer forces the viewer to dwell on Lily’s body. Instead of using a triangular composition that draws the eye across Lily’s body to her face, however, Wenzell places Rosedale and Lily on opposite sides of the painting. As he did in Look at Those Spangles, Wenzell places his subjects’ faces in a horizontal line, ensuring that Rosedale’s head competes with Lily’s for attention (see fig. 2.12). Rosedale’s clothing also competes for attention, since it is nearly as decorative as Lily’s. He wears a brightly colored vest with a floral pattern, jewelry on his fingers, spats, and light-colored hat. Compared with the dark-suited men in Wenzell’s other pictures, Rosedale is a feminized dandy.

Wenzell is not alone in his depiction of the feminized Jew. As Bryan Cheyette points out, portraying Jewish men as feminine was commonplace for both artists and writers in the nineteenth and the twentieth-centuries (5). Wenzell does not employ the stereotype in order to comment on it, however. Instead, he emphasizes Rosedale’s femininity in order to draw attention away from Lily. Unlike Selden at Bellomont, Rosedale’s body is not firmly outlined. Instead, the folds of his jacket turn into the bark on the tree trunk behind him, just as the frills
on Lily's hat blends with the leaves above her. Because he is placed on the lefthand side of the picture, the viewer's gaze falls first upon Rosedale, and is then forced to linger in order to absorb the decorative detail. Because Lily has lost her social capital, Wenzell seems to say, and is no longer capable of reflecting the wealth of the men around her, she is no longer an object to be gazed upon by men.

In many ways, Wharton's strategy for portraying Lily is similar to Wenzell's. Like Wenzell, Wharton makes a spectacle of Lily, but she does so in order to expose the destructive nature of the patriarchal society that prizes women solely as decoration. She also makes it clear that rather than passively submit to the controlling gazes of others, Lily takes charge of her own presentation. In the tableau vivant scene and elsewhere, Lily uses the appearance of her body as a tool to gain power and influence the world around her. From an early age, Lily "liked to think of her beauty as a power for good, as giving her the opportunity to attain a position where she should make her influence felt in the vague diffusion of refinement and good taste" (30). Lily is not the only one to recognize the benevolent potential of Lily's beauty. Gerty, for example, tells Selden how Lily used her beauty to benefit the members of the Girl's Club. Unlike Mrs. Bry, who gave five hundred dollars and Mr. Rosedale, who gave one thousand, Lily's principle contribution was to allow the young working women to gaze upon her. "[Y]ou should have seen their eyes," Gerty exclaims as she and Selden prepare to witness the tableau vivant. "[I]t was as good in a day in the country just to look at her" (105).
It is clear from Gerty’s comments that simply giving money isn’t enough. Although Rosedale had donated more money than Lily and Mrs. Bry combined, Gerty is not entirely pleased with his gift, wishing that Lily were not so nice to him. What the girls really need, according to Gerty, is not Rosedale’s “Jew” money or Mrs. Bry’s new money, but the refining influence of Lily’s upper-class beauty. Gerty was not alone in her faith in the uplifting power of leisure-class women. Mary Cadwalader Jones, Edith Wharton’s sister-in-law, published an essay on working girls’ clubs in 1894. According to Jones, the best that a “society belle” can do for young working-class women is not to donate money to keep their social clubs afloat (club dues should do that), but to be “looked upon as examples” (282). Jones makes the case that allowing oneself to be “looked up to and followed […] by a clubful of hard-working girls” is more than enough to ensure the “development of higher and nobler aims” (283, 278). Unlike her sister-in-law, Wharton does not seem to be so uncritically accepting of the notion that young society ladies can improve the lives of working women simply by allowing themselves to be gazed upon. When Lily meets up with one of Gerty’s former club girls in the final chapters of the novel, Nettie expresses her gratitude for the uplifting influence Lily has had on her life. However, it wasn’t Lily’s beauty or social graces that helped Nettie begin a new life with a baby and a husband, but the money that Lily gave her to recover in a sanatorium—money that she received from Gus Trenor (243). While Jones claims that it is impossible to do effective club work while “lead[ing] a life outside the club that is willfully inconsistent” with the high moral standards that the club is trying to instill,
Wharton clarifies that the only reason that Lily can be any help to Nettie at all is because she allowed herself to take money from Trenor under questionable circumstances (282).

Wharton further dismantles the idea that gazing upon the aesthetic beauty of Lily’s body is somehow enough to inspire “higher and nobler aims” by having Selden express just that sentiment. As he gazes upon the opening tableau, Selden thinks about his own capacity for an “adjustment of mental vision” and “responsive fancy” that will allow him to see more deeply and truly than Lily’s other viewers (105). When he finally sees Lily’s reenactment of Mrs. Lloyd, Selden is primed for a sublime experience. To Selden, the “flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart” expresses nothing so much as “nobility”, “grace,” “poetry,” and “eternal harmony” (106). Indeed, Selden thinks that he gazes for the first time on the “real Lily Bart” and is sure that now that her beauty has been “detached from all that cheapened and vulgarized it,” it can now lead him into the Republic of the Spirit that he discussed with her at Bellomont (107). Of course, Lily’s beauty does no such thing. Ned Van Alstyne’s first reaction to the sight of Lily’s figure is to exclaim that “there isn’t a break in the lines anywhere” (106). For Ned, the point of the evening was not to reach a higher state of being, but to realize “what an outline Lily has” (109). George Dorset and Gus Trenor react similarly. In fact, the most practical consequence of Lily’s appearance in the tableau vivant is to convince Gus Trenor that he should demand the sexual favors she implicitly promised by taking his ten thousand dollars.
The audience’s various reactions to Lily’s appearance among the tableaux vivants do not just expose the crassness of Gus Trenor’s and Ned Van Alstyne’s “unfurnished minds” (105). They also demonstrate the limitations of Selden’s ability to “read” Lily and of Lily’s ability to control the manner of her consumption. In “Aesthetic Obtuseness and Aesthetic Perception in *The House of Mirth,*” Travis Foster invokes Walter Pater to argue that Selden’s responses to Lily’s self-formation as an art object reveal his own inadequacies as an art critic. Walter Pater was a nineteenth-century English essayist and art critic whose views on art seem to have informed Selden’s. That Wharton was familiar with Pater’s work is evident from the inclusion of his volume on Renaissance art in her library (Ramsden) and references to him in her autobiography (141). One of Pater’s principle tenets was that engaging with a work of art should heighten one’s self perception. The way to perceive critically, according to Pater, is to observe oneself while experience new sensations, or “see oneself seeing,” as Travis puts it (3). While Selden does seem to be very aware of his reactions to Lily’s appearance, those reactions rarely lead to any special insight. Selden is never able to see “anything new” in Lily Bart: not in the train station, at the tableau vivant, or at the end of the novel looking at her corpse. For Selden, Lily’s purpose is always to confirm his previously-held notions about himself. Indeed, Selden seems most willing to marry Lily when he thinks she will leave those notions unchallenged. As Selden thought about Lily the night after she appeared as Mrs. Lloyd, he lost himself in a “state of impassioned self absorption” and craved “the companionship of one whose point of view should justify his own,
who should confirm, by deliberate observation, the truth to which his intuitions had leaped” (121). Judged by Pater’s standards, Selden is not the sophisticated aesthete he claims to be. Instead he is a “chronic and stubbornly bad reader, one whose inability to perceive critically either Lily or art indicate an equal inability to think critically about himself” (Foster 3).

It is unsurprising then, that Selden vastly misunderstands Lily’s purpose for appearing in the tableau vivant. For Selden, the “real Lily Bart” he sees there is otherworldly, “divested from the trivialities” of the society that surrounds her (106). For Lily, however, her appearance as Mrs. Lloyd is precisely to cement herself in the center of that society. Like the Wellington Brys who put on the show, Lily decides to “attack society collectively” by displaying herself to as many people as possible (103). She is not at all concerned with providing a sublime experience to the discriminating mind. Instead, she simply wishes to be admired. After the show, Lily finds herself at the center of a throng of audience members, caring “less for the quality of the admiration received than for its quantity” (108). In fact, she gives Ned Van Alstyne and George Dorset the exact look that Selden hopes to receive for having supposedly read her correctly.

Unfortunately, while the Wellington Brys manage to profit socially by Lily’s appearance, Lily does not. Judith Fryer, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Emily Orlando, and many others have made a big deal of Lily’s authorship in the tableau vivant, of the fact that her beauty becomes a source of power rather than a means of objectification. While this is undoubtedly the case, it is also true that Lily proves completely incapable of controlling the reactions of her audience members, or of
using those reactions to gain a more secure position in society. If anything, Lily’s turn as Mrs. Lloyd places her in an even more precarious position. Jack Stepney, for example, who has only just gained a place among the inner circle of New York society himself, uses the occasion to censor her (124). Both Selden and Rosedale, neither of whom Lily considers to be viable husbands, are sufficiently inspired by her beauty to try to ask her to marry them (110, 140). Most damaging, perhaps, is Gus Trenor’s resolve to make her his mistress and the perception by her friends that he must have done so. While Lily may have entered the tableau vivant hoping that her “crystalline” beauty could gain her a secure place and identity, in practical terms it only serves to destabilize her further.

It is likely, in fact, that Wharton specifically chose Mrs. Lloyd as Lily’s subject because the portrait is far too over-determined to offer her any hope of securing a stable self-hood. Although Judith Fryer claims that Edith Wharton’s knowledge of painting “was not substantial,” there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Wharton was familiar with fine art in general and with Reynolds’ work specifically (34). Fryer herself notes Wharton’s familiarity with Italian renaissance painting, and Wharton’s autobiography is full of references to art and artists. She mentions having met the modern American painters Edward Boit and Ralph Curtis, for example (171-72), as well as devouring books on renaissance painting by Walter Pater and John Symonds “with zest” (141). Wharton’s art library was substantial. Of the four thousand or so volumes of books owned by Edith Wharton at the time of her death, sixteen hundred of them
were dedicated to art, archeology, and history. Unfortunately, this portion of Wharton’s library was destroyed during Germany’s bombing of London in 1940, so it is difficult to know with certainty how many of her books dealt specifically with painting (Ramsden xv). In the afterward to his catalogue of her remaining books, however, George Ramsden writes that the reason Wharton separated her library into two parts in her will was that her godson’s family already owned a substantial collection of art books. It is likely, then, that the much of the destroyed portion of Wharton’s library did have to do with art and that she was interested enough in those volumes to make sure that they went to a family that could use them.

Not all of Wharton’s art books made it into the selection that was destroyed in the London blitz, however. Among the books on art criticism and painting that Wharton willed to the Clarks were Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *Fifteen Discourses* that he delivered to the students of London’s Royal Academy (Ramsden 102). That she read the discourses is indicated in a letter to William Fullerton in which she wrote that she found Reynolds’ pronouncements on art “such a mixture of drivel and insight” (*Letters* 238). She also referred to the Reynolds’ speeches in her fiction, particularly to the “noble draperies [of] Sir Joshua’s Discourses on Art” (*False Dawn* 76). Although interest in Reynolds had fallen off somewhat during the mid-1800s, by the turn-of-the-century his work again commanded a great deal of popular interest. His discourses to the Royal Academy were reprinted in 1891, and a number of treatments of his biography and paintings were widely available in the years when Wharton was working on
The House of Mirth: Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Claude Phillips in 1894; Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Walter Armstrong in 1900; Reynolds, by Estelle M. Hurl in 1900; and Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Alfred Lys Baldry in 1903. Although Judith Fryer writes that “Wharton might well have consulted any number of programs for tableaux vivants,” it is more probable that she chose Reynolds’ Mrs. Lloyd as carefully as Lily did (42).

In late nineteenth-century newspaper accounts of fashionable tableaux vivants, Sir Joshua Reynolds’ paintings feature heavily. In 1897, a society columnist for the Philadelphia Inquirer notes that “Mrs. Frederic Edey made a striking picture of a Sir Joshua Reynolds beauty in deep wine-coloured velour” (4). In “At the Queen’s Court, Two American Ladies Create a Sensation in Buckingham Palace,” another columnist remarks on the sumptuousness of another Reynolds’ gown: “The dress worn by Mrs. Hein was copied from a picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The petticoat and corsage were of rose-colored brocade embroidered with silver, and the full court train, also of rose velvet, fell from the shoulders and was edged with silver” (1). The overall effect of these and other public recreations of Reynolds’ paintings seems to be one of opulence and wealth. When Lord Wolseley issued invitations to a fancy dress ball and demanded that the ladies dress up to resemble paintings by Reynolds, Romney, or Gainsborough, he does so because such a show of conspicuous consumption will display and solidify power (11). It is possible that Lily has a very similar goal in mind, such as when she tells Selden that in order to be successful, women are expected to be “pretty and well-dressed till [they] drop” (12), or when she
explains to Gerty that wearing costly dresses is simply part of the price of living with the rich (207). It is also possible that Lily’s choice of dress is meant to convey just the opposite.

In contemporary newspaper accounts of society women dressing up to match Joshua Reynolds’ paintings, two broad purposes emerge: the first is to display power and wealth, such as at the Bradley-Martin party in Philadelphia or at Lord Wolseley’s ball in Dublin; the second is to display innocence and simplicity. Furthermore, there seems to be definite rules about who gets to dress up as what. When Reynolds is invoked to denote extravagance and wealth, the women dressed up to look like his paintings are invariably married. When Reynolds is used as a metaphor for purity and simplicity, the women matching those paintings are invariably unmarried. For example, in “Simplicity in Dress: Opportunities for Pretty Effects Which Young Ladies Ignore,” the author of an 1881 Harper’s Bazar article urges girls under twenty-one to rely on the natural beauty of their bodies rather than elaborate dresses and jewelry to appeal to the opposite sex. “It is the soft rounded forms, the dewy bloom of the cheeks, the clear young eyes, the soft tender lips, that we want to see,” the author writes. Instead of “heavy velvets and loaded trimmings,” women should look to the “old portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds” for examples of “grace and elegance” (3). In 1884, a columnist using the name “Lady Manners” praises young women who choose to dress themselves after Reynolds portraits. “Young unmarried girls were formerly dressed with the utmost simplicity,” Lady Manners writes. “[W]hite
draperies, like those Sir Joshua Reynolds used to paint, were considered in
every respect most suitable for them” (4).

On one hand, Lily’s choice of “pale draperies” instead of a fancy dress
may have very well meant to convey the “soaring grace” that Selden allows
himself to see (106). On the other hand, the fact that she didn’t “cover up her
figure” with “fal-bals,” as Ned Van Alstyne gleefully points out, leaves her open to
all sorts of vulgar comments and ribald speculation (109). Lily’s inability to
command a uniform reaction is no doubt due to the liminal state in which she
finds herself. It is true that she is unmarried, but she is also twenty-nine—far
older than the age that the Harper’s Bazar article stipulates for wearing Reynolds
draperies. Lily’s display of her full-bodied figure, then, is more akin to a married
woman’s efforts to display the property of her husband than it is an unmarried
girl’s demonstration of innocence and youth. Van Alstyne voices this sentiment
when he tells the crowd gathered at Carrie Fisher’s that a girl as good-looking as
Lily had better get married. “In our imperfectly organized society,” he says,
“there is no provision as yet for the young woman who claims the privileges of
marriage without assuming its obligations” (124). Rather than stabilizing her
position, Lily’s choice to appear as Mrs. Lloyd makes her in-between status even
more evident.

Wharton’s selection of Mrs. Lloyd is especially destabilizing because while
it allows Lily to “oversee her objectification” as Emily Orlando puts it (84), it also
undermines Lily’s ability to control her own image by making her just one more
artist in long line of artists. Judith Fryer points out that while Lily has clearly
authored the scene by selecting the type, there is also irony in the fact that she represents a figure, Mrs. Lloyd, who is not herself autonomous but represents another figure: Mr. Lloyd (47). The authorship of the scene becomes even more muddled when we consider that Reynolds did not select the pose, but borrowed it from a Raphael drawing of *Adam Tempted*. The image he used had been etched in reverse by Pierre Crozat for his *Recueil d'Estampes* in 1763 (Mannings 1137). We might say that Wharton poses Lily posing as Mrs. Lloyd posed by Reynolds after a pose by Crozat copied from Raphael. Although there is no way to know whether or not Wharton knew of *Mrs. Lloyd*'s complicated provenance, it does seem clear that Lily’s appearance in the tableau vivant does not easily allow her to claim ownership of her own image.

In fact, as the novel progresses Lily finds it more and more difficult to manipulate the “vivid plastic sense” of her physical body (103). When Selden first sees Lily at Grand Central Station, he thinks of her beauty as “fine glaze” over vulgar clay (7). When he meets her again in Monte Carlo, her beauty had undergone a “process of crystallization” that resulted in an “impenetrable surface” (149). While Selden thinks that the evident crystallizing of Lily’s features represents a kind of permanent beauty, it is clear to the reader that Lily...
desperately fears losing her good looks. She complains to Gerty that she is getting lines in her skin, and worries that her face is becoming pale and leaden (207). Lily’s physical deterioration is an important marker of her social descent; as Lily’s opportunities diminish, so does her beauty. By the end of the novel, she repeats the image of the charwoman, clutching the packet of Bertha Dorset’s letters to sell as she walks down Madison Avenue in front of Selden’s apartment building (236).

**Wenzell’s Alternate Ending**

Wharton’s final descriptions of Lily’s body make it clear that the social world she tried so hard to enter has left her scooped out and hollow—little more than a shell of the woman she was before. In fact, Wharton uses the word “hollow” twice to describe Lily in the final few chapters, once when Selden notices her “delicately-hollowed face” (238) and again when she hollows out her arm to make room for Nettie Struther’s phantom child as she lays dying (251). Selden’s final glimpse of Lily as she says goodbye to him in his apartment is of a virtual skeleton. Her hands are thin, her figure has “shrunk to angularity,” and there are dark circles underneath her eyes (241). She seems the polar opposite of the woman who had appeared as one of Reynolds’ paintings just a few months before. To make sure that we notice the difference, Wharton brings back several elements of the tableau vivant for Lily’s final death scene (Fryer 52). At the Wellington Bry’s, Lily “expanded like a flower in sunlight” (108). Now she is “a flower from which every bud had been nipped” (247). Before taking the laudanum that will kill her, Lily lays out the Reynolds dress on her bed to remind
her of her previous triumph. Finally, when Selden sees her corpse, he can’t reconcile the “real self” on the bed with the “real Lily Bart” he saw modeling as Mrs. Lloyd (252).

By drawing such a sharp contrast between Lily’s tableau vivant and her tableau mordant, Wharton reminds her audience that unless they are willing to conform to the rules and expectations of society, women will find it next to impossible to create stable selves. Any attempt to live independently threatens to leave them hollowed out and wasted away, just like Lily’s corpse. In “Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity,” Cynthia Wolff discusses the difficulty that women of Wharton’s culture had constructing independent selves in the face of “various narratives of the world to which women had, of necessity, accommodated themselves” (219). Wolff argues that one of the narratives that Lily struggles against is the expectations of Edwardian melodrama, in which a good woman is tempted by the extravagance of society, and then either dies as a result of her fall or is redeemed by her refusal to succumb. Wharton purposely frustrates these expectations. Lily demonstrates her refusal to succumb to society’s temptations by burning Bertha Dorset’s letters, but is not subsequently redeemed. She also refuses the alternate narrative, which is the redemption-through-marriage plot as exemplified by Nettie Struthers.

A. B. Wenzell’s illustration of Lily’s final meeting with Selden, however, restores the redemptive narrative that Wharton has purposely frustrated. For one thing, Lily is pictured not as a skeletal shell but as a full-bodied woman. Rather than being “shrunk to angularity,” Lily retains the S-curves she displayed
descending the staircase at the beginning of the novel. If anything, the curves of her body are even more exaggerated than in earlier illustrations. As it did in *I Mean to Make You*, the floral pattern of Lily’s dress matches up with the floral pattern in Selden’s tapestry (see fig. 2.4). For another, Wenzell’s Lily seems to have achieved the redemption that Wharton denied her. No longer an object to be desired and conquered, she is a figure to be worshipped. Lily’s white dress contrasts sharply with the black dress she wore in the previous illustration. Selden’s head is bowed, as if before an angel, while Lily kisses him chastely on the forehead. Pictured just after she selflessly burns Selden’s letters, Wenzell’s Lily has become angelic. For Wenzell, Lily’s death is triumphant rather than tragic. Rather than being destroyed by a society that denies women the possibility of constructing stable selves, Wenzell’s Lily is instead exalted by it. As my next chapter will reveal, J. Alexandre Skeete also counters Pauline Hopkins’s efforts to create independent female characters who are not simply victims of social expectations and prejudice, but he does so in order to contribute to the national debate about the contested nature of black manhood.
CHAPTER THREE

PAULINE HOPKINS, R. EMMETT OWEN, AND J. ALEXANDRE SKEETE

AT THE COLORED AMERICAN MAGAZINE

Introduction

When Pauline Hopkins stopped working for the Colored American Magazine in 1904, the official reason given by the management staff was that she left for health reasons. What nearly every Hopkins critic has pointed out for the last forty years, however, was that she was fired for disagreeing too strenuously with Booker T. Washington, arguably the most powerful black leader of the day. Because of the dramatic nature of her departure and the evident power struggles involved, as well as the fact that nearly everything Hopkins ever published was in association with the magazine, her working history at Colored American Magazine is easily the most-discussed aspect of Hopkins scholarship. It does make a fascinating story.

As literary editor and principle contributor to the Colored American Magazine between 1900 and 1904, Hopkins presided over the period of the magazine’s greatest influence. Boasting a readership of up to one hundred thousand people after its first year of publication, Colored American Magazine billed itself as “an illustrated monthly devoted to literature, science, music, art, religion, facts, fiction and traditions of the Negro race” (Elliot 43). Hopkins’s contribution to the magazine was prolific. In the first half of its nine-year run,
Hopkins published four novels, ten short stories, more than ten biographical sketches, and numerous essays and articles (Yarborough xxviii). By 1904, however, Hopkins’s insistence on using the pages of the journal to “agitate” (Dworkin 276) had earned her the animosity of both the magazine’s upper management and the supporters of Booker T. Washington. In March of that year, Washington bought a controlling interest in the magazine and engineered Hopkins’s dismissal. After Hopkins’s departure, Colored American Magazine stopped publishing fiction and its circulation eventually dropped to 200 a month (Wallinger 162). When Washington withdrew his financial support in 1909, the publication folded.

From 1900 to 1904, however, Colored American Magazine provided a forum for black readers and writers to debate the terms through which “racial uplift” should be carried out. The debate was not just a contest between Booker T. Washington’s conciliatory, self-help approach and W. E. B. Du Bois’s focus on civil rights. An examination of the literary and visual content of the magazine reveals that the contested nature of black manhood and womanhood formed a crucial part of the debate. For many educated blacks, combating white dominance and racial prejudice meant demonstrating their own moral and material respectability by championing traditional gender relations and family stability. Hopkins’s fiction, on the other hand, depended upon details that didn’t seem to conform to conventional morality, including white rape of black women, unconventional parentage, and fluid gender roles. For Hopkins and other black women intellectuals, exposing the effect that white oppression and the legacy of
slavery had on African-American families was necessary for change. Washington and his followers, however, felt that Hopkins’s accusatory stance and insistent questioning of patriarchal gender relations hindered their quest to replicate white middle-class ideals.

Booker T. Washington and Pauline Hopkins’s contest for ideological control over *Colored American Magazine* is reflected just as much in its visual content as in its essays and fiction. In *American Archives* (1999), Shawn Michelle Smith shows how visual representations of African Americans in books, magazines, and newspapers both reflect and shape the way that Americans imagine communities of race and gender. Ostensibly, the illustrations, photographs, and advertisements of *Colored American Magazine* were meant to provide an alternative for the racist and demeaning images of black men and women that African American and white readers encountered elsewhere, but those images are often confusing and contradictory. For example, images of idealized black manhood and womanhood are presented alongside advertisements for products that promised to straighten readers’ hair and whiten their skin. R. Emmett Owen’s illustrations for Hopkin’s novel *Contending Forces* (1900) portions of which were published in the magazine, reinforce Hopkins’s condemnation of white rape and oppression. Conversely, J. Alexandre Skeete’s illustrations for *Hagar’s Daughter*, serialized in the *Colored American Magazine* from 1901 to 1902, undermine her critique of rigid gender roles and patriarchal social conventions. Examining how Owen and Skeete’s illustrations interact with Hopkins’s texts reveals some of the friction that led to Hopkins’s departure from
Colored American Magazine as well as the contested nature of race and gender at the turn of the last century.

**R. Emmett Owen Illustrates Contending Forces**

Although Contending Forces remains Pauline Hopkins’s best known and most widely read novel (Dworkin xix), there has been almost no critical attention paid to R. Emmett Owen’s accompanying illustrations. Jennifer Putzi, one of the few Hopkins scholars to have addressed Owen’s illustrations so far, limits her analysis to the observation that his “carefully shaded illustrations work incredibly well with Hopkins’s dominant themes of race, blood, and skin color, and deserve more attention than they have heretofore received” (19). Allison Berg acknowledges that Owen’s frontispiece “serves as a constant reminder of black women’s continued subjugation” in the text, but does not devote more than a sentence to the idea (134). Since readers of Colored American Magazine were first introduced to Contending Forces by Owen’s frontispiece illustration, and since Owen’s illustrations were included in the original 1900 edition of the novel and have been present in every publication since, it pays to give them more than a cursory glance.

Robert Emmett Owen seems an odd choice to illustrate Pauline Hopkins’s first novel. As a twenty-three-year-old white male, he didn’t appear to have a lot in common with the forty-one-year-old Hopkins when he was asked to create eight illustrations and a cover design for Contending Forces. Furthermore, nothing in Owen’s career subsequent to his work on the novel suggests that he was terribly concerned with racial equality or women’s rights. As an illustrator,
Owen specialized in juvenile adventure series featuring blond, blue-eyed heroes like “Tom Slade,” who used his Boy Scout skills to combat anti-American forces in WWI, or “Baseball Joe,” who manages to attend Yale, play in the majors, and win the World Series in spite of his long-standing rivalry with another player called simply, “The Jew” (Sojka). As an impressionist painter later in his career, Owen was best known for his New England landscapes that critics would see as an attempt to reassure his viewers that “the simplicity and purity of Anglo-Saxon America still existed in the part of the country where European settlers had first established roots” (Peters 1). Echoing this view, Owen himself described his art as “typically American” (Robert Emmett Owen Papers). In spite of the male-oriented and Anglo-centric tone of most of his work, however, Owen’s illustrations for *Contending Forces* are remarkably aligned with Hopkins’s feminist and race activist aims.

Owen published his first illustration in *Life Magazine* in 1897, and in 1898 he moved to Boston to study at the Eric Pape School of Art. While in Boston, he continued to publish drawings in local magazines and newspapers such as the *Boston Globe*, and it is undoubtedly in this capacity that he came to the attention of the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company (“Owen, Robert Emmett”). The readers of *Colored American Magazine* were first introduced to Owen’s work (and Hopkins’s novel) in the November, 1900 issue, in a full-page frontispiece illustration that pictured Grace Monfort’s lynching at the hands of Hank Davis and Bill Sampson.
Ever since Hazel Carby first addressed it in 1987, literary critics have made the scene of Grace Monfort’s whipping a central part of their arguments that Pauline Hopkins is not, as Mary Helen Washington once claimed, “a prisoner to an ideology that ultimately supports white superiority” (79). In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Carby reads Grace Monfort’s whipping as a rape in order to argue that Hopkins shows how the nineteenth-century ideology of True Womanhood was not equally accessible to white and black women (132). According to Francesca Sawaya, Hopkins inverts the racial positions of Davis, Sampson, and Monfort to show how possessors of white privilege felt threatened by black power. For Sawaya, the whipping represents a “vengeful slave” taking revenge on the “lily-like limbs of a master” (87). Beth McCoy takes Sawaya’s argument a step further, seeing the attack as evidence that in Hopkins’s fiction, “whiteness thrashes about in a state of threatened flux” (570). According to McCoy, the balance of white, masculine power shifts from the aristocracy, represented by Charles Monfort and Anson Pollock, to the working class, represented by Hank Davis and Bill Sampson (578). Of course, it is this very anxiety about threatened whiteness that makes it possible to read the Monforts’ destruction as a warning to African Americans who attempt to rise too high on the socioeconomic ladder.

In the text, Charles and Grace Monfort are Bermudan plantation owners who immigrate to the United States in 1800 in order to avoid having to free their 700 slaves. As for many of Bermuda’s aristocracy, there is a chance that “a strain of African blood pollut[es] the fair stream” of the Monfort family, a possibility that seems to be confirmed when Grace steps off the boat in North
Carolina (23). After appraising Grace’s beauty, slave trader Bill Sampson declares that there is “too much cream color in the face and too little blud seen under the skin” for Grace to be a “genooine white ‘ooman” and uses the hint of miscegenation as an excuse to kill her husband, burn down her house, whip her body, and steal her children (41). According to the narrator, however, it is not the absurdity of the “one drop” rule that leads to the Monforts’ downfall, but the fact that they refused to give up their human property in a “mad rush” for “wealth, [...] position, [and] personal comfort” (65). Had they simply respected the laws of Great Britain and stayed in Bermuda, the narrator indicates, then Grace, Charles, and their children would have remained safe and happy. Hopkins takes pains to identify Monfort’s wealth and privilege as the key to his undoing. Anson Pollock, a rival planter who engineers the destruction of the Monfort family, is incited to reclaim his property (which Charles had purchased from him upon his arrival from Bermuda) when he sees Jesse Monfort using gold coins as toys (49). Hank Davis vows revenge after Charles publicly flogs him (57). To drive home the point that the Montforts are punished for acquiring more material goods than their neighbors, Hopkins emphasizes the family’s wealth in the paragraph just before their attack. They drink coffee out of a silver urn, experience the “great luxury” of having a weekly paper, and sit down to a “well-appointed board” full of “creature comforts” (66). In other words, the Monforts enjoy all of the material prosperity and social power that whites of Hopkins’s time feared were being taken over by African Americans. Once Bill Sampson identifies Grace as not completely white,
the Monfort family no longer has the racial qualifications necessary to maintain its privileged position.

The narrator’s apparent condemnation of the Monforts for occupying a social position more properly belonging to purely white people appears to support Booker T. Washington’s program outlined at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 (65). In a speech that was highly praised by the white organizers of the exposition and by President Cleveland, Washington compared the African American community to a lost ship, floundering at sea. Rather than take supplies from the neighboring vessels, the sailors on Washington’s ship were able to survive because they drew water from the spot in which they were anchored, the mouth of the Amazon River. Washington’s message to his black audience to “cast down your bucket where you are” meant remaining in vocational jobs, not seeking higher education, and accepting disenfranchisement (331). Similarly, his message to white farm and business owners was to hire from among the African American population rather than the millions of incoming immigrants. Assuring his white audience that African Americans would stand by them “with a devotion that no foreigner can approach,” Washington promised that in return for access to menial labor, African Americans would not run for office, vote independently, or attempt social integration (332). This was a controversial policy among many African Americans, some of whom saw wisdom in not antagonizing southern whites, and others who felt that gaining a college education and the ability to vote was the only way to hold on to their livelihoods and property. It is evident that Hopkins was thinking seriously about these issues as early as 1899, since two of the main
characters of Contending Forces are patterned after W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Will Smith, who longs to attend Harvard before studying philosophy at “some good German university” is an obvious stand in for Du Bois (168), while Arthur T. Lewis, the president of a black vocational school in the south who argues that “industrial education and the exclusion of politics will cure all our race troubles” represents Washington (124).

Although Hopkins’s apparent endorsement of the Atlanta Compromise in the opening chapters of Contending Forces can be seen as an attempt to appeal to white readers or Washington supporters, her fluid treatment of race may have been less palatable. For one thing, the fact that the family for whom the reader is expected to feel sympathy is of mixed race was bound to make some readers uneasy. Furthermore, the ease with which Charles and his wife “passed” (at least at first) and the fact that they felt no moral qualms about doing so would have forced white readers to acknowledge the possibility that their own access to white privilege wasn’t absolute. When the narrator states that the Monfort ancestry may have included “a strain of African blood,” she qualifies the announcement by stating that that fact “would not have caused him one instant’s uneasiness” (23). Not only does Charles not seem to care that he and Grace are of mixed ancestry, Hopkins’s use of the conditional “would” indicates that he hadn’t even thought about it. When he gets to North Carolina, however, Charles’s attitude changes. He worries about the rumors that his wife is of African descent, and expresses his desire that she and the children return to Bermuda or go to England (52). Charles’s feelings about Grace’s racial identity,
then, are not determined biologically, by her “one drop” of African blood, but
geographically, by the fact that she has immigrated to the American south. In
Bermuda or England, Grace is white; in North Carolina she is not.

Hopkins emphasizes the mutable nature of race in her initial description of
Grace Monfort. Significantly, Hopkins does not describe Grace’s body in the first
chapter, when she is introduced to the reader, but in the second, when she is
introduced to the “motley crowd of rough white men and ignorant slaves” on the
wharf in North Carolina (40). Now that her geographical position has changed,
hers racial position is open for examination as well. The narrator’s description of
Grace’s body is deliberately ambiguous. Her “high white forehead” and hair that
falls below the waist line seem to indicate whiteness, but hints of darker ancestry
are not lost on the crowd. Her skin is “creamy in its whiteness, of the tint of the
camellia”; her golden hair is accompanied by a shade of brown; and her
eyebrows are dark and heavy. Bill Sampson’s immediate assessment is that
“thet ar female’s got a black streak in her somewhar” (41). As she crosses on to
American soil, Grace Monfort instantaneously goes from white to black.

For Bill Sampson and Hank Davis, race was an essential element of one’s
biology, discernable by looking at a person’s skin, face, and hair. According to
Cheryl Hines, most Americans at the turn-of-the-last century thought of race as
“immutable, scientific, biologically determined—an unsullied fact of the blood
rather than a volatile and violently imposed regime of social hierarchy” (1739).
Hopkins’s insistence that one’s race was not a biologically determined fact but a
socially constructed position was a direct refutation of the mainstream racial
theories of the time. Julie Nerad argues that Hopkins further destabilizes the category of race by showing that whiteness is a form of property that can be lost or gained (361). Grace loses her whiteness, for example, when Bill Sampson starts the rumor that she is black. Charles Monfort, Jr. loses his whiteness when he is enslaved by Anson Pollock, but regains it when he escapes to England. As long as the Monforts possess whiteness, Nerad argues, their assets and their lives are protected from Anson Pollock and the other members of the “committee.” As soon as they are no longer seen as white, their lives and assets are forfeit. The fact that Bill Sampson and Hank Davis can publicly flog a visibly white woman demonstrates that for Hopkins, race is a tenuously constructed social category, an idea that must have been revolutionary for many of her white readers.

Perhaps because the publishers of *Colored American Magazine* feared offending those readers, the excerpt from *Contending Forces* that was published in the November, 1900 issue of the magazine is carefully sanitized. Skipping Hopkins’s preface (an outspoken criticism of mob law and lynching that was completed at least two months before the November publication), the excerpted section of the novel begins with the history of the emancipation of Great Britain’s West Indian slaves and ends with the Monforts approaching the North Carolina shore, “silently gaz[ing] upon the fair scene before them” (72). Taken as a whole, the section leaves the reader with Monfort’s original assessment: that moving to America will allow him to free his slaves and live even more prosperously and honorably than before. While the excerpt does include the line about the “strain
of African blood polluting the fair stream of Montfort’s vitality,” it ends before Grace’s disembarkation and does not include the details of her fall from whiteness, her whipping, or her suicide. Without the brutal reaction of Bill Sampson and Hank Davis to Grace’s ambiguously racialized body, it is easy to read the line about her potentially polluted blood not as a critique of biologically determined race, but as a simple statement of white supremacy.

Another indication that the publishers felt nervous about white readers’ reactions to *Contending Forces* is the fact that they decided not to offer the novel to the general public without carefully monitoring its presentation. In an advertisement addressed specifically to white readers in the September, 1900 issue of *Colored American Magazine*, the publishing company included a subscription request for copies of the book. “Owing to the peculiar nature of this work,” the advertisement reads, “the publishers deem it advisable to place it before the public by subscription” (“Prospectus”). Rather than purchasing the novel from the bookstore or receiving it by mail, subscribers were to fill out cards with their names and addresses on them, after which “club women” would deliver copies of the book directly to their homes. The publishers envisioned a system in which Hopkins, who had presented the novel to the Woman’s Era Club of Boston the year before, traveled to women’s clubs around the country giving readings of the novel. These women would then sign up to be agents and deliver copies to households in their area on commission.

According to Elizabeth McHenry, the fact that Hopkins would be “glad to give readings before women’s clubs in any section of the country’ suggests that
she imagined African American clubwomen as a primary audience for her work” (231). However, the language of the “Prospectus” makes it clear that African Americans were not the intended audience of the advertisement at all. That the request for subscriptions was meant for white readers is evident from its use of pronouns and odd editing of the term “race.” In her preface to the book form of the novel, Hopkins speaks as one member of the “colored race” to another: “No one will do this for us,” Hopkins writes in italicized letters. “[W]e must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race” (14). In the version of this declaration that appeared in the September, 1900 advertisement for *Contending Forces*, however, the identities of the presumed writer and reader have changed: “No one will do this for the race,” the prospectus declares. “They must themselves develop the men and women who can and will do this work faithfully.” The language of the subscription advertisement distances the reader from “the race” by replacing first-person pronouns like “we” and “us” with third-person pronouns like “they.” By omitting references to the “colored” or “Anglo-Saxon” races, the term “race” becomes an exclusionary marker separating readers who think of themselves as being uninflected by race from the developing, racialized others. While it is true that the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company wished Hopkins’s novel to be placed in “every household in the United States,” it also appears that the publishers thought carefully about how *Contending Forces* would be received by white readers.
If the textual presentation of *Contending Forces* in *Colored American Magazine* tiptoes around the sensibilities of white readers, both in its advertisement and in its choice of excerpts, then R. Emmett Owen’s frontispiece addresses their racial anxieties head on. The illustration captures the moment after Bill Sampson and Hank Davis have enacted Grace Monfort’s slave status by tying her to a post and whipping her. Grace’s inert figure lies at the bottom of the composition, startling in its whiteness. One of the men stands over Grace’s body, placing one foot on the rope that binds her as if to claim ownership. The other man calmly rewraps his whip as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. According to Allison Berg, Owen’s illustration “serves as a constant reminder of black women’s continued subjugation” by introducing a trope in which “blood functions variously as an internal measure of race and an external sign of sexual violence” (134). As it appears in the magazine, the text below the frontispiece illustration connects whipping and rape more forcefully than it does in the book form of the novel by including the portion of the sentence that alludes to Hank’s bodily gratification: “When Hank Davis had satiated his vengeful thirst he cut the ropes which
bound her, and she sank upon the ground again” (2).

As Hopkins will do in her text, Owen critiques the connection between blood and race by emphasizing Grace Monfort’s whiteness. The bloody lash marks crisscrossing her back and the black rope draped over her body accentuate the whiteness of her skin. Owen sets off Grace’s light skin even further by surrounding her with material of darker shades: her hair (darker than the golden brown Hopkins describes), her dress, Bill Sampson’s shadow, and the black blood pooling out from underneath her body. Her blood is blacker, in fact, than the cascade of hair spilling out beside it. By placing Grace’s very dark blood next to her very white skin, Owen echoes the commonly held notion that one’s blackness is tied to one’s blood—even if it is only one drop that contaminates the whole. As if to draw attention to its contaminative nature, Grace’s blood runs away from her body, toward the viewer. The fact that Hank Davis’s left elbow breaks free from the picture plane gives the reader the impression that Grace’s black blood might do the same. The flowing blood may serve to remind the viewer of the eugenic proverb that “blood will out,” meaning that a person’s class or race is indelibly recorded in the blood and must eventually be made evident in her behavior. Of course, Hopkins has already made it clear that Grace’s behavior is impeccable (her first thought when she hears the hoof beats of the lynch mob making its way toward her house was whether or not she had enough breakfast food laid out for guests), especially when compared to the brutal and savage behavior of the white men who have just finished whipping her. In this
scene, the blackness of Grace’s blood isn’t revealed until after it has been cut from her back.

Owen doesn’t draw attention to Grace’s black blood in order to support the idea that race is biologically detectable or determined, but to reinforce Hopkins’s argument about the precarious nature of whiteness. The dark lash marks on Grace’s white skin remind the viewer that white womanhood is also threatened by sexual violence, a point that Hopkins makes clear when she reveals that Pollock had Bill Sampson whip his white wife “the same way he did his slaves” (50). The image of a white woman being flogged must have been shocking to early twentieth-century viewers, forcing them to recognize that the concept of white womanhood (or white manhood, for that matter) was not unassailable. By emphasizing the whiteness of Grace’s skin and the blackness of her blood, Owen calls into question the practice of basing social privilege on the capriciousness of biological heredity.

Owen continues to upset his viewers’ preconceptions about race by inverting the roles of protective white man and rapacious black attacker. For example, he shades Hank Davis’s skin so that his is the darkest complexion in the picture. Davis is turned away from the light source, throwing his body into shadow. His face and hands are significantly darker than the naked back of the woman at his feet, or even than the exposed arm of Bill Sampson in the background. Davis’s hat, jacket, pants, and boots are also darker than the other man’s clothing, as if to emphasize that the attacker standing directly over the prone woman on the ground is not completely white. By calling Davis’s
whiteness into question, Owen turns the current excuse for lynching on its head. Instead of a white man protecting a white woman from the sexual violence of a black man, the figures in Owen’s illustration look suspiciously like a black man violating a white woman.

Hazel Carby has argued convincingly that Hopkins crafts her language so that the whipping can be read as a rape. After “tear[ing] her garments from her shrinking shoulders,” Hank Davis makes sure that Grace’s “tender flesh [...] feel[s] the lash” of the whip (68). Carby identifies the “snaky leather thong” that Davis uses on Mrs. Monfort’s flesh as the “metaphoric replacement for the phallus” (132). Like Hopkins, Owen also codes Grace’s whipping as a sexual attack by replicating phallic symbols. The post that Grace has been tied to rises up from the center of the ground while the rope continues to sprawl over her bare skin. Hank Davis’s whip is no longer rigid, but snakes down between his legs and onto the ground. Of course, the presence of three distinct phallic symbols may be conspicuous overcompensation. Beth McCoy makes the argument that in the days leading up to the attack, both Monfort and Pollock feminize Hank Davis and Bill Sampson (575). Monfort does so by flogging Davis, while Pollock pretends to dismiss the rumors that Sampson started about Grace’s African descent as being no more than “the malice of some malicious, jealous woman” (52). If Hopkins’s text feminizes Hank Davis and Bill Sampson in order to demonstrate the precariousness of white masculinity, then Owen’s illustration exposes their attack on Grace Monfort as a desperate attempt to shore up their gender and racial identities.
Granted, not all of Owen’s illustrations in *Contending Forces* undercut racial stereotypes as completely as the frontispiece. In fact, Owen may rely on stereotypical images of black men and women to downplay Hopkins’s more radical depictions of female desire. His renderings of Ophelia Davis and Mr. James, for example, approximate two black-face caricatures more than realistic portraits of human beings with individual characteristics.

In *Everybody Was A-Lookin’ an’ A-Gappin’ at Us*, Owen shows two African-American figures on bicycles, headed straight toward the viewer. The faces of both figures are at least partially obscured by shadow, so it is difficult to discern facial features. Instead, the man and woman are distinguishable largely by their fashionable clothes: Miss Davis with a long dress and leg-of-mutton sleeves and Mr. James with a top hat, starched collar, and waistcoat.
In many ways, Owen’s depiction of Miss Davis and Mr. James is very much in line with a stock image in turn-of-the-century periodicals: African Americans made ridiculous by dressing beyond their station. In *Mr. Dilsey in Hoboken*, for example, E. W. Kemble shows a skinny black man dressed up in a dress coat, starched collar, white gloves, a top hat, and a cane. His nose is turned up in the air as if he is too good for the other Hoboken residents who stare at him as he passes by. The message of the cartoon seems to be that Mr. Dilsey has turned himself into a comic figure by dressing in clothes more properly seen on a white man, calling himself “Mr.” and parading around Hoboken as if he owned the place. According to Jan Pieterse, images of black men and women that exploit the friction between their apparently barbarous exteriors and civilized exteriors do so in order to reinforce the divide between white and black cultures (98). The viewer is supposed to recognize that in spite of the clothes, at his core Mr. Dilsey is no different from the other caricaturized black figures in the drawing and therefore incapable of achieving the social equality his costuming seems to demand.

If Owen has turned Ophelia Davis and “Mr. Jeemes” into stock caricatures, however, it is only because Hopkins has given him the ammunition to do so. In describing their outfits, Ophelia makes them as ridiculous as Mr. Dilsey’s. “Mr. Jeemes had on a black suit with a gray linen duster,” she tells her friends after the trip, “an’ he did look extinguished in his beaver hat an’ that white choker an’ tie o’ hisn which I must say I do admire” (367). For her part, Ophelia wore a “pale blue bicycle suit with a pink shirtwaist an’ a white sailor hat an’ tan-
colored shoes an’ gloves.” The outlandishness of their outfits is underscored by Ophelia’s heavy dialect and with her uneducated diction: saying “extinguished” for “distinguished,” for example, indicating that she is anything but.

In “Mammies, Bucks, and Wenches: Minstrelsy, Racial Pornography, and Racial Politics in Pauline Hopkins’s Hagar’s Daughter,” Kristina Brooks argues that while Hopkins’s evidently stereotypical characters like Ophelia Davis and Mr. James can be read as demeaning, they also offered readers a broader view of African-American representations than were available in other publications. In a time when other race magazines and newspapers were committed to depicting blacks as much like upper-class whites as possible, Colored American Magazine seemed willing to present a much wider range of “acceptable representations” of African-American culture (126). For example, Penelope Bullock has shown that rather than concentrating exclusively on classical music, as the Negro Music Journal tended to do, Colored American Magazine dedicated as many articles to vaudeville as it did to opera (214). According to Brooks, racial stereotypes were as familiar to the African-American community as they were to whites, but would have engendered a range of responses among white and black readers, including both distancing and identification. In other words, it is not a given that Hopkins’s contemporaries would have read her determination to characterize the “exquisitely droll humor peculiar to the Negro” as necessarily racist (16). Brooks argues that depending on the extent to which Colored American Magazine’s black readership identified with and took pleasure from them, Hopkins’s racial caricatures may have been a source of cultural pride (148). It is also possible
that Hopkins plays up Ophelia’s “droll” characteristics in order to provide an acceptable example of African American female behavior that functions as an alternative to the extreme purity and piety of Grace Monfort and Sappho Clark.

Some literary scholars have been critical of Hopkins’s use of seemingly ultra-virtuous heroines at a time when many white women writers were creating more openly subversive female characters, but most have recognized that black women writers worked within a different context than their white counterparts. Jane Campbell, for example, criticizes the female protagonists of Contending Forces for demonstrating “a worship of domesticity which sanctified motherhood” (187), but the majority of Hopkins scholars agree with critics such as Hazel Carby and Claudia Tate, who argue that black women writers adopted the ideals of True Womanhood and the narrative strategies of domestic novels in order to counter negative stereotypes of black womanhood. Granted, a smaller number of critics have investigated subtexts in which the heroines of Contending Forces are more socially transgressive than they initially appear (such as Sappho’s ability to provide for herself or express homoerotic desire), but the majority see Hopkins’s inscription of piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness into her major female characters as a necessary part of her fight against the twin evils of “lynching and concubinage” (15).

Oddly, few literary critics if any have examined Ophelia Davis as an alternate example of acceptable African-American female behavior, perhaps because like Richard Yarborough, they consider her a “lower-class” character (xli). In spite of her dialectical speech and undiscerning fashion habits, however,
it is clear that Hopkins doesn’t mean for Ophelia or her friend Sarah Ann to be considered lower class women. Indeed, in the “The Fair” and “The Fair Concluded,” Ophelia is presented as one of the “colored 400,” not as refined as the Smiths or Sappho Clark, perhaps, but a member of the social elite nonetheless (183). The main conflict in these two chapters is a contest between Ophelia Davis and Mary Jane Robinson, a serving-class parishioner who resents the interference of “high toned colored folks” and “white folksy colored ladies” like Ophelia and her friends in the church fund raiser (186). For a week, the two women preside over competing refreshment tables in a contest to see who can raise the most money toward paying off the mortgage on the church and buying the pastor a new suit. The contest splits the congregation into two classes, with the darker-skinned, working class church goers frequenting Mrs. Robinson’s table and the “high toned” members of the congregation purchasing food from Ophelia Davis. The two menus couldn't be more distinct. Mary Jane Robinson serves southern food, like roast pig, boiled cabbage, and fried opossum, while Ophelia Davis and Sarah Ann White offer up ice cream, oysters, salads, and temperance drinks in a “fairy-like grotto” of evergreen trees, complete with electric lighting, rose-colored lamp shades, and serving girls in white dresses and fancy caps (189). Judging from the elegance of Miss Davis’s cuisine and the fact that Mrs. Robinson and her friends feel that she is in a separate class altogether, we are clearly meant to see Ophelia as a member of the lighter skinned black elite. As such, she is exactly in line with the photographs and biographical sketches of the parade of light-skinned African American women that grace the
pages of *Colored American Magazine*: women that are meant to be admired and emulated by the magazine’s female readership in an effort to increase the social standing of the race as a whole.

It is not too big of a leap, then, to think that Hopkins means for Ophelia to be an acceptable model of African-American female behavior. Unlike Sappho Clark, Ma Smith, and Grace Monfort, however, Ophelia does not conform to the tenets of True Womanhood. In the story of her courtship with Mr. James, for example, Ophelia pursues a divinity student half her age, rides a bicycle, busts out of her corset, and reciprocates the physical advances of her suitor. In “A New Race of Colored Women,” Jill Bergman argues that since Ophelia is a “well-meaning but silly” character, Hopkins must be skewering New Womanhood by allowing Ophelia to embody its principles (93). In order to make this claim, however, Bergman has to ignore the evidence of the “Fair” chapters that aligns Ophelia with the society women featured in the *Colored American Magazine*. She also has to ignore the similarities in Ophelia and Sappho Clark’s life stories: both women escape from the South to a better life in the North; they both live in Ma Smith’s boarding house while working for their own financial support; and both get married at the end of the book—a sure sign of the novelist’s approbation. Rather than dismissing Ophelia’s actions as those of as a “silly” character, then, it seems more in keeping with the aims of novel to think of her as an aspect of African-American womanhood that is just as vital as domestic virtue. If Sappho’s true womanhood is a necessary part of Hopkins’s project to portray virtuous African American women, then Ophelia’s new womanhood is an equally
necessary part of portraying “the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history” (14).

Compared to Sappho, Ophelia is conspicuously passionate when it comes to Mr. James. For example, in her description of their bicycle ride, the two of them had worked up quite a bit of speed, enough to throw their bodies forward and onto the ground in a tangled heap. For another, Ophelia makes it clear that they were not riding on separate bicycles, but together. She confesses to the residents of Mrs. Smith’s boarding house that “[a]ll this spring he’s been a-ridin’ me on his bike,” and then tells about one afternoon when they went out together on “a beautiful bike an’ saddle” (366-67). When Ophelia tells the story, she places special emphasis on their body parts and the ways they connect. She identifies herself as Mr. James’s lost rib, for example, and makes up her mind that if he wants her, she will give it back. She also describes how they sat close enough together for him to put his arm around her and how she “fell on his neck like the patrihawks” when he proposed marriage (368). The most provocative moment comes when the two of them get going so fast that they lose control of the bike and fall off, with Mr. James landing on the ground and Ophelia on top of him. In the process, Ophelia loses her gloves, hat, and a new pair of corsets.

The fact that they were on a bicycle ride at all suggests the possibility of Ophelia’s willingness to depart from “proper” feminine behaviors. According to Ellen Gruber Garvey, bicycle riding was seen as potentially threatening to a young woman’s chastity (116). Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century physicians were afraid that if women and girls were to hunch over their bicycles
(what they called the "scorched" position), they placed themselves in danger of developing a masculine physique or losing their sexual purity.

In order to avoid such dangers, women were encouraged to ride in a straight-backed position, with upright handlebars that encouraged proper posture, on seats that were carefully designed not to pressure sensitive body parts.

It is likely that Hopkins was well aware of the association of sex and bicycle riding as it was described in contemporary periodicals, and exploits those connotations to portray Ophelia Davis as a desiring female subject. Owen, on the other hand, seems to paper over her sexual desire. Rather than setting her on a bicycle with Mr. James, he places them on two separate bicycles, several yards apart (see fig. 3.2). Ophelia is not riding in the "scorched" position; both she and Mr. James have upright handlebars and straight backs. In fact, Ophelia isn't pedaling at all, but coasting with her feet up in the air.

While Owen may sanitize Ophelia's courtship by not allowing her the same degree of sexual desire as she has in Hopkins's text, he does emphasize her independence by separating her from Mr. James and placing her in the foreground of the illustration. In an article for Scribner's, Marguerite Merington celebrated the freedom that bicycle riding offered women in an article entitled "Woman and the Bicycle." “Now and again a complaint arises of the narrowness...
of a woman’s sphere,” Merington writes. “For such disorder of the soul the sufferer can do no better than to flatten her sphere to a circle, mount it, and take to the road” (703). Owen complements this idea by placing Ophelia far out in front of Mr. James, leaving him to trail in a cloud of her dust. Indeed, it is possible that he separates the two figures not just to diminish the sexual nature of their encounter, but to emphasize Ophelia’s independence and new womanhood.

As a twenty-three-year-old white man, it is remarkable that Owen was able to convey so much of Hopkins’s feminist and race activist intentions for *Contending Forces*. His illustrations capture many of the concerns that present-day literary scholars find so fascinating about Hopkins’s work: the connection of race and gender, an interrogation of the ideology of biologically determined race, the relationship between sexual violence and race subjugation, and the possibility of liberated, independent black womanhood. J. Alexandre Skeete’s illustrations for *Hagar’s Daughter*, on the other hand, conflict sharply with Hopkins’s feminist text. While Hopkins’s novel provides an outspoken critique of both racist and patriarchal practices, Skeete’s illustrations soften her criticism by reinforcing traditional gender roles and by countering her support for misgenation. Ultimately, Skeete’s political views were far less radical than those of Hopkins, and his illustrations of her text reflect that conservatism.

**J. Alexandre Skeete at the *Colored American Magazine***

J. Alexandre Skeete was only twenty-six when he began working for *Colored American Magazine* in the fall of 1900. Born in British Guiana in 1874,
Skeete immigrated to Boston in 1888 and began his studies at the Cowles Art School soon after. He had also studied briefly in Europe and published several illustrations in the *Boston Herald* and other papers before being hired to work on the *Colored American Magazine* (Elliot 48). William Stanley Braithwaite, a frequent contributor to the magazine, later wrote that Skeete was “one of the few Negro artists then developing in America” (118). According to Braithwaite, Skeete was the only “Negro artist” besides Henry O. Tanner that “had a standing in the world of pictorial art.” That the management was excited about Skeete’s potential contribution is evident from a publisher’s announcement made in the November, 1900 issue one month before the appearance of his first illustration. Even though *Colored American Magazine* had undoubtedly been the “best illustrated monthly so far issued exclusively in the interest of the Afro-American,” the publishers declared that future issues “will be even better in every respect” (76). The prime reason given for the magazine’s improvement was the “goodly number of illustrations,” which would be increased “as fast as the growth of the magazine will allow.” While Skeete isn’t mentioned by name in this announcement, the fact that he began contributing illustrations to the very next issue indicates that his engagement is the reason for their excitement. By the spring of the following year, Skeete was working as art director for the magazine and in May the front cover was replaced by one of his design.

Some scholars have used Skeete’s magazine covers to gauge Hopkins’s influence over the editorial policies of *Colored American Magazine*. For example, in “Everything We Hoped She’d Be,” Jill Bergman tracks the decline of woman-
centered issues in the journal by paying attention to the point when Skeete’s design was removed from the cover. The design that Skeete introduced in 1901 featured a floral pattern surrounding an open square that changed its content with every issue. Embedded in the pattern were two portraits: one of Frederick Douglass and the other of Phillis Wheatley, which seemed to represent the magazine’s twin goals of racial and artistic uplift during Hopkins’s tenure. When Hopkins was fired from her editorial post at Colored American Magazine three years later, the new editorial board also eased out Skeete’s contribution to the cover. In March of 1904, a new design eliminated Frederick Douglass and Phillis Wheatley, and by June the floral design was replaced by twin images of successful African American men. While it is true that Skeete’s artwork on the cover of Colored American Magazine seems to be in line with Hopkins’s feminist and race activist goals, as Bergman suggests, the artwork that Skeete provided

140
for the content inside the magazine, including the illustrations that he did for

_Hagar's Daughter_, are far more supportive of Booker T. Washington's
accommodationist policies.

Skeete's first illustration was for a poem by Augustus M. Hodges about a
family's progress from slavery to landownership. "The Christmas Reunion"
carefully balances the injustice of slavery, the pride of self-sufficiency, and
expressions of gratitude for a country that has somehow been the source of both.
The poem is able to negotiate these two poles by drawing on a long tradition of
associating holiday meals with national unity that enables the speaker to
condemn slavery without offending white audience members. The speaker
appeals to white readers by showing how the conciliatory policies of Booker T.
Washington lead to peace and prosperity.

A number of scholars have investigated the role of holiday celebrations in
the consolidation of national identity, particularly how nineteenth-century
domestic magazines used the Thanksgiving Day meal as a way to conceive of
the nation as primarily white and Protestant. Elizabeth Pleck, for example,
shows how Sarah Josepha Hale and the _Godey's Lady's Book_ encouraged
nineteenth-century homemakers to establish thanksgiving culinary traditions that
would serve as an antidote to the alternative celebrations of non-white, non-
Protestant, and immigrant families. Similarly, Anne Blue Wills argues that "Hale
and Godey's led the way in creating a standardized celebration, which in turn
hoped to set the boundaries of a standardized celebrant, a standardized and true
American" (145). According to James Baker in _Thanksgiving: The Biography of_
an American Holiday (2009), by the end of the nineteenth century depictions of Thanksgiving celebrations in mass market magazines and public schools were meant to inculcate Protestant, New England values in an increasingly disparate population (117-19). For example, an 1895 short story by Harriet Spofford in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine showed two Southern Catholic women adopting the thanksgiving breakfast as a sign that they wished to enter mainstream American culture. An 1897 story in Chautauquan by Julia M. Tenney demonstrated that while black Americans could also productively adopt the tradition of Thanksgiving Day celebrations, they should do so in a way that didn’t threaten the white community’s control over consumer goods.

In “Thanksgiving on Herring Hill,” a group of black servants organizes a thanksgiving feast while the rich white family they work for vacations out of town. Using food from her employers’ reserves and dressed in one of her mistress’s silk gowns, Aunt Susan invites servants from miles around to partake of the meal. Just before the feasting begins, a black minister arrives and chastises the group for stealing from their white neighbors. Returning home with the few who would follow him, Elder Jones prays over his own simpler meal that “in all dese times of ‘citement yer mus’ spec’ dar’ll be some chaff in wid de wheat […] an’ dis night we kin hol’ Thanksgibin’ ober de fac’ dat we is got a leetle measure of de good grain anyhow!” (201). It is hard not to read Tenney’s story in terms of Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Exposition address. Like Washington, Elder Jones urges his constituents to remain satisfied with what they have rather than clamor for the economic and social achievements of their white neighbors. In
“Thanksgiving on Herring Hill,” Aunt Susan represents black Americans who are unwilling to abide by Washington’s program and wait for social advancement and material prosperity, but take it instead from rich whites by literally wearing their clothes and eating their food. Elder Jones, on the other hand, casts his bucket into his own larder and remains a “member in good standing” (200). By allowing him a “leetle measure of de good grain,” Tenney equates Elder Jones’s moral standing with his willingness to accept less. Elder Jones and those who follow him are part of the “good grain” that Christ separates out from the tares rather than the chaff that is burned with the wicked because their Thanksgiving Day feast is not had at the expense of the white community.

Like Tenney’s story, Hodges’ poem in the December, 1900 issue of Colored American Magazine shows African Americans participating in a holiday meal, but in a way that is careful to indicate a measure of prosperity without being overly threatening to white readers. The poem is largely made up of the recollections of “Uncle Joe Moore,” an ex-slave who uses the occasion of a Christmas feast in order to tell his children about his marriage to “Aunt Sally,” 41 years earlier. Joe’s story has the potential to be politically provocative: he recounts escaping from a slave trader in order to marry Sally, fighting in the Union army, and returning to work a Kentucky farm previously owned by slave owners. However, Hodges is also careful to ameliorate the more radical elements of the poem. For one thing, Joe and Sally retain the innocuous titles of “Aunt” and “Uncle,” even though it is their children and grandchildren who are present and not their nieces and nephews. For another, Joe’s escape from
slavery is short-lived. Although he runs away from his own master in order to marry Sally (by a white minister in exchange for some chickens and corn), he is immediately absorbed into the household of his wife’s owners. While Augusta Rohrbach calls the act of African Americans getting married a “politically radical and liberating event” because it represents a civil right not permitted to black slaves, Joe and Sally’s marriage takes place under the auspices of slavery (496). Joe remains faithfully with his new owners until the death of his new master, “While Missus and you, Sal, stood by his side” (84). After the master’s death, Joe joins the Union army but he does not emphasize his own role in fighting for his freedom. Instead, he is careful to point out that it was Abraham Lincoln that “sot us all free.” Finally, while children and friends return from the “North, South, and West” to partake of the celebratory meal, they do not come back with goods from those regions (83). Instead, the table is laden with food that Uncle Joe and Aunt Sally have provided by “farming and trucking” on their own land in Kentucky.

J. Alexandre Skeete’s illustration makes similar concessions to Washington’s plan for non-confrontational assimilation into the American social landscape. As the frontispiece illustration in the December issue of the magazine, Skeete’s painting appeared

Fig. 3.7. The Young Colored American. 1900.
directly opposite a full-page reproduction of *The Young Colored American*, a photograph of a young black boy sitting astride the American flag. As in other issues, the text surrounding the photograph urges readers of the *Colored American Magazine* to cut out the picture, frame it, and hang it in their homes, thus encouraging them to align their interests with those of the nation at large. In this context, Skeete’s illustration echoes dozens of other nineteenth and early twentieth-century magazine and newspaper illustrations that equated celebrating American holidays with assimilating into mainstream American culture. Take, for example, the following cartoon from an Iowa City newspaper showing depictions of an immigrant family from Eastern Europe before and after their arrival to the United States (Saxon-Ford 49). The panel on the left shows the family before leaving Bohemia: their clothes are in tatters, their bodies are thin and angular, and their expressions are mournful. Other than their clothing, the family appears to be completely lacking in material possessions. The panel on the right, however, displays the material wealth supposedly available to immigrant families once they have assimilated into the broader culture. In addition to eating plenty of American food, the family has put on American clothing and is celebrating under a sign reading “Merry Christmas” in English. The family even appears to have acculturated physically; their bodies
and faces are rounder and the long, straight noses that Americans associated
with Slavic ethnicity are less pronounced.

Many of the elements of Skeete’s Christmas dinner scene are remarkably similar to those of the Iowa City cartoon. A family gathers around a table covered with items that a half century of magazine readers had been taught to associate with American holidays: a tablecloth, fine dishes, and a turkey on a platter. As in the immigration cartoon, there is plenty of food, indicated by the girl in the foreground walking back to her place with a heaping plate. In both illustrations, social order is evident in the way that the children sit around the table waiting patiently for their food. The figures in Skeete’s illustration appear to be partaking of the American Dream as surely as the “Young Colored American” on the facing page. There are some notable differences between the two images of holiday celebration, however. The clothing worn by the figures in Skeete’s illustration is decidedly less refined than that of the newly acculturated immigrant family. The black father figure wears a vest, but not a coat and tie, and the children are dressed in more working-class clothes than their white counterparts. While Uncle Joe is sitting at the head of the table, he does not dominate the center of the composition like the immigrant father in the right-hand panel of the advertisement. Just as Hodges diminishes
Joe’s patriarchal authority by calling him “Uncle,” Skeete deflects Joe’s status as father figure by shunting him off to the side of the picture and showing him sitting in his seat rather than carving turkey. In keeping with the text of Hodge’s poem, Skeete’s illustration shows a black family that is capable of achieving the American dream without upsetting any of its social norms. By demonstrating a significantly lesser degree of prosperity than the Bohemian family in Merry Christmas, the black family in After the Meats doesn’t threaten to upset the economic prosperity of its white neighbors. By relegating the maternal figure to the margins of the composition—in the kitchen with the puddings and pies, in fact—Skeete maintains the image of patriarchal order as well.

If the speaker of the poem and the subjects of the illustration participate in the American Dream, both Hodges and Skeete are careful to present the realization of that dream in a way that conforms to Booker T. Washington’s segregatory policies. In keeping with Washington’s Atlanta Exposition pronouncements, the holiday participants depicted in the Colored American Magazine and in the Iowa City newspaper remain “as one as the hand” in their commitment to adopt mainstream American culture, yet “as separate as the fingers” in the social and material ways that that culture is experienced. Judging from his initial illustrations for Colored American Magazine, J. Alexandre Skeete seems to represent exactly the kind of Bookerite ideology that Knight argues would get Pauline Hopkins ejected from the magazine a few years later. Indeed, Skeete’s illustrations for Hagar’s Daughter consistently downplay the text’s radicalism. While Hopkins’s female characters act in unconventional ways in
order to critique patriarchal dominance and white supremacy, Skeete’s images provide a counterbalance that seeks to preserve the status quo.

Granted, not all readers see Hopkins’s magazine novels (Contending Forces, Hagar’s Daughter, and One Blood) as being particularly upsetting to the status quo. In her afterword to the 1978 reprint of Contending Forces, Gwendolyn Brooks claims that Hopkins’s critiques are “not indignant enough” (404), stating that she is “a continuing slave, despite little bursts of righteous heat” (405). Brooks is particularly critical of Hopkins’s use of light-skinned heroines and her apparent references to white superiority, as is Houston A. Baker, who calls Hopkins a “departed daughter,” arguing that her white-looking heroines constitute “an implicit approval of white patriarchy inscribed in the very features of the mulatta character’s face” (25). More recently, John Nickel has argued that Hopkins accepted the prevailing notion that African-American racial traits were inferior to those of white Americans and meant her novels to serve as eugenic conduct books that instructed her largely female readership on choosing appropriate marriage partners (50). What these critics don’t fully realize, however, is that Hopkins doesn’t feature heroines with pronounced markers of white racial descent in order to champion Anglo-Saxon superiority, but to critique the underlying assumptions of Social Darwinism. With their complex genealogies, Hopkins’s mulatta characters demonstrate the absurdity of determining or valuing race by physically visible markers of whiteness or blackness. Furthermore, Hopkins presents miscegenation as a positive tool that enables African-American women to engage in racial uplift.
J. Alexandre Skeete Illustrates *Hagar's Daughter*

*Hagar’s Daughter* features a mother and daughter who pass as white, marry powerful politicians, and gain significant influence in the nation’s capitol. Unlike the “tragic mulatto” characters of the previous century—such as the mother and daughter in Lydia Marie Child’s *The Quadroons* (1846) or Zoe of Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* (1859)—Hagar and her daughter Jewel don’t die of shame after discovering their biracial status or commit suicide when they are denied domestic bliss. Instead, Hagar escapes to the American West and emerges twenty years later as the wife of a United States Senator. When Jewel (who had since been adopted by a white family) discovers her mixed heritage, she rejects the advances of her slave-owning uncle, convinces her fiancé to reject the follies of racism and marry her in spite of her non-white status, and remains throughout a “true woman to the core” (268). Rather than being ashamed or undone by evidence of miscegenation, Hopkins’s heroines are empowered by it.

While Hopkins’s female characters proactively resist and manipulate the political and social forces that surround them, Skeete’s women are far more conventional. For example, Miss Bradford plays a key role in exposing Colonel Benson’s plan to frame Sumner and steal the Bowen fortune. In the textual version, Miss Bradford works as a stenographer, just as Hopkins would do on and off throughout her life. Miss Bradford seems conspicuously comfortable in
the working world. She “labors […] at a furious rate of speed all day,” and moves about the office as if it were as much hers as Sumner’s (151-52). The language used to describe Miss Bradford’s actions when she decides to inform Sumner of the plot against him is decidedly active and physical: “she rose with a sigh, crossed the room and flung herself down on one of the couches opposite Sumner’s desk, evidently bent on conversation.” Audibly expressing fatigue, transversing the office, and initiating conversation with one’s boss are not traditionally demure behaviors. Indeed, the narrative draws attention to Miss Bradford’s physicality; she raises, relocates, flings, and positions her body in ways that suggest ownership of space. Granted, Hopkins may not mean to hold up Miss Bradford as a model for emulation. The stenographer will shortly reveal that she has also been a victim of Colonel Benson, has an illegitimate child, and does not plan to remain in his employ longer than she has to. However, her ability to negotiate the workplace and dictate to her boss indicates that Miss Bradford is more than a passive victim. The fact that she can reforge her own life after being victimized by Benson, including supporting her child and extended family members, is typical of Hopkins’s heroines.

Skeete’s Miss Bradford is decidedly more passive than her textual counterpart. In “Did it Ever Occur to You,” Sumner dominates the center of the composition (see fig. 3.10). He is surrounded with markers of masculinity: work papers, law books, bags of money, and straight lines formed by the hard surfaces of table and chairs. The mantelpiece in the background is supported by Grecian columns and dominated by a plain white bust. Miss Bradford, on the
other hand, is relegated to the upper left-hand corner of the picture plane. Rather than discoursing from a position of power across from Sumner, Miss Bradford sits behind him, in a rounded armchair that is at odds with his angular desk and chair. She holds her hand to her face and her head is tilted slightly away from Sumner, as if she is reticent to share information that is scandalous or beyond her purview. Her armchair is decorated either with a lace doily or with a piece of needlework that Miss Bradford has just set down. There is no typewriter in sight. While Hopkins blurs the lines between feminine and masculine spheres, Skeete re-delineates those boundaries by minimizing Miss Bradford’s presence in the composition and by denying her any of the accoutrements of masculine work. A hard white line edging Sumner’s body and the lampshade provides an added distinction between his space and her space.

In their textual exchange, however, Bradford and Sumner both engage in behaviors that seem to cross stereotypical gender lines. Bradford uses “cunning” and “diplomacy” to secure her position and provide for her child’s education (161), while Sumner longs to leave politics behind and return to a quiet life with
his father (152). Bradford lectures Sumner calmly on race relations, while the latter is swept by waves of emotion, shouting in outrage at one moment and shedding “tears which were no shame to his manhood” the next (162). By attributing stereotypically feminine behaviors to Sumner, Hopkins does not mean to emasculate him. If anything, she takes pains elsewhere in the text to emphasize his masculinity. One of the first things the reader learns about Sumner is that he has been “in love with the [opposite] sex, more or less, since the day he left off knee-breeches” (84). When Jewel and a friend first meet him, they use the word “man” five times in eleven sentences, with Jewel concluding that Sumner’s most distinguishing characteristic is that he is “more manly” than her other suitors (85). Instead, Hopkins uses Bradford and Sumner’s exchange to broaden the boundaries of acceptable male behavior. In her novel, it is as appropriate for men to cry as it is for women to engage in the public sphere.

It is also appropriate for women to be their own rescuers. When Jewel rebuffs General Benson’s proposal of marriage, she does so in ways that push the boundaries of acceptable feminine behavior. Rather than portraying Jewel as the innocent object of General Benson’s seduction, Hopkins emphasizes Jewel’s physicality and sexual desire. Throughout their exchange, she shivers, aches, cries, sighs and touches (144). She is acutely aware of Benson’s body as he holds her hand, breathes on her hair, and places his arm around her. Of course, Benson’s behavior is meant to be threatening, but Hopkins is careful not to turn Jewel into a passive victim. Instead, Jewel engages in a series of physical and verbal bouts with Benson designed to keep him at arm’s distance. When turning
away, drawing back, or removing her hand from his grasp prove ineffective, she tries other tactics: changing the subject, reminding him that he has no right to question her, declaring herself through with love, and refusing to be more than his friend. Jewel is clearly threatened, but also proves capable of dealing with that threat. Sumner recognizes Jewel's agency when he witnesses the exchange and cries out to her to desist rather than to Benson.

Alexandre Skeete's illustration of this scene in the frontispiece of the August, 1901 issue of *Colored American Magazine* makes the contest between Sumner and Benson rather than Benson and Jewel. Rather than discreetly waiting in the wings, as he does in Hopkins's text, Skeete's Sumner dominates the foreground of the illustration. Benson occupies the far left of the picture plane, with Jewel in between. While Sumner's body is clearly outlined and distinguished from its surrounding environment (as it will be in *Did it Ever Occur to You*), Jewel's body appears insubstantial and ghostlike (see fig. 3.10). Skeete is not interested in depicting Jewel's physicality or sexual desire. Instead, he makes her appear ethereal and angelic by painting her in a white dress that seems to blend in to the light from the hearth at her feet. The soft contours of the folds of
her dress are echoed by a piece of needlework lying limply on the sofa, much like
the lace doily on Elise Bradford’s armchair. While Hopkins works hard to create
female characters that interrupt or confound gendered stereotypes, Skeete works
just as hard to redraw the boundaries between acceptably masculine and
feminine behaviors.

Skeete may have reinforced the dividing line between the men and
women of *Hagar’s Daughter* not because of sexism, necessarily, but because
many black men of Skeete’s day saw miscegenation as unmanly. According to
Kevin Gaines, black intellectuals such as William A. Lynch, John Durham, and
W. E. B. Du Bois saw “race conservation” as a way to combat prevailing notions
of white superiority and to retain the physical, intellectual and spiritual ideals of
African manhood (121). John Durham, for example, felt that mixing with white
blood “unman[ned] the Negro,” while William Lynch described cultural and
biological assimilation as “emasculating” (quoted in Gaines 121-122). Unlike
Hopkins, who envisioned a future in which racial boundaries would be dismantled
when Americans realized that they were all of mixed blood, a significant number
of black male writers and thinkers felt that miscegenation simply reinforced
stereotypes of rapacious black men and licentious black women. It may be that
for this reason, when Skeete illustrated the cliff-hanger moment in which Hagar
jumps from the bridge of the Potomac River in order to escape the slave catchers
that pursue her, he reinforces the “tragic mulatto” trope that Hopkins will
deliberately deconstruct by the end of the novel.
A number of critics have noticed how Hopkins reworks the “tragic mulatta” stereotype exhibited in nineteenth-century fiction by African American authors. Sterling Brown was one of the first scholars to discuss the tragic mulatta as a literary stereotype (31-48). In his formulation, a tragic mulatta is a literary character who encourages the reader’s sympathy because of the misery and tragedy she experiences as a person of mixed heritage. The two most common responses to this tragedy are suicide, such as when William Wells Brown’s Clotel jumps into the Potomac River, or turning into a paragon of social virtue, as Frances Harper’s title character does in *Iola Leroy* (1892). In *Clotel* (1853), the quadroon daughter of Thomas Jefferson is separated from her home and her infant daughter when her master’s wife determines to sell her into slavery. Clotel escapes from slavery, then prison, but is finally cornered by slave catchers on the Long Bridge in Washington, D. C. and commits suicide by jumping into the Potomac, just as Hagar will be torn from her white husband, sold into slavery, escape from prison, and evade slave catchers by jumping from Long Bridge into the Potomac River. Clotel, under the tragic mulatta tradition, ends her life because as a mulatta character of indeterminate social standing (the daughter of the president and a slave), she will never be able to find a stable place in society. Critics like Janet Gabler-Hover and Susan Hays Bussey have argued that by reworking the tragic mulatto plot, Hopkins imagines new roles for mulatta heroines. According to Gabler-Hover, Hopkins’s Hagar resists the tragic mulatta tradition by escaping to the presumably tolerant American West. Hagar avoids “simplistic victimization” by disappearing from the bridge and reappearing twenty
years later as a white woman (132). For Bussey, Hagar’s decision to pass rather than to commit suicide “marks her as both defiant of ‘tragic’ status and as an agent of self-determination” (302). What distinguishes Hopkins’s heroine from William Wells Brown’s protagonist a half century earlier, then, is her refusal to be defined by the stereotypes that social convention and literary tradition demand of her.

While Skeete is undoubtedly aware of Hagar’s Daughter’s connection to Clotel (his frontispiece illustration for the May, 1901 issue of Colored American Magazine depicting Hagar’s leap into the Potomac is eerily similar to the 1853 frontispiece illustration of the parallel scene in William Brown’s novel) he takes pains to reinscribe her into the tragic mulatta tradition (see fig. 3.13). One of the ways he does this is by emphasizing her extreme virtue. Skeete surrounds Hagar’s figure with lots of stark white highlights, for example, making her and her baby appear angelic. Her angelic nature is emphasized even further by her flowing garments, halo-like hood, and a transparent foot through which some of the shadows on the water’s surface may be glimpsed. Although the upward flow of the hood indicates a falling motion, Skeete halts Hagar’s descent by making the baby’s blankets drape downwards and the hem of her dress flow sideways.

Fig. 3.12. Frontispiece. May 1901.
As Gabler-Hover points out, Skeete's Hagar “appears to ascend rather than fall,” as if she is headed to heaven (133). With her baby snuggled securely in her arms, Hagar looks very much like the Virgin Mary, portraits of whom featured frequently in the December issues of *Colored American Magazine*. These details, coupled with a caption that repeats the narrative’s line about Hagar raising her eyes to heaven while sinking below the waters of the river, more than prepared Hopkins’s readers to see Hagar as a tragically pure victim of the violence of slavery rather than as an active agent in control of her own fate.

Another way that Skeete emphasizes Hagar’s victimhood is by drawing on images of lynching that proliferated in the 1890s and 1900s in order to situate Hagar’s leap from the Long Bridge firmly in the present. Skeete’s illustration is not just a memorial to the tragic past, but a fierce condemnation of a violent present in which over a hundred African Americans were lynched every year (Gosset 269). Comparing Skeete’s illustration to its counterpart from *Clotel*, several lynch-like elements emerge. First of all, Skeete has placed Hagar below the bridge rather than above it, replicating the position of a body hanging from a rope. While Clotel’s hair is unbound, Skeete has wrapped Hagar’s

Fig. 3.13. *The Death of Clotel*. 1853.
head in a hood that looks startlingly like the noose of a rope—particularly since it appears to be knotted at the base of her neck. Finally, by lowering Hagar closer to the water, Skeete replicates a composition common to images depicting late nineteenth and early twentieth-century lynchings. In *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000), John Allen explains that bridges and bodies of water were common sites for lynching, since they reminded participants and viewers of Christian rites of passage such as baptism or crossing over into death (170). Lynch mobs may have selected these locations as a reminder that by punishing and sacrificing black “wrongdoers,” they were expelling evil from their communities and ensuring their own salvation.

One of the reasons that Skeete can rely on his viewers to recognize contemporary images of lynching in his frontispiece illustration is that those images were commonly distributed in the popular media and elsewhere. James Allen describes how in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, participants and spectators took photographs of lynchings, copied them onto postcards, and circulated them through the U. S. Mail. These postcards served a variety of functions, including commemorating the event, confirming white superiority, and terrorizing (or outraging) African Americans who saw them. Often the same image would be reproduced for different audiences for varying purposes. African American periodicals, for example, published images of lynching in order to expose the vicious and pandemic nature of the practice. The *Topeka Plaindealer*, a black-owned newspaper in Topeka, Kansas, printed a photograph of a black man being set on fire so that “the world may see and know
what semi-barbarous America is
doing" (quoted in Allen 11). The
same image was circulated
elsewhere on a postcard with the
caption "Coon Cooking" in order to
trivialize the event and
dehumanize the victim (172).
Skeete's illustration of Hagar
jumping into the Potomac would
have been recognized by white
and black viewers alike as a
replica of the all-too-familiar image of a murdered African American.

In one of the two postcards
commemorating the lynching of Laura Nelson
and her son L. W. Nelson, for example, a crowd
of white families lines the bridge above their
victims (97-99). Many of the men wear white
shirts and ties, as if attending a worship
service. The photographs are startlingly like
and unlike Skeete's illustration of Hagar. Like
Hagar, Laura hangs suspended from a bridge
over a river of water. Her dress hangs down to
her ankles, not quite covering an exposed foot, and a hood surrounds her shoulders. Unlike Hagar, however, Laura does not raise her eyes hopefully to heaven. Her head is not framed by a halo, but by a tow sack that was used to gag her as she was hauled by wagon to the site of the hanging. Her child is not wrapped securely in her arms but hangs thirty feet away on a separate rope. His pants have been torn off, exposing his bare legs. By rendering the flow of her dress and of the baby's blanket in a way that belies downward motion, Skeete suspends Hagar and her child in midair. Although there is no rope extending from her body to the bridge, the bright outline of the hood and knotted clasp at her neck are as reminiscent of a hangman's noose as they are of a halo.

Skeete's image of Hagar as both an ascending angel and hanged woman is jarringly dissonant. As a virtuous victim, a hanged version of the Virgin Mary, Skeete's Hagar matches the tragic mulatto mold with precision. In addition, by merging the familiar trope with the visual images of contemporary photographs and postcards, J. Alexandre Skeete levels an unmistakable charge against the practice of lynching African Americans. While lynch mobs justified their actions by accusing their victims of rape, murder, and other crimes, Skeete's vision of Hagar as an innocent victim directly refutes those claims. Of course, it is also a way for Skeete to deemphasize Hagar's later role as active participant in her own rescue and social elevation (a version of Hagar that he does not illustrate, incidentally, since the image of Hagar suspended over the Potomac is Skeete's last rendering of her).
J. Alexandre Skeete and African-American Manhood

Skeete’s decision to leave in the reader’s mind the image of a tragically circumscribed mulatta woman is of a piece with the rest of his career. Skeete was far more concerned with creating positive images of black men (particularly black men firmly in touch with their African roots) than he was with promoting Hopkins’s more radical project of accomplishing racial uplift by miscegenation and empowered African-American women. By examining early photographs of J. Alexandre Skeete along with his other illustrations for *Colored American Magazine*, it is possible to envision a career dedicated to a brand of African-American activism that equated masculinity with undiluted African heritage.

As a twenty-three-year-old art student in Boston, J. Alexandre Skeete began modeling for the photographer F. Holland Day in 1897. Although somewhat overshadowed by Alfred Stieglitz after the turn of the century, in the late 1890s Day was considered one of the United States’ premier art photographers (Harker). Day had a penchant for photographing subjects whom he considered to be ethnic-looking. Many of his models were drawn from the poor immigrant children he tutored in Boston, although others were members of more prominent families. He photographed both Angelina Grimké and Kahlil Gibran while they were still teenagers, for example (Grimké would go on to be a noted poet of the Harlem Renaissance, while Gibran would become famous for his collection of essays and other writings in *The Prophet* in 1923). One subject who featured prominently in Day’s work was a handsome young black man who appeared alternately in African, Mid-Eastern, and contemporary clothing. In her
1981 biography of Day, Estelle Jussim identifies the man as Alfred Tannyhill, his parents' household servant and driver (107). While Jussim corrected this mistake in an article for History of Photography just two years later, many critics continue to falsely label Tannyhill as the model. It wasn't until recently that the model was positively identified as J. Alexandre Skeete (Roberts 136).

It is possible to think of Day's work with Skeete, Gibran, Grimké and others as essentialist. Day had a large stock of clothing, jewelry, and other props—what he called “necessary accessories”—that were meant to convey racial and ethnic types. According to Verna Curtis, Day's goal was to “synthesize a profile, an expression, an attitude [...] thus characterizing a whole race” (“F. Holland Day” 307). Day's friends often wrote to him about ethnic-looking people they discovered in their travels, wondering if they would be appropriate subjects for his camera. Estelle Jussim quotes from a letter written to Day by Louise Guiney. In her letter, Guiney tells Day about a boy she encountered during a vacation to Maine: “I think I have already caught a young model for you,” Guiney writes. “[A] ten-year-old with large, rather foreign-looking features, and first-rate black eyes, with lashes a yard long. When you see him, if you like him, you can bribe him to keep his hair uncut” (Slave to Beauty 113). As Patricia Berman has noted, Guiney's description reveals “discreet power relations” (352). In many ways, Guiney writes as if the boy in question were at a slave market, with Day as the potential buyer and she the auctioneer. After catching the boy, Guiney points out some of his “foreign looking” features that Day may keep if he is willing to pay for them: first-rate black eyes, long lashes, and uncut hair. Guiney wasn't the
only one of Day’s friends to write to him about ethnic-looking subjects that they thought he would find interesting. Clarence White, for example, wrote to Day about a group of African Americans he encountered in a courthouse in Virginia: “Those five black heads against a lime washed wall I know would have carried you away” (quoted in Michaels 35). Like Guiney, White shows a propensity to fetishize black bodies in a way that allows the artist to take ownership of them. In spite of these descriptions, it is a mistake to think of Day as the powerful white photographer selecting and collecting models as if he were pulling them off of auction blocks. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that many of Day’s models, including Skeete, considered themselves active participants in Day’s work and not simply powerless objects of his camera’s gaze.

For example, both Kahlil Gibran and Angelina Grimké took an active part in selecting props and clothing for their portraits, even bringing some of them from home. In “Actors and Adolescents: The Idealized Eye of F. Holland Day,” Curtis writes that the photographer’s models became “witting collaborators in the process of creating portraits and ‘subject pictures’ with dignity” (45). In addition, Day cultivated personal and professional relationships with his models that extended beyond the confines of the portrait studio. Day’s mother, for example, had a long friendship with Archibald Grimké, Angelina’s father, and the two families often interacted together socially. Day and his friends helped to advance Skeete in his art career, even helping him travel to Europe. Curtis states that Skeete carried Day’s photographs with him to the Eighth Photographic salon in London in the fall of 1900 (136, footnote 42).
Day’s photographs of Skeete allowed American viewers to see images of powerful black men that weren’t the norm during the 1890s and early 1900s. White audiences were more accustomed to images of black men and women that treated them as childlike figures for ridicule, such as E. W. Kemble’s popular “coon” series: A Coon Alphabet, Comical Coons, and Coontown’s 400. The Coontown’s 400 cover is an obvious reference to “Astor’s 400,” the list of socially prominent New Yorkers that Caroline Astor was said to allow into her ballroom; and “colored 400,” the largely derisive name given to upwardly mobile African Americans in Boston and elsewhere who were said to mimic upper-crust whites. Although they are dressed in a gown and tuxedo, Kemble’s picture makes it obvious that the black couple can never truly fit into elite white society. Kemble draws their clothes too big for them, as if the black man and woman were children playing dress up. Their wide grins and caricatured features further distinguish them from Astor’s four hundred, so that the title becomes ironic and

Fig. 3.16. Coontown’s 400. 1899.

Fig. 3.17. African American in Hat. 1897.
nonthreatening to whites who feared that the political and economic
advancement of African Americans would somehow hurt their own social
standings. Day's images of J. Alexandre Skeete, in contrast, are poised and
respectful. According to Pam Roberts, *African American in Hat Seated* is a
"coolly elegant portrayal of a man from an ethnic minority with a confident future
in a multi-racial city" (17). Unlike Kemble's caricatures, Day's portrait of Skeete
encourages viewers to imagine a future in which the middle and upper classes
are as equally accepting of blacks as they are of whites.

Day is equally careful to portray empowered black figures when they are
dressed in their "necessary accessories." For example, a triptych piece entitled
*Armageddon* features a hooded Skeete in the center frame, pronouncing
judgment on the white figures to his left and right. For Curtis, the center figure of
*Armageddon* proclaims "poetic Justice" and "racial equality" ("Actors and
Adolescents" 46). According to contemporary reviewer Etienne Wallon, that is

![Armageddon](image)

Fig. 3.18. *Armageddon*. 1899.
just what Day had in mind: “Monsieur Day told me that he took the idea from the Apocalypse; in any case its theme, quite clearly, is the Last Judgment: the figure occupying the centre of the picture represents Justice” (quoted in Becker 61). White audiences sometimes felt threatened by Day’s images of powerful dark-skinned subjects. When Armageddon was displayed in Philadelphia, one viewer took it to mean that “the powers of darkness […] will win” the final battle. She told photographer Joseph T. Keiley that she found the idea “as horrible and repulsive as that black figure that is in the center of the triptych; and that is so brutal and repulsive that it makes my flesh creep to look at it” (quoted in Michaels 337). Clearly, many white viewers were more comfortable with Kemble’s images of socially inferior black stereotypes than they were with Day’s images of black men who seemed to have a great deal of say over the ultimate disposition of white America.

According to Barbara Michaels, Day’s photographs of black men were meant to “glorify Africa in the biblical past and in recent history” (334). Day’s portrait Menelek (1897) was an allusion to Ethiopia’s victory over Italy in its fight for independence in 1896, led by its new leader, Menelik II. The picture, in

Fig. 3.19. Menelek.
conjunction with the unveiling in Boston Commons of Augustus Saint Gauden's monument to black Civil War soldiers that same year, had "political reverberations" (336). Both Gauden's monument and Day's photograph forced white Bostonians to acknowledge the military prowess of dark-skinned soldiers in a time when U. S. conquests of Cuba and the Philippines dominated the media. Furthermore, Menelek confronted Americans with the image of a powerful black man in a time when many white voters were afraid that the black vote was gaining a disproportionate amount of influence over national politics.

In 1899, Menelek was exhibited in Philadelphia; a reproduction of the photograph appeared in Harper's Weekly in November of that same year, just a few pages away from Henry Loomis Nelson's coverage of the race for governor in Ohio (1120). All that fall, Nelson and his illustrator W. A. Rogers had done a series of articles chronicling the gubernatorial elections in Ohio and Kentucky. Of central concern in those elections was the way that
parties in both states were canvassing for the African-American vote, as is
evident by Roger's illustrations entitled *A Meeting of Colored Republicans, A
Little Missionary Work*, and *On the Way to a Political Meeting* (1084). While
Nelson's fierce condemnation of "machine-building" politics doesn't specifically
mention black voters, Rogers's accompanying illustrations make it clear that
Nelson's principle concern lay with the Republican Party's efforts to court African-
American votes. That the Ohio Governor's race in particular was seen as a
microcosm of national politics is evident in both its coverage in *Harper's Weekly*
and in Nelson's comment that the candidates "are forced to talk on national
issues, for this is the President’s State, and the Democratic candidate for
Governor must make headway, if he can, against the President’s policy and the
President’s popularity" (1107).

Two years earlier, the election of the previous Republican Governor, Asa
Bushnell, had nearly been derailed after many African Americans felt that his
response to the lynching of a black man in Urbana was insufficient. Unwilling to
risk angering white voters, Bushnell had refused to investigate the lynching until
after the election and as a result lost a significant portion of his black constituents
to the Democratic opposition (Harris 11). Eager to regain those votes in 1899,
Nash spent much of his campaign courting support among the black community,
even though many whites feared the increasingly significant role that African
American voters were playing in Ohio's gubernatorial elections (Rieder). In
*Judge Nash Holds a Reception* (see fig. 3.23), Rogers speaks to that anxiety by
placing a potential black voter in the center of the picture. Rogers' illustration
provides a striking example of the popular image of African American men that Skeete worked against in the *Colored American Magazine* and elsewhere.

The illustration captures the moment just before Judge Nash and the African American voter clasp hands. Rogers draws attention to their union by directing a series of compositional thrusts toward the space where their hands will meet: the line of the staircase banister, sweeping down from the upper left corner of the painting, the triangular gap of checkered floor that points upward from the bottom edge of the picture, and the two rows of white men's faces turned toward the central figure. Even the old man's cane in the lower left corner of the painting points vaguely toward the joining of black and white hands. Of the three figures waiting to be received by Judge Nash, the African American has been given pride of place. Distinguishable by their lighter clothing and hatless heads, the three potential voters can be said to represent the three factions that were essential to the national Republican party's return to power in the latter half of the 1890s: adherents to the Grand Old Party that remembered its glory days under Lincoln (represented by the old man on the left); the party's recently forged partnership with big

![Fig. 3.23. Judge Nash.](image-url)
business, personified in the press by McKinney's political advisor, Mark Hanna (represented by the young man on the right); and the black delegations in southern states that party leaders attempted to purchase before each election (Walton 153). Of the three factions, the black man in the middle was the most worrisome to white voters. By the 1890s, black voters in the south were no longer allowed to vote in local or state elections. In the national arena, however, their votes were vital to northern-born presidential candidates who sought to secure nomination at national conventions (151). Consequently, presidential candidates spent large amounts of time campaigning in southern states among black voters, giving them influence over national politics that they couldn't possibly get at the local level.

In his illustration of Judge Nash's reception, however, Rogers is careful to allay fears that the African-American voter is becoming too powerful. Although the black man occupies the center position of the illustration, Rogers takes several steps to diminish his importance. For one thing, the man's clothes are clearly those of an unschooled laborer. Instead of the dark suit and tie of the white politicians in the room, the black man wears a tattered denim coat with a turned-up collar, indicating that its main function is to protect him from the elements rather than to look fancy at a party. His work boots are similarly at odds with the shiny dress shoes worn by the white men in the room. In addition to having shoddier clothing, the black man's posture is significantly more humble. Unlike the white politicians, reporters, and other members of the crowd, the black man's knees are bent, his back is inclined forward, and his shoulders are slightly
hunched. Even though Nash is visibly the shorter of the two, the voter’s bent posture places his head significantly lower than the Judge’s. The only white figure in the room that is similarly positioned is the bearded figure in the lower left-hand corner. While the old man echoes the black voter in his lighter colored jacket and hat, Rogers distinguishes him by giving him a finer overcoat, a starched collar, and a cane.

In comparison to W. A. Rogers’s crouching Ohio voter, F. Holland Day’s portrait of J. Alexandre Skeete as the first emperor of Ethiopia, the alleged son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, is startlingly regal (see fig. 3.19). Menelek’s crown, jewels and furs signify his political authority, and the two spears he clutches in his right and left hands indicate his willingness to maintain that authority through military means. Day’s photograph of a powerful black man directly counters the more common images of weakened or ridiculous black men that proliferated in the mass media. Encouraged by Day, many of the images that Skeete created for Colored American Magazine featured strong, confident African American men.

For example, the cover of the October, 1901 issue featured one of Skeete’s illustrations for “The Smokey City,” a multi-part examination by Oliver G. Waters of the economic and social conditions of African Americans living in Pittsburg that ran until February, 1902. While Hagar’s Daughter continued to be serialized until March of that same year, none of the covers contained any references to the novel, nor did any of the frontispieces or other illustrations. Tellingly, the October cover does contain a headline for an essay by Booker T.
Washington lauding the importance of industrial training. *Colored American* Magazine’s decision to supplant Hopkins’s novel with a five-month extolment of industrial labor marks the first in a series of editorial shifts that will eventually culminate in her firing.

Like others of his illustrations for the five-month feature, Skeete’s cover image for “The Smoky City” features a strong-looking man gazing directly out at the viewer. His “necessary accessories” are significantly less refined than those worn by Skeete in Day’s *African American in Hat* (see fig. 3.17). He wears a workman’s cap, a knotted cloth around his neck to wipe away sweat, and holds in his hands the long rod used to stir molten pig iron. The worker’s skin is decidedly darker than that of the light-skinned woman featured on the previous month’s cover. Indeed, one of the main thrusts of the article is to equate the “swart” skin of the iron workers with the soot and blackness of the blast furnaces they helped operate (419). In this way, Waters privileges black workers by placing them at the center of the industrial capitol of the “greatest industrial empire on the globe” (417). Key to maintaining this central position is the workers’ blackness and masculinity. They must be strong enough to work the iron, for instance, and because they are the “same hue as their product,” Waters implies, the “hero[es] of the Forge” are
able to perform tasks that even Irish workers were unwilling or unable to do (420). Because of their willingness and ability to perform industrial tasks, the black men who work in the blast furnace are rewarded with enough money to build homes and communities, the respect of the owners of the forge, and the gratitude of a nation dependent on the production of steel.

Skeete was attracted to stories in which black men are able to make their way in Western society because of their African heritage rather than in spite of it. In “A Zulu Prince,” which appeared in the April, 1902 issue of *Colored American Magazine*, the titular character adopts a series of personas in order to make his way in an Anglo-dominated culture: a high school student, a Harvard athlete, a janitor, a high-society party guest, a photographer’s model forced to dress up “à la savage,” and finally as an exiled Zulu Prince (Pinn 346). Throughout most of the story, the narrator is frustrated at his inability to peg the Prince into any one category. His initial description, which is placed directly under Skeete’s illustrated version, is a nest of contradictions. He wears an English High School cap, identifying him as a student of one of Boston’s more prestigious public high schools, yet the cap rests against a circular mark on his forehead, which the narrator thinks either identifies him as a

Fig. 3.25. Zulu Prince.
runaway slave or African royalty. He is “a type of black man to inspire the soul of an artist [...] strid[ing] through the crowd like a black god,” yet his physical characteristics belie easy categorization (344). His “very dark” skin, wide nostrils, and lined face seem the mark of “savagery not far removed,” yet his lips that are “not too thick” and his cheeks that are transparent enough to display a blush seem to indicate a biracial identity. It isn’t until the Prince abandons his earlier personas, moves to France, and comes into his own as the son of a Zulu chief that the narrator is satisfied that the Prince has displayed his true character. “Truly,” the narrator concludes, “blood as well as water will find its level” (347).

It’s hard to imagine that Skeete, who attended Boston schools and also dressed up “à la savage” for a studio photographer, didn’t identify with the Zulu Prince in Pinn’s short story. Indeed, Skeete modeled his end-piece illustration after a portrait that Day had done of him five years earlier. *Ebony and Ivory* (c. 1897) shows a naked Skeete sitting atop a leopard skin with his head bowed among folded arms (Roberts 74). In the foreground is a figurine that looks like it could be from ancient Greece pointing a staff up towards Skeete’s body. It is unclear if the viewer is meant to equate the ebony and ivory figures and notice how they valorize both Greek and African cultures, or think about how the descendants of one ancient civilization conquered
another. Skeete must have liked the ambiguity of the portrait, because he used an inversion of it to finish Pinn’s story. In the illustration, a naked African figure sits on the ground with his head bowed. A spear rests at his side. Rather than contrast the seated man with a Grecian statuette, Skeete juxtaposes him with a ship sailing into the sunset, presumably toward America. Skeete’s final image (the last one done for the magazine, since after Hopkins’s departure Colored American stopped publishing illustrated fiction) is frustratingly ambiguous, especially when paired with Day’s earlier portrait. Are we meant to pity the figure whose family may have been carted off by slavers? Are we meant to valorize an image of purely African manhood? Does Day’s portrait of Skeete represent the reduction of a human being to the status of a photographer’s prop, or does it suggest Skeete’s willing collaboration as a fellow artist?

**Conclusion**

One of the reasons these questions are so difficult to answer has to do with the complex variety of responses employed by African Americans confronting an overwhelmingly racist society. Black men and women did not uniformly agree on what racial uplift meant or how it should be pursued. Booker T. Washington felt that social segregation, coupled with vocational training, would
allow African Americans to accumulate material wealth while minimizing the threat of reprisals by whites eager to preserve the current class system. W. E. B. Du Bois felt that without political representation and higher education, such material wealth would be impossible to hold on to. Black women activists, confronted with racial prejudice inflected by sexism, responded by lauding, critiquing, or otherwise negotiating social norms like True Womanhood that also had a bearing on how they experienced race. African Americans approached topics such as enfranchisement, miscegenation, and education differently depending on their economic status, gender, the color of their skin, or whether or not they considered themselves part of the “talented tenth.”

It is tempting to attribute Hopkins’s firing from *Colored American Magazine* to her taking to task “the most powerful black leader at the turn of the century (Bergman 44). This theory presupposes a top-down power structure in which Hopkins fights a losing battle against Washington and his cronies or a cabal of male managers eager to steal control of the magazine. Examining Hopkins’s writing in tandem with J. Alexandre Skeete’s illustrations, however, reveals a much more complex interaction of race and gender. Skeete’s drawings may have downplayed the feminism and unconventional gender politics of *Hagar’s Daughter*, but he didn’t necessarily de-radicalize Hopkins out of a sense of parochialism or misogyny. Instead, Skeete sought to narrowly portray African-American manhood and womanhood because he felt that conventionally defined gender roles more effectively countered the racist imagery and caricatures of African Americans in the popular media. Skeete’s beatification of Hagar and her
daughter at the moment of their leap from the Potomac Bridge, for example, dampens Hopkins’s critique of the tragic mulatto stereotype, but does so in order to counter the myth of the promiscuous black woman. Similarly, Skeete’s tendency to illustrate African American men doing traditionally manly things (like Uncle Joe sitting at the head of the Thanksgiving table or the Pittsburg iron worker engaged in manual labor) is meant to repudiate the notion that African American men were effeminate and incapable of providing for themselves or others.

For all three artists—Hopkins, Owen, and Skeete—racial and gender differences are inextricably intertwined. In both Contending Forces and Hagar’s Daughter, Pauline Hopkins advocates miscegenation as a means of promoting social equality because she thinks this will give black women a more prominent role in her version of racial uplift. For his part, R. Emmett Owen may have been reluctant to portray Ophelia as a desiring female subject because to do so would threaten the assumption that African Americans were a childlike subclass requiring the guidance of white parental figures, while J. Alexandre Skeete sought to counter Anglo Saxon patriarchy by championing traditional gender roles. Examining Hopkins’s writing in conjunction with Skeete’s and Owen’s illustrations shows that Colored American Magazine’s readership had to navigate a variety of competing strategies for defining and politicizing race and gender and emphasizes the complexity with which Hopkins was able to negotiate those forces in her fiction. In Chapter Four, we will see how the readers of Harper’s Monthly Magazine are presented with a similar set of competing portrayals of
Native Americans by politicians, ethnographers, fiction writers, and illustrators and how Zitkala-Ša, Frederic Remington, and Angel De Cora contributed to that discourse.
Introduction

On the night of June 11, 1919, Gertrude Bonnin awoke from a dream so vivid that she immediately set about writing it down. She was 43 years old and had lived for the previous three years in Washington, D.C., working as the secretary of the Society of the American Indian. For the last two of those years, ever since her husband left to serve as a captain in the U. S. Army, she had also been the managing editor and principle contributor to the *American Indian Magazine*. Perhaps with a mind to publish her account of the dream in the magazine, Bonnin prepared a typed manuscript and signed it in pencil with the pseudonym she had chosen two decades earlier to represent her literary output in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly Magazine*: Zitkala-Ša.

In the dream, Zitkala-Ša finds herself in a “spacious hall,” watching a program put on by three white women. The program seems to be a slide show of some sort, with a series of pictures flashed around the hall. There are too many images, being displayed too quickly, for Zitkala-Ša to look at all of them at once, but she quickly realizes that the pictures represent or are somehow reminiscent of her own life. For example, she sees a picture of a hayloft containing hundreds of eggs and is astounded to learn that a man named Old Sioux, whom Zitkala-Ša
had cared for in her home for the last twelve years of his life, had hidden these eggs from her. Zitkala-Ša is also struck by the fact that while this image of Old Sioux is deeply significant to her, the “Lady Artist” is not at all interested in exploring the matter further, but instead moves on to images of camels and landscapes. While Zitkala-Ša is fascinated by the pictures and interested in the artists who seem to be manipulating them, her primary goal is to figure out how the images are created and displayed so that she can do it herself. “I became exhilarated by the sense of having gained a new power,” she wrote. “I believed I too would be able to bring forth these wonderful, realistic, yet fantastic illustrations to support my own line of work. It would hasten its successful achievement. It made me rejoice!” (Raymond and Gertrude Bonnin Collection).

Zitkala-Ša’s written account of her dream, which was found in a collection of papers left to her lawyers after her death in 1938, demonstrates a key insight into how Zitkala-Ša thought about collaboration with other artists. First of all, she recognizes that other artists, particularly white artists, may not be interested in the same details and themes that interest her. Secondly, while she doesn’t seem especially bitter about this loss of authorial control, she does feel a tremendous desire to learn this “new power” so she can do it herself. Zitkala-Ša immediately recognizes that textual narrative and visual images can be very powerful together, while also acknowledging the risks of ceding her artistic vision to others.

Perhaps what is most poignant about this dream is how it seems to speak to the brief period from 1900 to 1902 in which she published the essays,
autobiography, and fiction for which she is most well-known today. Essays like "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," which she published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900, and stories like "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," which she published in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1902, brought Zitkala-Ša a tremendous amount of notoriety and attention. In these works she sharply criticized U. S. Indian policies and presented sympathetic visions of Native Americans that were directly at odds with the images that white writers, ethnologists, and illustrators were propagating in those same magazines. Some modern critics, like Laura Wexler in *Tender Violence* (2000), see Zitkala-Ša's use of sentimental language and her apparent advocacy of white, middle-class values as evidence that she is a victim of Anglo-European culture rather than a critic of it. What her description of her dream indicates, however, is that Zitkala-Ša was not a passive victim of dominant white culture, but an eager participant and cunning manipulator of its tropes and techniques. Zitkala-Ša knew that her depictions of Native American attitudes and culture were only a tiny part of the vast quantity of "Indian stories" appearing every month in mainstream literary magazines. Frederic Remington, Woodrow Wilson, James Mooney, and others supplied an endless stream of Indian representations that encouraged readers to view Native Americans as either savage threats or quaint anachronisms. A close examination of her collaborations with white illustrators like Frederic Remington and Native American artists like Angel De Cora reveals that Zitkala-Ša deliberately engages with the broader culture in order to provide an alternate view of sympathetically rendered Native Americans that struggle to find their place in two cultures.
Historical Context

Born in 1876, the same year that a confederation of Sioux and Cheyenne defeated General Custer in the Battle of Little Bighorn, Zitkala-Ša was witness to some of the most important occurrences in the history of U. S. and Native American relations. When she was eight years old, she entered the government-run Indian boarding school system. She was eleven when the Dawes Allotment Act was passed, allowing lawmakers to break up tribal affiliations by dividing and eventually selling reservation properties. When she was fourteen, the U. S. army killed at least 300 of her fellow Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee Creek. When she was forty, she and her husband moved to Washington D. C., where they campaigned for Native American rights until her death in 1938, just four years after the federal government recognized tribal sovereignty (Davidson and Norris xli-xliii). Today, Zitkala-Ša is probably best known for the works of fiction and autobiography she published in the Atlantic Monthly and Harper's Monthly Magazine while enrolled at the New England Conservatory of Music from 1900 to 1902. In these short stories and essays, Zitkala-Ša fiercely criticizes the government-sponsored boarding schools that attempted to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American life. Zitkala-Ša’s work is an important part of the debate over the “Indian Question” in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Specifically, her stories are meant to encourage white readers to see beyond the black-and-white options of genocide or total assimilation.
As early as the 1850s, government officials saw the only two viable policies toward Native Americans as civilization or extermination (Wilson 289). In response to reformers who lobbied for the former rather than the latter, President Grant’s 1869 “Peace Policy” determined to settle Native Americans onto reservations and send Christian missionaries to prepare them to live near white communities. The discovery of gold on Sioux land in 1873 gave the U. S. government even more reason to hem Native Americans into increasingly smaller areas of land, and in 1877 congress passed a law shrinking the Sioux reservation from 134 million acres to just 15 million (Davidson and Norris xi). As Native Americans appeared to become less of a military threat, many Americans expressed guilt over the nation’s role in dispossessing them of their lands. In 1876, the commissioners in charge of clearing the Black Hills of its Sioux population wrote:

> We cannot afford to delay longer fulfilling our bounded duty to those from who we have taken that country, the possession of which has placed us in the forefront of the nations of the earth. We make it our boast that our country is the home of the oppressed of all lands. Dare we forget that there are also those whom we have made homeless, and to who we are bound to give protection and care?” (quoted in Wilson 297)

Naturally, the commission did not go so far as to recommend that Native Americans be allowed to return to their tribal lands. Instead, their solution was to share with them the benefits of civilization.

In 1880, John Wesley Powell wrote that the debt owed to the Native Americans for being robbed of their lands could be paid by “giving to the Indians Anglo-Saxon civilization, that they may also have prosperity and happiness under
the new civilization of this continent" (Hoxie, Talking Back, 24). The only way to ensure that Native Americans enjoy the "prosperity and happiness" of the Anglo-Saxon civilization, however, was to eradicate their traditional tribal cultures. The two main components of this cultural eradication were the Dawes Act and government-run Indian boarding schools, both of which Zitkala-Ša takes to task in her Atlantic Monthly and Harper’s publications.

The main goal of the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act, was to open up tribal land for white settlement. Money gained from selling land to white farmers on the periphery of reservations was to be used to teach Native Americans the farming methods used by Anglo settlers. The thinking went that if Indians were able to farm smaller allotments of land, huge portions of what once pertained to the reservations would be available for white homesteaders (Newlin xviii). Some of the elements of the Dawes Act that Zitkala-Ša would criticize in her fiction and essays are the assumptions that assimilation is both desirable and easy; that it is the duty of white people to paternalistically care for Native Americans; and that by parceling homesteads into family-sized portions, the social organization of Native American life would change from tribal-centered to being family-centered and thus diminish the political and culture potency of the tribe.

Zitkala-Ša’s critique of the philosophies underlying the Dawes Act is complex. While she deplored the greed and graft involved in selling allotments of Native American land, she also vacillated between longing for a time when the wider kinship relationships available through the tribe were more important than
those of parents and siblings, and representing the nuclear family as a natural, central part of Native American life. She is similarly ambiguous in her attitude toward government-run boarding schools. While Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical essays and “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” seem to be clear indictments of the assimilation of Native Americans taking place in boarding schools, she fought hard to increase funding for those schools and converted to Catholicism later in life in order to send her son to a Christian boarding school (Hafen, Dreams and Thunder, xix). Part of the reason for her ambiguous reactions to both of these efforts may be due to the fact that Zitkala-Ša lived and wrote in a time when American attitudes toward Native Americans were undergoing a dramatic shift.

In A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, Frederick Hoxie argues that United States policies and attitudes about assimilating Native Americans underwent a major shift between 1880 and 1920. Following the military conquest of native tribes in the western United States, both reformers and politicians had as their main goal to “civilize” Native Americans through education and land allotment, but by 1900, the fear that Indians weren’t capable of education prompted policy makers to relegate Native Americans to a peripheral minority status rather than offer them social and political equality.

For example, in 1895, the federal government was spending over two million dollars a year to fund public schooling for Native Americans (190). When Estelle Reel replaced William Hailmann as superintendent of Indian Education in 1898 however, she drastically reduced the amount of government funding allotted to Native American education by cutting any program that didn’t relate to
basic vocational training. According to Reel, “[t]he theory of cramming the Indian child with mere book knowledge has been and for generations will be a failure” (195). When she learned that some Indian girls at a boarding school in Oregon were being taught the piano, she responded, “I sincerely hope that the Office will require the superintendents of all Indian schools to see that their large Indian girls become proficient in cooking, sewing, and laundry work before allowing them to spend hours in useless practice upon an expensive instrument which in all probability they will never own” (195). Reel designed a five-year-program in which male students would advance from fixing tools to operating a plow, and female students would go from completing household chores to “cut[ting] bread into dainty thin slices and place it on plates in a neat, attractive manner” (196).

For Zitkala-Ša, who knew how culturally debilitating assimilation-minded boarding schools could be but also felt strongly that Native Americans should not be denied higher education, the sea change in attitudes toward Indian education put her in a difficult place. On one hand, she wished to critique the harsh methods and narrow-minded attitudes of white educators who felt that the only way to prepare Native Americans for modern life was to root out any connection they might feel for their tribal cultures. On the other hand, she prized the education and opportunities that her own boarding school experience had offered her and didn’t want to see those opportunities snatched away from other Native American children. Furthermore, she recognized that changing attitudes toward Indian education was part of a larger debate about whether or not Native Americans should have any part in twentieth-century America at all.
On December 20, 1890, Frank Baum wrote in his editorial column of *The Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* that “[t]he whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent.” He continued that “the best safety of the frontier settlers will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians” (quoted in Chiarello 9). Baum, who would go on to win international acclaim for his children’s novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), made his pronouncement about Native American annihilation just nine days before the massacre at Wounded Knee. Five days after the massacre, Baum’s resolve to cleanse the United States of its remaining Native American populations had only been strengthened. This time, however, he expanded his arena from the frontier to the entire nation:

“The *Pioneer* has before declared that our safety depends upon the total extirmination [sic] of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries, we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth.”

The fact that Baum considered Native Americans “untamable” is a key part of his argument for genocide. Pronouncements by Reel and other politicians that Native American children were unable to learn to do any but the most menial tasks only reinforced his position.

When Zitkala-Ša began publishing in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s Magazine*, she had to mitigate her critique of white assimilation practices against the fact that a significant portion of her readership didn’t consider her capable of assimilation or even of being fully human. For many Americans it was an all or nothing prospect. A year before Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical essays began
appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, Henry Dawes argued in the same magazine that either the Native American “must be endured as a lawless savage, a constant menace to civilized life, or he must be fitted to become a part of that life and be absorbed into it” (281). To completely reject white education meant risking the genocidal impulses of writers like Baum or living in a state of perpetual inferiority as a people incapable of betterment. Zitkala-Ša’s project, then, became the impossible task of convincing her readership that Native Americans were capable of enjoying the rights and benefits of full citizenship while simultaneously critiquing the loss to Native American culture that such a merger would undoubtedly entail.

**Zitkala-Ša and the Codes of Sentimentality**

For literary critics studying Zitkala-Ša’s life and works, these two aims can be difficult to reconcile. Some wish to see her as completely resistant to the broader American culture. Molly Winter, for example, takes Zitkala-Ša’s denunciation of religious education in “Why I Am a Pagan” as proof that she “rejects Christianity outright” (69). Other critics recognize that Zitkala-Ša does not wholly reject white culture, but see that failure as evidence that she falls victim to it. In *Tender Violence*, Laura Wexler states that the fact that Zitkala-Ša’s stories and essays were suitable to be published in *Harper’s* and the *Atlantic Monthly* constitute an “utterly triumphant index of the absolute penetration of […] middle-class culture” (115). Wexler writes that by the time she began writing and publishing, Zitkala-Ša’s self-conception had become “so
effectively ensnared within the codes of sentiment that there is nothing Native American in them that is untouched by Western representations” (120-21). Both of these quotes portray Zitkala-Ša as a victim of sentimental culture, not a willing participant or willful manipulator of its tropes and discourse. To put it in Audre Lorde’s terms, Wexler does not fully appreciate how Zitkala-Ša makes use of the “master’s tools.”

Wexler’s assumption that Zitkala-Ša belongs more properly to one culture and not the other is also evident in her descriptions of Käsebier’s photographic portraits. For Wexler, Zitkala-Ša looks “uncomfortable” wearing New York society dress, but “more comfortable” in Native American clothing (122). Since Wexler does not provide any visual analysis to substantiate her claims about Zitkala-Ša’s comfort or discomfort, it seems just as likely that it is Wexler who feels more comfortable viewing her in admittedly stereotypical Indian dress and pose. In fact, both of Käsebier’s portraits seem equally stereotypical. It is true that the portrait of Zitkala-Ša in Victorian-era clothing seems stilted and artificial, but so does the other. In the first photograph, Zitkala-Ša is posed in a white party dress against a
backdrop of flowered wallpaper. She holds what appears to be a white handkerchief in one hand and a book in the other. The spotless white dress and stylized floral pattern of the wallpaper both emphasize the portrait's interiority and domesticity.

The companion portrait of Zitkala-Ša in Native American dress, however, specifically eschews a drawing-room atmosphere. Instead, Zitkala-Ša's hand is raised to her forehead, as if to shield her eyes from the sun while looking at the far horizon. The studio background has been darkened so that the viewer is free to imagine the subject in outdoor space. In the first photograph, Zitkala-Ša presents the perfect picture of True Womanhood: pious in Christian clothing, pure in an all-white dress, submissive in her seated pose before the photographer, and domestic in the enclosed, interior space. In the second photograph, Zitkala-Ša appears free from those constraints. In fact, the compositional elements are antithetical to those of the first: standing instead of sitting, outside instead of inside, black instead of white. By equating New York society dress with True Womanhood and Indian dress with the opposite, Käsebier asks the viewer to consider whether or not the
subject is a true woman, a question that Wexler seems to answer in the negative when she declares that Zitkala-Ša looks "uncomfortable" in one pose but "more comfortable" in the next. By giving in to Käsebier’s either/or paradigm in her readings of these portraits, Wexler ignores Zitkala-Ša’s ability to appropriate the sentimental tropes of one culture in order to shine a light on its overlapping connections with the other.

Other critics, however, recognize Zitkala-Ša’s ability to use elements of the white culture rather than be used by them. For example, Susan Bernardin states that Zitkala-Ša drew on sentimental genres, but then “strategically revised those genres” in order to “scrutinize sentimental ideology’s foundational role in compulsory Indian education as well as its related participation in national efforts to ‘Americanize’ the Indian” (213). Bernardin argues that because she was “[s]chooled in sentimentality,” Zitkala-Ša is able to “construct a life story that appropriates the domestic vocabulary of home, family, and the mother-child bond to show that Indian reform violates these values” (220).

Some of the clearest examples of this vocabulary are in Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical essays, which she published in 1900 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In the opening chapter of “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” Zitkala-Ša shows that rather than strengthening familial bonds among Native Americans, the philosophies behind the Dawes Act actually weakens them. When the seven-year-old narrator asks her mother why she weeps, she responds with a pathos-filled tale of how the “bad paleface” drove her family “like a herd of buffalo” from their tribal lands in order to house them on the reservation (37-38). Zitkala-Ša’s
sister, already sick, dies from the hardship, as does her uncle. In a smooth piece of narrative association, Zitkala-Ša blames the federal government’s Indian policies for her father’s death as well: “There is what the paleface has done,” her mother says, pointing to the graves of her daughter and brother-in-law. “Since then your father too has been buried in a hill nearer the rising sun. We were once very happy. But the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our land, the paleface forced us away.” By associating her husband’s grave with those of her other family members, Zitkala-Ša’s mother implies that they were all killed by the same government action. Since her husband’s grave is “nearer the rising sun,” it is easy for the reader to assume that Zitkala-Ša’s father died earlier on the trail during their forced relocation.

What the narration obscures, however, is that Zitkala-Ša’s father was actually a white man named Felker, the first of her mother’s three white husbands (Fisher ix). Simmons, the name that Zitkala-Ša rejects when she takes on a Sioux name, was the second of those husbands (x). Zitkala-Ša will further obscure her connection to white culture by changing her brother’s name in her autobiographical essays from Dave to Dawée (Davidson and Norris xv). By subtly blaming Indian removal policies for her presumably Native American father’s death, Zitkala-Ša appeals to readers who would have been horrified by the collapse of her nuclear family, an entity that the Dawes Act was supposedly enacted to protect. Being clearer about the identity of her white father would have only dulled her critique and dampened her ethos, since readers would have expected her to be a fully-blooded Native American. According to Mary Carden,
Zitkala-Ša ignores her white father in her autobiographical essays in order to reject the notion that her identity as a Native American could be defined by blood. Carden quotes the Dawes Act, which attempted to legally define a person’s Indian-ness by the “blood quantum” or “degree of Indian blood” he or she possessed (127). By glossing over her white heritage, Zitkala-Ša refuses to cede her right to define herself over to the U. S. government.

While Zitkala-Ša’s essays are critical of both the U. S. Government and the Christian movement that put her in boarding school, she makes skillful use of Judeo-Christian symbology in order to drive home those critiques. For example, the missionaries who convince Zitkala-Ša to leave her mother to study at White’s Manual Institute in Indiana do so by promising her “nice red apples” and a ride on an iron horse (46). These apples never materialize, but their equation with the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden is hard to miss, as is the connection between the Christian missionaries and the tempting serpent. Zitkala-Ša prepares us for this connection in a chapter preceding the missionaries’ arrival entitled “The Dead Man’s Plum Bush.” In this chapter, the “forbidden fruit” is a plum bush growing from a dead Indian’s grave (44). The man liked plums so much that he was buried with a set of seeds in his hands that grew into the bush. It is telling that the forbidden fruit grows from the skeleton of a Native American corpse. For Zitkala-Ša, the learning represented by the fruit of the tree of knowledge and Christian boarding school comes at a high cost.

According to Catherine Kunce, Zitkala-Ša employs Edenic mythology in order to “reconcile[e] her white audience’s sensibilities with the more urgent need
to instruct that audience about the cataclysmic results of religious hypocrisy” (74). It is certainly true that the Christian boarding school Zitkala-Ša describes is full of hypocritical figures, such as the matron who is more concerned with roll call than with her charges’ health or the Sunday School teacher who shows her students pictures of the devil and tells them he will torture them if they don’t behave (“School Days” 190). Another reason for the repeated employment of the Edenic myth, however, is to connect Zitkala-Ša’s tribal life to a prelapsarian state that had not yet been corrupted by white influence. According to Mark Rifkin, this is a flawed strategy. He contends that even when Native writers offered positive accounts of traditional social systems, they almost always figured those accounts in the past. Because they coded traditional practices and community dynamics as childhood naiveté, nostalgia, ethnography, or mythology, as Zitkala-Ša does, they could not effectively counter the federal government’s depiction of Native American life as a “savage anachronism” (36). Judging from readers’ responses to Zitkala-Ša’s Atlantic Monthly publications, there may be some truth to this.

Captain Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Training School and Zitkala-Ša’s boss when she published her autobiographical essays, either didn’t recognize or didn’t feel threatened by her initial critique of Indian boarding school education. According to Deborah Welch, Pratt felt that Zitkala-Ša’s articles in the Atlantic Monthly “demonstrated the truth of what he had long preached to the American public—that Indian peoples, once educated and acculturated, could make responsible contributions” (quoted in Chiarello 19). Pratt probably felt that Zitkala-Ša’s description of her girlhood was simply a “benign portrait of traditional
Sioux life,” very much in line with what George Bird Grinnell and other anthropologists were publishing at the time (Bernardin 216). Pratt did have a problem, however, with “Soft-Hearted Sioux,” the short story that Zitkala-Ša published in Harper’s Magazine the following year. Zitkala-Ša commented on the negative reaction incurred by “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” in a letter she wrote to her then fiancé, Carlos Montezuma, in March of 1901: “Already I’ve heard that at Carlisle my story is pronounced ‘trash’ and I—‘worse than Pagan!’” (215). In a review published in The Red Man and Helper on April 12, 1901, the short story is pronounced “morally bad” (Fisher viii). As the school newspaper, The Red Man and Helper was primarily a vehicle for the expression of Pratt’s ideas and way for students to practice typesetting and presswork. Since its content was carefully edited and controlled by him, the review’s negative response to Zitkala-Ša story can be taken as Pratt’s own (Littlefield 320). The review was particularly harsh in the way that it attacked Zitkala-Ša personally:

“All that Zitkalasa has in the way of literary ability and culture she owes to the good people who […] have taken her into their homes and hearts and given her aid. Yet not a word of gratitude or allusion to such kindness on the part of her friends has ever escaped in any line of anything she has written for the public. By this course she injures herself and harms the educational work in progress for the race from which she sprang. In a list of educated Indians who we have in mind, some of whom have reached higher altitudes in literary and professional lines than Zitkalasa, we know of no other case of such pronounced morbidness.” (quoted in Fisher viii)

Why did Pratt ignore Zitkala-Ša’s condemnation of boarding school education in her autobiographical essays yet react so negatively to “The Soft-Hearted Sioux”? Part of the reason may be that by describing her life on the Yankton reservation in such idyllic terms and by suffusing her account with
Edenic imagery, she defuses her narrative by setting it safely in the mythic past. “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” however, is set firmly within the present, so that when it questions the wisdom of assimilation through Christian boarding schools, those critiques seem all the more pointed. Zitkala-Ša acknowledged that the present-day setting of “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” was probably what set Pratt over the edge in a letter she wrote to her fiancé: “Last week Harper’s accepted another story of mine—‘The Trial Path’—that is purely Ancient history and won’t bear hard on anyone’s pet concerns” (Bernardin 215-216). Indeed, the rest of Zitkala-Ša’s published fiction—“The Trial Path” (1901), “A Warrior’s Daughter” (1902), and Old Indian Legends (1901)—are ostensibly set in pre-Columbian times and thus far removed from contemporary concerns. While they certainly contain their own imbedded critiques of white culture, as we shall see, none is as overtly critical of as turn-of-the-century attitudes toward Native Americans as “The Soft-Hearted Sioux.”

As in “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” one of Zitkala-Ša’s main condemnations of the federal government’s assimilation practices in “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” is that it destroys families. Of course, in order to make this accusation, Zitkala-Ša must downplay aspects of Sioux culture that offer alternatives to conventional family structures that her white readers would recognize. For example, in her autobiographical essays, Zitkala-Ša describes a tribal community that fulfills many of the functions her readers would normally associate with mothers, fathers, and siblings. She and her mother frequently invite the older members of the tribe to eat with them in “Impressions,” for
example, and other members of the community appear to let themselves in and out of Zitkala-Ša’s teepee as if it were their own. When the young Zitkala-Ša has trouble getting her mother to allow her to go with the Christian missionaries, she knows she can get permission from her dead Uncle’s widow. In “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” however, the larger tribal community plays a much smaller role.

In the opening paragraphs of the story, a young man sits in a teepee with his father, mother, and grandmother, who take turns telling him what he should do with his life. His grandmother suggests selecting a woman to marry, his mother wants him to learn how to become a great hunter so he can bring home meat to his wife, and his father thinks he should become the youngest member of his tribe to earn the title of warrior. These three roles—husband, hunter, and warrior—seem to typify the gender ideals of Dakota manhood, but they are of central concern to middle-class white readers as well. Feeling that the closing of the frontier had led to the feminization of American men, public figures like Teddy Roosevelt and Silas Weir Mitchell urged a closer connection with nature in order to rekindle the nation’s masculinity. Part of the appeal of the frontier adventure stories that filled the popular magazines of the period was undoubtedly due to the way they soothed readers’ anxiety about gender roles by reaffirming the values of traditional manhood. In order to effectively tap into that anxiety, however, Zitkala-Ša has to align her representation of Sioux masculinity with what her white readers had been conditioned to expect. As Mark Rifkin points out, Zitkala-Ša relies on the “erasure of winktes [tribal members who adopted the dress and behavior associated with both male and female roles] from Dakota communities
and a consequent straightening of Dakota sex/gender ideologies” in order to
convince her readers that a Christian education makes Sioux males unfit to
function as men in their communities (48).

The moral thrust of the story, in fact, depends on showing how Christianity
feminizes the protagonist to a degree that he can no longer be a husband,
hunter, or warrior. Soon after his conversation with his mother, father, and
grandmother, the young man goes to a Christian boarding school and spends
“nine winters hunt[ing] for the soft heart of Christ” (505). The narrator’s
description of his schooling contains the delightful ambiguity of trying to obtain a
soft heart for himself and trying to capture and pierce the soft heart of another. It
is a reminder that one can be either Christ-like or a killer, but probably not both.

When the narrator returns to his tribe as a converted missionary, he finds
that his family is in poverty and his father is starving to death. Instead of hunting
or warring as his father and the other men of the tribe expect him to do, however,
the soft-hearted Sioux is now too feminized to react in the traditional manner.
The first thing he does when glimpsing his starving father is to bow his head with
his mother and cry. “Alike our throats were choked and tears were streaming
from our eyes,” he says, but where it may be acceptable in sentimental fiction for
female characters to react to hardship by weeping, it doesn’t seem a very manly
thing for the soft-hearted Sioux to do (506). As the story progresses, he betrays
his loss of manhood in other ways, such as losing a speaking contest with the
medicine man or failing to find meat in the winter’s cold. For the soft-hearted
Sioux, Silas Mitchell’s classic formula has been reversed. Rather than adventuring west to find his manhood, he travels east to lose it.

Perhaps the protagonist’s biggest failure is his inability to keep his father from starving to death. Molly Winter notes that throughout his father’s illness, the soft-hearted Sioux is more interested in his father’s soul than in his health (65), which means that all of his Christian education has not made him capable of providing even the basic essentials for his family. Eventually, the rest of the tribe becomes so disgusted by his ineptitude that they leave the young man and his parents to suffer their fate alone. According to Jace Weaver, this is explained by the fact that they no longer consider him fit to be a member of the tribe. Weaver states that “failure to fulfill one’s responsibility to the community” is the “closest approximation” in Native American culture to the concept of “‘sin’ in the Christian lexicon.” Further, in Native American culture, “there is no concept of ‘salvation’ beyond the continuance of the community” (38-39). Hunting after the soft heart of Christ, in other words, has not made the protagonist more capable of joining the broader community, but less.

In desperation, the young man decides to poach a neighboring rancher’s cow and accidentally kills the rancher in the process. Of course he is captured, jailed, and eventually hung for his crime, but the reader is encouraged to feel sympathy for his plight and some relief that in his final acts before capture, the protagonist finally inhabits the roles of husband, hunter, and warrior that his grandmother, mother, and father had envisioned for him at the beginning of the story. When the narrator calls the dead rancher “paleface” rather than “white
man,” it is a signal that he has achieved something of a triumph by rejecting Christianity and returning to his Native American roots (508). One of the reasons Zitkala-Ša is able to cause her readers to applaud the killing of a white man by an Indian (not the usual thing in fiction depicting Native Americans) is that it reaffirms values of gender and sentiment that most of the reading public already held dear. It may be unusual in fiction to feature a Native American protagonist killing a white rancher, but it is usual for a boy to go to the frontier, shed the trappings of civilization, and become more of a man by doing so. It is also usual for the male protagonist to endure a period of weakness (in this case Christianity) before returning to strength and wreaking violent vengeance. Rather than becoming “ensnared within the codes of sentiment,” as Wexler suggests, Zitkala-Ša uses those codes to present a sympathetic representation of a Native American protagonist that was unique for the period.

**Frederic Remington in *Harper's Monthly Magazine***

One way to appreciate just how unique Zitkala-Ša’s representation of Native Americans was is to compare them to other dominant images of Native Americans appearing alongside her fiction. For example, the volume of the *Atlantic Monthly* that features Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical essays also contains a portion of Mary Johnston’s novel *To Have and to Hold* (1900), a romance set in Virginia during the Anglo-Powhatan war. According to Davidson and Norris, the novel indulges in “all the possible stereotypes of evil and devilish ‘savages’,” but was immensely popular nonetheless (xxxiv). Patricia Okker states that during the months the novel was serialized, the *Atlantic Monthly’s* circulation nearly 200
doubled (89). Barbara Chiarello suggests that Johnston’s novel was so popular precisely because it catered to Americans’ preconceived notions of how Native Americans were supposed to live and behave. She notes that while the *Atlantic Monthly* did not review Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical articles, it did review Johnston’s novel. The reviewer William E. Simonds finds comfort in Johnston’s portrayal of Native American stereotypes, stating that that Johnston’s Indian “belongs to that shadowy type born from the romance of the forest which Cooper gave us long ago” (17). Like Frank Baum, Simonds seems to prefer to think of Native Americans as dead and gone rather than mucking up the present.

Simonds’ was a popular attitude. Molly Winter states that the U. S. government, ethnologists, and writers of popular literature “all vigorously propagated the idea that American Indians were an anachronistic and dying race,” probably because that made it much easier to justify taking their land and underfunding programs meant to provide for their welfare (56). The absence of Native Americans from the cultural and physical landscape also made it easier for whites to think of themselves as the beneficiaries of natural selection. One of the most popular proponents of this attitude was Frederic Remington, who by the time Zitkala-Ša began submitting stories to *Harper’s* had already enjoyed a long history as the magazine’s foremost producer of Indian stories and images. In 1881, *Harper’s Monthly* published Remington’s first paid illustration: a sketch of two cowboys done on the back of some wrapping paper (Buckland 4). In 1886, Henry Harper sent Remington to Arizona to cover the army’s pursuit of Geronimo, and then to Canada a year later to draw members of the Blackfoot
Indian tribe (32). Between 1889 and 1902, Remington published more than a hundred stories and essays for Harper’s and other magazines and an even greater number of illustrations, more than a third of which featured Native Americans. For many Americans, Remington’s “Indian Stories” provided the definitive representation of how Native Americans were supposed to look and act—his most persistent portrayal being that they were prey to Darwinian evolution, more properly belonging to the past than to the present. In “The Story of the Dry Leaves,” for example, a piece of Remington fiction that came out in Harper’s two years before “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” a young hunter named Ah-we-ah is unable to provide food for his family because the season had simply moved on.

It is important for Remington that the reader recognize right away that his narrative takes place in the “nearly forgotten past” and that his protagonist has very little chance of survival (95). Before the story begins, Ah-we-ah’s family has been killed by the Sioux, making him the last surviving member of his tribe. In telling the story of Ah-we-ah’s ill-fated struggle to survive on his own, Remington frequently interrupts his narrative to inform the reader that the characters in his story are now all dead: “The people are long since gone,” he interjects before telling of Ah-we-ah’s marriage. “[T]he camps are mould; the very trees they lived among are dead.” (96). The “dry leaves” of the title, then, are more than just the implement that causes the protagonist’s ultimate undoing; they also stand for an entire culture that has withered and died as naturally as the passing seasons.
Unlike the soft-hearted Sioux, whose failure to provide meat for his family is directly attributable to his Christian education, Ah-we-ah fails because the fates are simply against him. His family is slaughtered, his canoe capsizes, the beaver population that he usually hunts becomes diseased, and the ground is full of dry leaves that won’t allow him to sneak up on any prey. In a last-ditch effort, he prays to the spirits that he will somehow be able to provide for his wife and newborn child, and is rewarded by falling snow. The snowfall muffles the sounds of the crunching leaves and Ah-we-ah is finally able to kill a bear and take the meat back to his family. By then, of course, his wife and child have died from hunger and cold and Ah-we-ah gives up in despair.

The similarities between “The Story of the Dry Leaves” and “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” are striking. In each case, a young man struggles to provide food for his family, finally kills an animal, but returns to his teepee too late to save the life of a loved one. In Remington’s version, however, the author is careful to place the blame on natural forces. While Zitkala-Ša clearly indicts the federal government and its Indian education system for making her main character incapable of keeping his father alive, Remington’s protagonist is unable to find food due to a series of circumstances entirely beyond his or anyone else’s control. For Remington, Native Americans belonged to a decimated and dying culture not because of anything white people had done, but because nature willed it. His message is unambiguous: the time of the Native Americans has passed, so there is no use lamenting or struggling against their demise.
The ending of “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” on the other hand, is deeply ambiguous. While the protagonist claims to await his hanging serenely and bravely, it is clear from his final thoughts that he is still not sure which culture he should have followed: “Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep?” he asks, “Or will my warrior father greet me and receive me as his son? Will my spirit fly upward to a happy heaven? Or shall I sink into the bottomless pit, an outcast from a God of infinite love?” (508). While the phrasing seems reluctant to fully endorse Christian theology (the reader is probably supposed to recognize the difficulty of reconciling a God of infinite love with a God who sinks outcasts into a bottomless pit), Zitkala-Ša is equally ambivalent about embracing Native American culture instead. After all, the medicine man’s chants are as ineffective as the missionary’s prayers in saving the life of his father. Furthermore, the tribe abandons the soft-hearted Sioux as he had abandoned them. The soft-hearted Sioux’s final questions are a poignant evocation of the untenable position in which Native Americans of Zitkala-Ša’s generation found themselves. Do they reject their culture outright in an effort to survive in the twentieth century, or does that rejection make survival impossible?

As an artist who clearly feels that Native American survival into the twentieth century is out of the question, Frederic Remington does not seem the ideal choice to illustrate “The Soft-Hearted Sioux.” Although he had a long history of publishing articles and illustrations for Harper’s, Remington’s penchant for depicting Native Americans as little more than savage anachronisms was well known. For example, when Hamlin Garland was readying his collection of Indian
stories for publication, his editor suggested including Remington illustrations that had already been published in Harper’s. Garland, however, objected. He disliked the painter personally, for one thing, but he also felt that Remington’s illustrations were inimical to his stories (Newlin xliii). While Garland’s representations of Native Americans turned out to contain plenty of stereotypes that confirmed his notions of white superiority, he was also capable of depicting them in a positive light and seemed genuinely concerned with the difficulties of adjusting to reservation life. Furthermore, he recognized that his efforts to depict Native Americans as actual people were unique among other white writers of the period.

In his unpublished introduction to The Book of the American Indian, Garland wrote, “There are a thousand writers to emphasize the harsh and cruel side of the Indian. There are very few who care to dwell upon their commonplace everyday human side” (Newlin xi). According to Garland, Remington was one of those who emphasized harshness and cruelty. “My design was directly opposite to that of Remington,” Garland later explained. “He carried to the study of these hunters all the contempt, all the conventional notions of a hard and rather prosaic illustrator. He never got the wilderness point of view. His white hunters were all ragged, bearded, narrow between the eyes, and his red men stringy, gross of feature, and cruel. I recognized no harmony between his drawings and my text” (409-410).

Of course, Garland didn’t allow this disharmony to stand in the way of making a larger profit. Recognizing that Remington’s popularity would undoubtedly help him sell more books, Garland finally agreed to allow Harper
and Brothers to publish his stories along with 35 full-page Remington illustrations. Later, he acknowledges that that was a smart move. "It may interest the reader to know that the editors were right and that they have sold more than ten times the number of copies I had anticipated," Garland noted gleefully in his journal (410).

*Harper's*, then, had several reasons for using Remington to illustrate "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" in spite of his reputation for depicting Native Americans monochromatically: he had a long history with the magazine; he was immensely popular among readers; and his illustrations tended to encourage sales. Perhaps surprisingly, Remington’s illustration *At My Feet* actually complements Zitkala-Ša’s text in interesting ways. The stark duality of the composition—two dark figures silhouetted against a plain snowy background—subtly echoes the choice the protagonist must make between two diametrically opposed cultures. Also, Remington has altered the scene somewhat from Zitkala-Ša’s textual description in order to dramatize the soft-hearted Sioux’s
struggle to “hunt for the soft heart of Christ.” While the text placed the dead rancher “prone in blood red snow,” Remington has flipped him onto his back in order to render him as a crucified Christ. The rancher’s arms are splayed outwards, in the shape of a cross, and the blood is carefully placed to replicate Christ’s wounds in his hands, feet, and torso. By representing the soft-hearted Sioux’s knife fight with the white rancher as physical combat with Christ, Remington visually emphasizes both his struggle with Christianity and his final decision to reject it in favor of his father’s culture.

Of course, Remington’s rendering of the soft-hearted Sioux’s confrontation with the rancher presents its own difficulties that may run counter to Zitkala-Ša’s aim of presenting a fully realized human character rather than a savage stereotype. Charles Hannon, for example, makes the point that Remington’s illustration of “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” encourages viewers to sympathize with the martyred rancher rather than the murdering Indian (186). Few Christian viewers would applaud the killer of Christ, after all, and the image of the soft-hearted Sioux standing over a white man’s body with a dripping knife in his hand would have only confirmed their preconceptions of Native Americans as blood-thirsty savages. Furthermore, Remington’s dual composition creates a distorted mirror image that reinforces white views that Native Americans simply weren’t capable of fully assimilating as Christian citizens.

In “The Economy of Manichean Allegory,” Abdul JanMohamed states that the aim of “colonialist literature” is to “justify imperial occupation and exploitation” (62). One of the ways it does this is by employing what JanMohamed calls the
“Manichean allegory,” in which racial difference is reified as the European self is defined by the native other (and vice versa). Key to this allegorical scheme is the underlying assumption that the dominant culture is irrevocably superior to the subordinate culture. Even if literary or visual representations of colonized subjects show them adopting civilization (or rationality or whiteness or whatever other characteristic the colonizers attribute to themselves), the unbridgeable gap between cultures will be made even more evident by the approximation. In the case of Remington’s illustration, the mirror image created by the soft-hearted Sioux standing over the rancher’s body heightens the white viewer’s sense of the Indian’s barbarism precisely because at first glance he doesn’t seem all that barbarous. What could be seen as a relatively unaggressive, indecisive posture becomes, under JanMohamed’s formulation, proof that the soft-hearted Sioux will never become fully civilized.

Placed directly opposite the dead rancher, the soft-hearted Sioux’s half-hearted Christological stance (arms partly raised from his sides, one hand dripping blood only by virtue of the knife it carries) becomes a mockery of the white figure’s martyrdom. By almost giving the Native American figure a crucifical position but not quite, Remington draws attention to other bits of incomplete mimicry, such as the soft-hearted Sioux’s Anglo clothing or his shadow mirroring the rancher’s dead body, that ultimately serve to emphasize the differences between the two cultures in spite of their apparent proximity: Native Americans are not Christian but Christ-killers, they are murderous thieves rather than productive ranchers, and no amount of Christian education will alter
their savage natures. Like Käsebier’s portraits of Zitkala-Ša in Anglo and Native American clothing, Remington’s parallel composition encourages the viewer consider whether or not the Native American subject can be assimilated, but then reject that possibility. In spite of his surprisingly nuanced reading of Zitkala-Ša’s story, Remington has succeeded in confirming his and his readers’ vision that Native Americans have no place in modern society. While Zitkala-Ša’s text might also question the wisdom of assimilation, she does so in a way that engenders empathy for Native Americans rather than white settlers. By turning the soft-hearted Sioux into a villain, Remington’s illustration effectively justifies Native American displacement and extermination.

Remington’s illustration, in fact, aligns “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” with other representations of Native American conquest that appeared alongside Zitkala-Ša’s story in Harper’s Monthly Magazine. Beginning in January of 1901, Woodrow Wilson’s lavishly illustrated “Colonies and Nation: A Short History of the People of the United States” was serialized in eleven installments. From the opening sentence, Wilson makes it clear that his aims in presenting this history are deeply nativist. “When the history of the English settlement in America begins,” Wilson writes, “an age of discovery and bold adventure has given place to an age of commerce and organization” (173). Wilson’s diction makes it clear that the “people of the United States” referred to in the title can only refer to those born of English settlers and he wasn’t alone in that assumption. Commenting on Wilson’s article, editor Henry Mills Alden echoes the author’s Anglo-Saxon nativism when he asserts that “for a century and a half […] our history is properly
English, as racially and radically it must be to the end” (323). For Alden, Wilson’s history wasn’t just a scholarly recitation of facts; it was also a referendum on turn-of-the-century politics, including the questions of foreign immigration and Native American assimilation.

For example, when Wilson recounts William Berkley’s governorship of Virginia in the 1670s, the main question seems to be whether or not the political leadership of the colony will have the fortitude to deal with the Indian threat. Berkley, whom Wilson describes as “no longer manly,” refuses to send armed men against the Susquehannock tribe attacking periphery settlements, while Nathaniel Bacon is a “man of action and of passion” who was more than up to the task (547). Wilson is clearly sympathetic to the colonists’ cause and has little empathy for the Native American combatants. While he does acknowledge that the Indians may have been “goaded to hostile acts,” he doesn’t hesitate to paint them in negative terms. They are “red men” and “savages” who “massacre” English colonists, while Bacon is a “fair and winning” figure who responds to their attacks with “dash and daring” (548). In addition to his preoccupation with masculinity, which was probably more indicative of American life in 1901 than in 1674, Wilson’s clear preference for Anglo-Saxon interests over Native American concerns was reflected in his presidency as well as his scholarship. Wilson, a Southerner who had “minimal interest in racial equality,” according to Frederick Hoxie in *A Final Promise* (178), told the Society of American Indians in 1914 that he did not consider their concerns terribly pressing and promptly turned the Indian Office over to western politicians who were eager to open up reservation
land to allotment and settlement as quickly as possible (108). Both as an
historian and as a politician, Wilson found it easy to dismiss Native Americans as
savage obstacles on the road to progress.

Wilson’s article, which was published in tandem with Zitkala-Ša’s stories in
Harper’s, came with a number of full-page illustrations by Howard Pyle. On the
War Path, which accompanies Wilson’s description of Bacon’s actions against
the Susquehannock Indians, was published in the March, 1901 issue alongside
Zitkala-Ša’s “The Soft-Hearted Sioux.” Pyle’s illustration affirms Wilson’s
formulation of civilized white
settlers contending with savage
Indians. Significantly, Charles
Hannon has noted that Pyle’s
painting has a lot in common
with Remington’s illustration for
“The Soft-Hearted Sioux” that
appeared just a few pages
earlier in the magazine. Each
painting features a high horizon
line, a martyred white settler in
the lower-left hand quadrant,
and a weapon-bearing Native
American in the upper right.

Fig. 4.4. On the War-Path.
According to Charles Hannon, the upper-right hand corner of Pyle's painting represents obstacles that must be overcome—rocky ground, thick forests, and hostile Indians—while the lower-left hand portion represents the progress American colonists have made (186). Given their broad similarities, it is difficult to imagine that Remington wouldn't have had Pyle's illustration in mind when he composed his own picture, or that frequent readers of the magazine wouldn't have connected them. Like Remington's depiction of the dead rancher, Pyle's wounded farmer takes a vaguely Christological position: arms stretched out, eyes turned toward heaven, and side pierced. As with Remington's painting, the viewer is clearly meant to sympathize with the white settler and demonize the Indian figures that have caused his demise.

Like other Native American writers of the period, Zitkala-Ša struggled to represent sympathetically realized Native American characters in a literary environment that was dominated by white writers, artists, and readers who were largely predisposed to view Indians as either romantic figures of the distant past or as untamable savages in a present they simply weren't suited for. While undoubtedly proud of her efforts (Zitkala-Ša bragged to her fiancé the month that "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" came out that an "intelligent literary critic" said her writing had "a distinguished air about it"), she must have been frustrated to find her message constantly muffled by the ubiquitous evocations of white superiority and nationalism that populated literary magazines at the turn of the last century (Bernardin 233). "Seville," the lead article in the issue of Harper's that contained "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," is a prime example of the type of American jingoism.
that pervaded periodical publications at the time Zitkala-Ša was writing.

Considered with “Seville,” “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” becomes simply another travel article about an exotic locale that Americans have just conquered and can feel good about consuming.

According to Mary Elizabeth Boone in *Vistas de España*, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American artists went to Spain to study from paintings by Velásquez and Goya, but also to “emphasize the importance of the Spanish past and the supremacy of the American future” (1). Immediately following the conclusion of the Spanish-American war, Spain became a popular destination for painters and writers trying to satisfy American readers’ curiosity about the country they had just conquered and at the same time shore up America’s image of itself as the rightful inheritors of Spain’s Golden Age. Interestingly, these writers and artists employed the same strategies they would later use to depict Indian populations in the American Southwest by deliberately feminizing Spanish subjects, insisting on preconceived notions of authenticity, and ignoring any aspect of Spanish culture that didn’t seem firmly rooted in a glorious past.

For example, the title of Symons’ article, “Seville,” is displayed directly adjacent to a portrait of a young Andalucian woman, as if one were metonymic for the other. As Americans had ever since Washington Irving, the illustrator places flowers in the senorita’s hair to symbolize licentiousness and availability (Boone 46). Throughout the article, Symons describes the city of Seville and its female occupants in similar terms. The city is “bright,” “blithe,” “animated,” and
“mysteriously quiescent” (497, 500), while its women are “seductive,” “intoxicating,” “sultry,” and “fatal” (501). In addition to equating political and sexual conquest, this persistent feminizing of Seville and its occupants renders Spain innocuous as a military or economic threat. F. Luis Mora, who specialized in pretty Spanish girls in charming costumes and would go on to illustrate Zitkala-Ša’s “The Trial Path,” tended to paint Native American women the same way. In “The Coming of Winter,” a 1905 advertisement for Ivory’s Soap that appeared in Harper’s Magazine and St. Nicholas, Mora surrounds his Native American subject with a cherubic baby, Art Nouveau features, and three white bunnies approaching her as if she were Snow White in a forest. It’s hard to imagine such a figure providing any sort of military threat or agitating for better treatment for Native Americans on reservations.

Another way that Symons renders Sevillians innocuous is by not imagining them outside of predefined boundaries. After wandering around the city for a day feeling that he hasn’t seen anything uniquely Spanish, Symons finally sees the “true” Seville only when its people conform to stereotypes gleaned from other tourists’ descriptions: gypsies dancing, castanets clicking, hands clapping (499). Fittingly, this vision is glimpsed as the sun goes down, as a “melancholy splendor burns down slowly upon the thin trees across the water, staining the water with...
faint reflections, and touching the dreary, colorless shrubs along the river-side with delicate autumn colors, as sunset ends the day of the people” (499-500).

For Symons, the true Spain is a dead Spain, carefully preserved in amber for the enjoyment of American tourists who wish to visit and feel all the more powerful, advanced, and vital for having compared themselves to their European predecessors.

Zitkala-Ša clearly considered the fiction that she published in *Harper's* and elsewhere to be subversive and directly challenging to the dominant discourse concerning Native Americans. In an autobiographical summary attached to a request for funding that Zitkala-Ša wrote in 1932, she describes her literary output from 1900 to 1902: “Concurrently with her teaching at Carlisle she wrote short stories for the *Atlantic Monthly, Harper’s Monthly,* and *Everybody’s Magazine* in which articles she criticized and ridiculed the manner and methods of the Indian Bureau in administrating the affairs of the Indians generally” (Raymond and Gertrude Bonnin Collection). While the publishers at *Harper’s* may have been willing to print Zitkala-Ša’s critiques of U. S. Indian policies, they did not do so without couching those criticisms within vast amounts of competing depictions that threatened to subsume or at the very least muffle her views. Placing Zitkala-Ša’s fiction next to competing historical narratives and Spanish travelogues diminishes the impact of her unique viewpoint, as do images that confirm negative Native American stereotypes already existing in the public’s mind. Zitkala-Ša, however, was not the only Native American woman to challenge those stereotypes in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine.*
Angel De Cora in Harper’s Monthly Magazine

According to Patricia Okker, Zitkala-Ša was “the first Native American women to write her life story without the mediation of a white editor or translator” (100). However, a year before Zitkala-Ša’s essays appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, her friend and colleague Angel De Cora published two stories in Harper’s that featured a young Native American girl coming to terms with a bicultural reality. “The Sick Child” appeared in February of 1899 and “Gray Wolf’s Daughter” was published in November of that same year. Although De Cora displayed considerable talent as a writer, teacher, and painter, the Harper’s press release announcing the inclusion of her short stories in its magazine identified her as a “naïve [...] Indian girl” (quoted in Hutchinson 747). As a Native American woman writing and illustrating in a mainstream literary magazine at the end of the nineteenth century, De Cora risked being dismissed by contemporary readers as a curiosity. However, both De Cora’s stories and her artwork constitute a calculated attack on the Native American stereotypes that prevailed in Harper’s, both paving the way for Zitkala-Ša’s literary productions and providing an alternative view of Native American assimilation.

Born the same year as Zitkala-Ša, Angel De Cora attended a string of boarding schools, colleges, and art institutes, beginning with the Hampton Institute in Virginia. According to her autobiography, De Cora was lured away from her unsuspecting parents and grandparents by a white man who asked her and six other children if they wanted to ride in a steam engine (280). They didn’t get off the train until three days later, when they reached the boarding school in
Virginia where De Cora stayed for the next three years. Although she describes her childhood on the reservation as idyllic, De Cora stayed in the east after graduating from the Hampton Institute to continue her education. She studied at the Burnham Classical School for girls in Northampton, Massachusetts, and then spent four years at Smith College. After graduating from Smith, she studied for two years at Drexel Institute under Howard Pyle, and then went to the Cowles Art School in Boston where she studied another two years under Frank Benson and Edmund C. Tarbell. After graduating from Cowles, she opened her own art studio in Boston. By the time she began publishing stories and illustrations in *Harper's Magazine*, Angel De Cora was a highly educated, accomplished painter and illustrator (Lindsey 212).

Although Elizabeth Hutchinson calls Angel De Cora the “best-known native artist in the United States before World War I,” she is almost entirely absent from modern critical scholarship of Native American art (740). She is not included in Berlo and Phillips’ *Native North American Art* (1998), nor is she listed in the *St. James Guide to Native North American Artists* (1998). She is listed in the *Biographical Directory of Native American Painters* (1995), but under her husband’s last name even though she never used it professionally. In spite of this lack of contemporary attention, De Cora had a significant presence in turn-of-the-century visual culture. She illustrated two of her own stories for *Harper’s Monthly* and a number of others for *Outlook* and *American Indian Magazine*, as well as at least five books, including *Old Indian Legends* by Zitkala-Ša (755). Anne Ruggles Gere notes that De Cora exhibited two paintings at the 1910 Paris
Salon (658), and she also served as the head of the art department at Carlisle Institute from 1905 to 1915 (Lester 152).

Like Zitkala-Ša, De Cora had her feet planted in two cultures. While this gave her certain advantages, it also made it difficult for her to be fully accepted as an artist and a professional in the Anglo community. Howard Pyle, for example, felt that De Cora would never be able to make a living as an illustrator because "unfortunately she was a woman and still more unfortunately an American Indian" (quoted in Curtis 64). This didn’t stop Pyle from investing in De Cora’s talent, however. In 1897, Pyle paid for her to spend the summer on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation so that she could study the details of Native American life first hand. Pyle insisted that his students research every detail of the items included in their pictures so that they could be reproduced with as much verisimilitude as possible. He felt that as a Native American, De Cora would be able to capture the minutiae of the reservation in a way that his white students could not. Although De Cora would eventually break with Pyle because, as she wrote to a friend, “I am an Indian and don’t want to draw like a white man,” she seems to have taken his lessons about verisimilitude to heart (quoted in Gere 658). According to Sarah McAnulty, the two illustrations that De Cora published in Harper’s following her Fort Berthold trip were “more detailed in their conceptions of costume, facial expression and setting than any other illustrations she did.” Elizabeth Hutchinson also sees Pyle’s influence in the images’ “graphic simplicity, dramatic lighting, and use of period costume” (746). In spite of Pyle’s evident influence, however, the illustrations that De Cora did for “The Sick Child"
and “Gray Wolf’s Daughter” were antithetical to his conception of Native Americans, whom he portrayed as savage killers in “On the Warpath,” and of the west, which he saw as a scenic backdrop to showcase masculine vigor.

For Pyle, there was “no more picturesque object in the world than the Western cow-puncher” (133). Illustrators like Howard Pyle and Frederic Remington saw the west much like the writers Owen Wister and Theodore Roosevelt: a place where one went to mine images that would shore up easterners’ uncertain self-conceptions. When Pyle places the cowboy at the center of his mental picture of the west, it is in response to eastern concerns about non-white immigration and the loss of American manhood. According to Susan Bernardin, writers and artists who published in literary magazines like Harper’s and the Atlantic Monthly imagined the west as “a model for a renewed nationalism that was pointedly Anglo-Saxon” (226), while Cari Carpenter notes that white writers who wrote about Native Americans meant to provide “masculine antidotes to what they perceived as modern effeminacy” (156). It is significant, then, that although De Cora’s depictions of Native Americans in Harper’s may have been influenced by Pyle in technique, she shunned white cowboys as subject matter and centered her paintings around Native American women instead.

The untitled illustration at the center of “The Sick Child” focuses on two women and two girls watching over a sick baby (see fig. 4.6). Unlike the header and footer illustrations, both of which feature Native American characters against a prairie backdrop (see figs. 4.7 and 4.8), this interior scene is unremittingly
domestic. The adult women are surrounded by evidence of domestic labor—baskets, bowls, textiles, and children. Some of these artifacts, such as the rugs, baskets, and beaded necklaces, would have been recognizable to white viewers as stereotypically Indian items sold at train stops to tourists. The sense of "otherness" evoked by these items is mitigated by more familiar objects, however, such as a cradle, doll, and vaguely Victorian dresses. In fact, the scene as a whole is reminiscent of other popular turn-of-the-century mother and child paintings, such as those by Mary Cassatt. Like Cassatt, De Cora emphasizes the Madonna-like quality of the composition by dressing the baby in white and lighting the mother's face so that she appears serene and beatific.

According to Elizabeth Hutchinson, De Cora employs sentimental themes in order to encourage white readers and viewers to feel empathy for Native American characters living in the present rather than in some idealized or heroic past (744). "The Sick Child," for example, is narrated by a little Native American girl who must plant some tobacco leaves and red feathers on a patch of bare earth in order to cure her ailing sister. While the details surrounding the healing ritual seem exotic enough to strike the reader as authentically Native American, De Cora is careful to describe her protagonist in ways that readers of sentimental
fiction would have found familiar. She feels “full of reverence and strong faith” in her ability to find a snowless spot of ground in the middle of winter, but is soon overcome by “a feeling of doubt and fear” that no such spot will be provided for her (447). In some ways, “The Sick Child” is remarkably like Remington’s “The Story of Dry Leaves” that would appear in Harper’s a few months later. In both stories, a Native American protagonist contends against natural forces in order to save the life of a family member. In both cases, the family member dies.

However, while in Remington’s story the culprit of the protagonist's initial troubles is a neighboring tribe that destroys his village, De Cora’s narrator blames the “white monotony” that covers every inch of the surrounding prairie (446). Granted, both stories pit their protagonists against seasonal forces, but it’s hard not to equate the expanse of white snow in De Cora’s story with the expanse of white civilization that surrounds her reservation. Indeed, evidence of that influence creeps into the language of the story when both the narrator and the shaman use King James English to ask for intercession on behalf of the dying baby. The narrator prays, “Spirit grandfather, [...] I pray thee restore my little sister to health” (446), while the shaman says, “Inasmuch as though hast given me power to cure the sick, [...] allow me to recall the spirit of this child to its body once more” (448). By using the Christian convention of referring to deity as “thee” and “thou,” De Cora aligns the prayers of her Native American characters with those of her white readers. She also raises the possibility that one of the reasons that the narrator doesn’t wait until she finds a patch of bare ground before laying down her offering is because she is trapped between white and
Native American civilizations. It is noteworthy that the only time the phrase, “Inasmuch as thou” appears in the King James Version of the Bible is in the Old Testament book of Ruth—another story in which a young woman chooses between two cultures. As the narrator of “The Sick Child” points out, “it was a hard struggle for so small a child” (447).

The fact that it was a struggle, however, indicates another key difference between Remington’s young hunter that surrenders to the inevitable starvation of his family and Angel De Cora’s narrator who must choose to either trust in nature to “lay bare the earth” or succumb to the temptation to deposit her offering in the “white monotony” of frozen snow (447). For De Cora, the extinction of Native American culture was not the unavoidable result of natural selection, as Remington suggests, but a choice for individuals to make. In a letter she wrote to Cora Mae Folsom in 1892, De Cora ridicules the idea that Indians are naturally selected for extinction and asks, “Do you think it is too much for an Injun to read Darwin?” (Hutchinson 748). In both of the stories she writes for Harper’s, De Cora counters the predominant view that Native Americans are the helpless victims of social Darwinism by emphasizing her protagonists’ abilities to make personal choices.

For example, the opening paragraph of “Gray Wolf’s Daughter” introduces a young woman whose “mind had been wandering here and there to this and that one of her associates—to one who had been to school, to another who had stayed at home and was a thorough Indian, comparing the life of the one with the life of the other” (860). Unlike the little girl in Zitkala-Ša’s “Impressions of an
Indian Childhood," or indeed like De Cora herself, who was tricked into boarding a train bound for the Hampton Institute in Virginia, Gray Wolf's daughter makes a rational decision to leave home to obtain a boarding school education. According to Sarah McAnulty, "Gray Wolf's Daughter" offers one of the few positive descriptions by Native American writers of the transition from the reservation to boarding school. Stating that she "had for a long time desired knowledge of the white man's ways," the narrator seems eager to avail herself of the opportunities that life off the reservation could offer her. This is not to say that the choice isn't without sacrifice. The fact that only the friend who stayed at home remained a "thorough Indian" indicates that Gray Wolf's daughter is aware that in gaining the advantages of one culture, she may lose attributes of the other.

In the illustration that heads the story, De Cora underscores the difficulty of the choice by placing her protagonist in the center of the picture, balanced between two cultures. The symmetry of the illustration is broken only by the tilt of

Fig. 4.7. Gray Wolf's Daughter. Header.
the girl's head as she looks toward the beaded necklace that her mother had
given her in preparation for her final ceremonial dance. Rather than presenting
the young woman's departure as inevitable, De Cora is careful to give both
options equal weight. The girl's arms are raised up evenly, one on each side of
the illustration. On the viewer's right, beneath De Cora's Winnebago signature,
the choice to remain a "thorough Indian" is represented by the beads given to her
by her mother. On the viewer's left, above De Cora's Anglo signature, the girl
holds up a single braid that both echoes the shape of the necklace and
foreshadows her eventual shearing when she arrives at the boarding school.
The firelight throws the right side of the painting into shadow, which may indicate
the light and dark colors commonly attributed to the two races, or the
enlightenment that new education will offer and the ignorance she leaves behind.
In the final illustration at the foot of the story this light and dark scheme is
reversed, as if De Cora is hesitant to advocate too strongly for one choice or the
other. This time the Indian village on the right side of the picture occupies the

Fig. 4.8. Gray Wolf's Daughter. Footer.
brighter half of the painting, while darker woods on the left represent Gray Wolf’s daughter’s unknown future. She has made her choice, however, as she has moved out of the center onto the left side of the picture plane and replaced her mother’s beads with a design that looks somewhat like a Christian cross.

By giving her characters the choice to exchange Indian customs for Anglo education, De Cora counteracts Remington’s view that Native Americans were destined for extinction and Frank Baum’s view that they were incapable of assimilation. She articulates the cost of discarding Native American culture, however, by showing what Gray Wolf’s daughter gives up to enter boarding school, and by implying that if the narrator of “The Sick Child” had had more faith in tribal practices, her sister might have lived. In addition to perhaps being legitimately conflicted about their decisions to advocate for American Indians using the tools of European American culture, both Zitkala-Ša and Angel De Cora are careful not to agitate so stridently that they alienate their white readerships. De Cora accomplishes this by describing boarding school education as a positive option. Following the censure she received from the Carlisle Institute after publishing “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” Zitkala-Ša sought to avoid such criticism by setting her next stories deep in the past.

Zitkala-Ša and Angel De Cora Collaborate

At least at first glance, Zitkala-Ša’s *Old Indian Legends* (1901) seems to be sufficiently non-confrontational to appeal to mainstream audiences. Cathy Davidson and Ada Norris note that in the 1920s, stories from *Old Indian Legends* appeared in textbooks and readers for school children throughout the Eastern
United States (xiii). Plus, since they are ostensibly set in pre-Columbian times, they don’t “bear hard on anyone’s pet concerns,” as Zitkala-Ša explained in a letter to Carlos Montezuma. Several critics, however, have noted that even though they don’t feature any explicit accounts of Indian/white relations, Zitkala-Ša’s Indian legends do contain a veiled critique of encroaching white civilization. In making this argument, Julianne Newmark claims that Zitkala-Ša’s ability to manipulate the English language makes her an “empowered literary trickster,” much like the central trickster figure of many of the legends (336). According to Newmark, Zitkala-Ša employs deceptively simple language in order to confirm stereotypical assumptions about Native Americans while simultaneously exposing the high cost of cultural assimilation (338).

Much of Zitkala-Ša’s coded language centers on the figure of the trickster Iktomi, who makes an appearance in all but two of the tales. In “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” Zitkala-Ša states that Iktomi stories were the legends she loved best as a little girl and her inclusion of so many of them in her 1901 publication indicates that she continued to favor them as an adult (15). Iktomi is a fitting character for Zitkala-Ša to love, since one of the most striking things about him is his ambiguous nature. According to Jeanne Smith, in many Native American traditions Iktomi is both the hero and the villain. He invented language and culture and saved his people from destruction, but was also “deceitful, greedy, selfish, and amoral” (47). In most of her stories, however, Zitkala-Ša plays down Iktomi’s heroic side and emphasizes his villainy. For example, while many renditions of “Iya, the Camp-Eater” give Iktomi the primary role in saving
his people from destruction, he makes only a brief appearance in Zitkala-Ša's version. According to Smith, Zitkala-Ša makes these and other changes in order to align Iktomi with the white colonizers of the American west. In Zitkala-Ša's version of "Dance in a Buffalo Skull," for example, Iktomi becomes a "vast, impersonal, nearly invisible force sweeping the plains (49). In other tales, Iktomi seems to embody the pettiness and greed that Zitkala-Ša attributed to white politicians and bureaucrats who impoverished Native American communities in order to line their own pockets.

In reworking her tribal legends, Zitkala-Ša is careful not to condemn her white audience too directly. At first glance, in fact, her preface to Old Indian Legends seems to emphasize the childhood naiveté, ethnography, and mythology that Mark Rifkin says characterized most accounts by Native American writers of traditional tribal life and rendered them innocuous to white readers. For one thing, she describes the legends as stories for children, meant to be listened to around the campfire before bed. She also places the tales firmly in the past, calling them "old legends" and "relics," while at the same time offering them up to a new culture to consume (v). By stating that the "old legends of America belong quite as much to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the black-haired aborigine," Zitkala-Ša seems to acknowledge that the time of her people has passed and that as their conquerors, the blue-eyed patriots are the rightful inheritors of her culture (iv). Akin to American writers and artists traveling through a conquered Spain, white readers can admire the quaintness and
primitive nature of these Native American legends serene in the knowledge that the stories now belong to them.

Zitkala-Ša’s preface is not entirely quiescent, however. A closer reading shows a subtext that both condemns American colonialism for ravaging Native American culture and demands equal treatment for Native Americans in the present. “These legends are relics of our country’s once virgin soil,” she begins, drawing attention to the fact that if the land was once virginal, then white settlers were the despoilers (v). Whether “our country” refers to the country inhabited by Native Americans before the European colonists’ arrival or the country that belongs to both whites and Native Americans in 1901, Zitkala-Ša refuses to cede the land entirely to white expansionism. She makes this point again when she justifies her translations of the legends by stating that “America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue” (vi). Zitkala-Ša reminds her white readers that they are not the original inhabitants of the American continent and that their occupation is relatively recent and perhaps even tenuous.

In the last paragraph, Zitkala-Ša reveals that her true purpose in making the legends of her people available to English-speaking readers is not to make them inheritors of her culture, but to argue for the “great brotherhood of mankind” (vi). If the “blue-eyed little patriot” recognizes his common humanity with the “black-haired aborigine,” then perhaps he will be more likely to extend to Native Americans the same civil rights and economic opportunities that he has. Zitkala-Ša’s legends are not simply children’s stories from a distant past; instead they are a subtle but insistent call for racial equality and equal protection under the
law. Seen as a political tract, Zitkala-Ša’s preface aligns the stories of *Old Indian Legends* with her later activism. Zitkala-Ša considered herself directly responsible for the Act of Congress on June 2, 1924 that declared Native Americans citizens of the United States. In a letter she wrote to James Brockway in 1932, she claimed that the act was “directly attributed to [her] lecturing work among the Federation of Women’s Clubs and civic and commercial groups throughout the country” (Raymond and Gertrude Bonnin Collection). Far from being the tamed remnant of a conquered culture, Zitkala-Ša’s *Old Indian Legends* are firmly rooted in early-twentieth century concerns about the federal government’s Indian policies and Native American rights.

One of the ways that the legends seem at least as indicative of early twentieth-century Indian life as they do the pre-Columbian period is their constant preoccupation with hunger. Zitkala-Ša was deeply aware of the lack of food both on reservations and in government-run boarding schools. In an address she gave in 1928 to the Indian Rights Association at Atlantic City, Zitkala-Ša quotes from a recent report that expressed the federal government’s goal to feed Native American children for eleven cents a day, but then she goes on to explain that the children weren’t even getting that much (Raymond and Gertrude Bonnin Collection). She also clarifies a 1922 report in which the House Appropriations Committee acknowledged that it favored “keeping subsistence down to the lowest possible point” by adding that the committee was “speaking of rations to old and indigent Indians and orphans.” Zitkala-Ša may not have agreed with housing Native Americans on reservations and boarding schools, but she also
felt strongly that once there, they needed to be adequately fed. In *Old Indian Legends*, Zitkala-Ša reflects the extreme lack of food provided to Native Americans by the federal government by making the majority of them about starvation. Eight of the fourteen stories, in fact, have to do with looking for food, preparing food, or not sharing food with others.

In one of the legends, Iktomi tries to figure out a way to avoid sharing his boiled fish with a neighboring muskrat. The narrator makes Iktomi’s starvation apparent in the opening paragraphs (Iktomi is “ravenous” and “often [...] without food”), but also makes it clear that as a member of a plains culture, he is expected to share his food with other members of the tribe (27-28). When Iktomi deliberately ignores the hungry muskrat, however, his neighbor doesn’t know how to react. Iktomi displays some of the markers of a tribesperson by humming an old dance song and beating time with a buffalo-horned spoon, but he also clearly violates the “custom of the plains people” by not offering to share any of his soup.

In *The Muskrat Began to Feel Awkward*, Angel De Cora dramatizes the disconnect between Iktomi’s Indian appearance and his un-Indian actions by dressing him in fringed buckskin and moccasins, but posing him so that he stares out of the picture frame rather than at the muskrat occupying the parallel space (see fig. 4.9). The figures are personifications of two different animals, the muskrat and the spider, but they are dressed so similarly that it is hard not to think of them as belonging to the same tribe. Of course, their obvious kinship makes Iktomi’s determination to let the muskrat starve all the more striking. A
rising column of smoke, which in popular images of plains Indians generally signifies communication, only serves to separate the two figures more completely. As is usual in these stories, Iktomi’s trickery eventually causes him to lose the soup to the muskrat, after which he laments not having “shared [his] food like a real Dakota” (32).

Distinguishing between the “real” and the imposter seems to be a central preoccupation in many of the legends. In “Iktomi and the Fawn,” Iktomi tries unsuccessfully to disguise himself as a peacock, a flying arrow, and a fawn. In “The Toad and the Boy,” a toad attempts to convince a kidnapped child that she is his human mother. In “Shooting of the Red Eagle,” Iktomi masquerades as the “blood-clot boy,” a Dakota brave who spends his days avenging and protecting the Sioux people. Stories about proving one’s authenticity must have resonated with Zitkala-Ša, who evidently felt that she had to gloss over her half-white parentage in “Impressions of an Indian Childhood.”

Both as a writer and as a political operative, Zitkala-Ša was conscious of the risks of appearing before white audiences in Native dress—not just because she might reinforce negative stereotypes, but because it opened her up to
criticism by those who felt she wasn’t fully Native American. When she appeared before Congress in 1918 to testify in support of the illegalization of peyote, for example, the ethnologist James Mooney took her to task for wearing inauthentic attire. Mooney criticized Zitkala-Ša for appearing in clothing and accessories that were from non-Sioux tribes, including, ironically, a fan used in peyote ceremonies. Cleaver Warden, an Arapaho supporter of ceremonial peyote smoking, echoed Mooney’s criticisms then added, “We only ask a fair and impartial trial by reasonable white people, not half breeds who do not know a bit of their ancestors or kindred” (quoted in Carpenter 150). Of course, both men were critical of Zitkala-Ša primarily because of her support of anti-peyote legislation, but they expressed those criticisms by questioning her authenticity as a Native American. For Mooney, being a “real” Sioux Indian meant dressing entirely in Sioux clothing. For Warden, it meant being full-blooded. For Zitkala-Ša, however, being a “real Indian is to work for one’s tribe,” and dressing up to play a part is sometimes part of that work.

In a letter she wrote to Arthur Parker the previous year, Zitkala-Ša explained why she appeared before white audiences in Indian dress, noting that “[e]ven a clown has to dress differently from his usual citizen’s suit” (151). Zitkala-Ša was evidently aware that wearing an Indian costume exposed her to ridicule by those who questioned its authenticity as well as reinforcing white audience’s preconceptions, but she was willing to appear in such a costume because it got people to listen to her. When she agreed to play the organ for a church in Pasadena that stipulated she show up to the recital “all in Indian dress,”
for instance, she did so because she felt that “the use of Indian dress” was a “drawing card […] for a good cause.” Like so many of her literary productions, Zitkala-Ša’s wardrobe choices were a tool that allowed her to alter some of her audience’s preconceptions precisely because she conformed to others. Another example of this strategy is Zitkala-Ša’s tendency to pass herself off as a direct descendent of Sitting Bull.

Even though Yankton tribal records show that her mother was actually older than Sitting Bull (Fisher xvii), Zitkala-Ša promulgated the notion that she was his granddaughter, even going so far as displaying a picture of herself at the Sitting Bull monument dedication in her home and sending copies of the photograph to her friends. While newspapers such as the Washington Times and the New York Times took her claim to be a literal one, Davidson and Norris point out that Zitkala-Ša had a broader understanding of kinship (xiv). In an essay entitled “Heart to Heart Talk” (1924), Zitkala-Ša explains that “by marriage, by blood, or by adoption every member of the tribe bore some relation to the rest” (262). Referring to herself as Sitting Bull’s granddaughter, then, was not just a way to tap into popular sentiment about the Sioux Chief; it also allowed her to acknowledge and subvert domestic ideologies about family structure. By encouraging the mainstream press to attribute Sitting Bull’s heroism to her by virtue of genealogical descent, Zitkala-Ša pays lip service to the idea that kinship revolves solely around hereditary bloodlines. However, by expanding her family circle to include “every member of the tribe,” and claiming as her grandfather a man that was not related to her in the way that Anglo-Americans normally
acknowledged, Zitkala-Ša devalues the importance of blood relationships and reinscribes the communal significance of the tribe.

Many of Zitkala-Ša's stories in Old Indian Legends also pay lip service to Anglo-American values and social norms, only to show how those social structures are actually not as effective as traditional tribal structures. For instance, one of the purposes of breaking up reservations into smaller farm plots under the Dawes Act was to deemphasize the importance of the tribe and increase the importance of the nuclear family. "The Badger and the Bear," which like all of the Old Indian Legends purports to take place in pre-Columbian times, starts out with conventional family structures already firmly in place. Living by themselves in an underground dwelling at the edge of a forest, a family of badgers fulfill gender and familial roles that would be easily recognizable to early twentieth-century readers: the father badger hunts, the mother badger cooks, and the baby badgers stay home and get fat (61). Angela De Cora’s accompanying illustration reinforces those roles with an interior scene that shows the members of the badger family tightly clustered together. While

Fig. 4.10. Over a Bed of Coals.
the mother prepares venison in the foreground, the father places his body protectively between his children and the bear who has come for dinner. Their respective roles are further emphasized by the cooking implements in the mother’s hand and the bow and arrows hanging over the father’s head.

However, these conventional roles soon prove ineffectual against the invading bear who wishes to take over the family’s home, as the mother badger bitterly notes when she laments having fed the bear enough meat to allow him to grow strong enough to displace them. Faced with the threat of the much larger animal, both parents attempt to fulfill their traditional roles, but fail. The father badger gives way before the bear’s repeated threats that he is “strong, very strong,” and the mother is made so nervous that she can no longer sew buckskin without piercing her fingers (65-66). After the bear hurls them out on their heads, none of the badger family is able to resume his or her prior roles. The father can no longer hunt meat without his arrows, the mother has no meals to prepare and no home to manage, while the children grow hungry from lack of food. After the father is unsuccessful at begging any food from the bear family now occupying his dwelling, he tries a new tactic.

Snatching up a clot of buffalo blood left over from the bear’s latest kill, the badger hurries it back to his family. In preparing the blood, the badger is careful to observe all the forms of traditional Sioux ceremony: he purges himself in a steam bath, prays to the Great Spirit to bless the blood clot, and places the clot upon sacred stones. Immediately, a Dakota brave springs from the blood clot and declares his intent to avenge the badger against the bear. It is significant
that the badger was only able to stand up against the stronger invader when he abandoned the gender roles that he occupied at the beginning of the story. The father badger prepared the food, after all, and in creating the first human member of the Dakota tribe, he became part of a social organization that was much more successful in dealing with the bear than he had been on his own. In fact, the narration expands the definitions of kinship to include tribal relationships when the badger calls the blood-clot boy “son” and the avenger calls the badger “father.” When the Dakota brave sets out “over the earth” to right other wrongs in the last line of the story, he broadens the badger’s influence far beyond the underground dwelling place described in the first paragraph.

In “The Badger and the Bear,” Zitkala-Ša begins by giving white readers a portrait of Native American life that conforms to their own notions of gender and family structures, but ends by drastically expanding the possibilities of what those structures could look like. Furthermore, she seems to indicate to her Native American readers that the best way to withstand the invading white culture that the bear in the story represents is not to abandon tribal customs as the Dawes Act demands, but to protect against it by re-embracing Native American culture.

**Conclusion**

It is easy to see Zitkala-Ša’s stories in *Old Indian Legends* as a retreat from the more obviously critical essays and stories she published in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. This view reflects the narrative promoted by Laura Wexler and others who argue that Zitkala-Ša confronted the literary establishment briefly and stridently only to back away from an
overwhelmingly more powerful force. Wexler’s one-sentence summary of Zitkala-Ša’s life after mainstream literary production describes her political career like the second round of a boxing match after having lost her first: “Forsaking New York and literature, she married a Sioux, returned to the reservation, and became, eventually, an early and pugnacious Native American activist, lobbying in Washington, D. C. for the rights of her people” (122). A close examination of the stories reveals a more nuanced strategy, however. As she did in Harper’s and the Atlantic Monthly, in Old Indian Legends Zitkala-Ša employs the tropes and techniques of the dominant literary culture in order to critique that culture’s policies and attempt to improve conditions for Native Americans.

Audre Lorde’s famous aphorism that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” exposes some of the difficulties that Zitkala-Ša faced in appropriating elements from the dominant culture in order to challenge the way that that culture represented Native Americans (112). In each case, she risked buttressing the hegemony she meant to challenge. For example, when Zitkala-Ša privileges nuclear families and conventional gender roles in “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” or “The Badger and the Bear,” she risks convincing her readers that white family structures are more natural or preferable to Native Americans than tribal communities. Similarly, when she accepts Roosevelt’s premise that eastern culture feminizes Native American men, she seems to validate his solution of turning lands that had previously supported the Sioux peoples into a therapeutic proving ground for white men. While it is possible to interpret Zitkala-Ša’s use of sentimental rhetoric as simply the price of admission that a
marginalized writer must pay in order to publish in mainstream literary magazines, her deployment of those strategies suggests a more subversive agenda. By ascribing “white” social norms to Native American characters, but then showing how those attributes are ultimately debilitating or destructive, Zitkala-Ša challenges the efficacy of those norms and the wisdom of indiscriminately using them to supplant Native American culture.

Both Angel De Cora and Zitkala-Ša learned to “use the master’s tools” to construct an alternate representation of Native Americans. Instead of leading a “schizophrenic life,” as Mary Stout argues (71), or being “caught between two cultures,” as Patricia Okker suggests (94), Zitkala-Ša skillfully manipulated multiple genres in order to provide a counterweight to the stereotypical savage or obsolete Indian that frequented literary magazines at the turn-of-the-last century.

In his introduction to Native American Literatures, Gerald Vizenor points out the irony of the fact that the children who attended Indian boarding schools and learned English also started a multigenerational movement of Native Americans who fought for local and national tribal rights (5). Zitkala-Ša and Angel De Cora were at the forefront of that movement, as their work in Harper’s Monthly Magazine attests. Rather than being victims of the dominant discourse as practiced by Remington and others, both women actively engaged with and participated in that discourse in order to shape the political debate during the assimilation era of Indian-white relations.
CONCLUSION

While most art historians place the “Golden Age of Illustration” between 1880 and 1920, magazine illustration actually reached its peak between about 1900 and 1910. One way to track the public’s increased demand for illustrated fiction at the end of the nineteenth century and its subsequent decline shortly after is by the changing titles of what is now the New York Times Book Review. In 1896, the Times’ “Book Review Supplement” was renamed “Review of Books and Art.” By 1911, the word “Art” was removed and it became simply the “New York Times Review of Books” (Ulrichs). Between 1896 and 1911, however, readers and editors of the Saturday supplement spent as much time arguing about the merits of illustrators and illustrations as they did the quality of authors and their texts. When one reader noted in 1904 that Howard Pyle’s backgrounds were “rich in color, harmonious, and effective,” another wrote back to say that Pyle’s work on “The Story of Adhelmar” was so bad that if the author “has survived the sight of them, he is doubtless going about in quest of the artist and thirsting for his gore” (Hoyt 34). Two weeks later, a letter writer responded to the debate by arguing that Pyle’s illustrations were perfectly adequate (“[h]e at least occasionally gives us a good picture”), but that the illustrator Henry Huit “supplies a long-suffering public with chalky nothings that are an insult to both intelligence and taste” (Hyle 754). The fact that entire articles and letters to the
editor were devoted to commenting on the illustrations of a particular text rather than on the text itself, and that illustrators were named without elaboration, like well-known celebrities, indicates an intense level of interest that wasn’t matched a decade earlier and wouldn’t be equaled a decade since. Given the degree of attention that magazine illustration received at the turn of the last century, it makes one wonder why it fell out of favor so quickly.

In *The Magazine in America: 1741-1990*, John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman argue that the reason fiction for adults ceased to be illustrated so soon after such illustration became popular is that the same advancements that made high-quality magazine illustration possible also rendered it obsolete (71). Before 1900, technological inadequacies made it difficult to accurately reproduce full-color paintings, while after 1910 that same technology would allow publishers to reproduce photographs for less than they would have to pay for illustrations. In other words, illustrators had a short window of time between the moment when magazines could do their art justice and the moment when it was no longer possible to make a living drawing solely for literary magazines. Alex Nemerov makes a similar argument about technology being both a benefit and a bane for turn-of-the-century illustrators, although he doesn’t mention money. Instead, he argues that the demand for illustrated fiction went up after other media began to compete for readers’ attention, and that glossy illustrations were meant to entice the public back to reading books (“The Boy in the Bed”). Once film (then radio, then television) became a dominant art form, illustrations were no longer seen as viable competition.
In *The Illustrator in America: 1860-2000*, Walt Reed argues that while illustration may have had to compete with other media for the public's attention, it didn’t die out completely until the beginning of the Great Depression. Artists who had previously been able to make a comfortable living through magazine illustration now survived only because of the assistance of the WPA (11). As advertisers reduced spending, magazines that had prospered in previous decades folded. Those that survived called for less fiction and fewer illustrations. Arthur William Brown, for example, who illustrated an average of a story a week in 1929, claimed to have just a single assignment two years later (203). Although it may be true that the lack of advertising dollars in the 1930s ended many magazine artists’ careers, the reading public began to voice distaste for illustrated fiction long before that.

In his 1946 book about the first hundred years of *Scribner’s* history, Roger Burlingame uses Edith Wharton’s novels to track the decline of illustration in literary fiction. In 1907, *The Fruit of the Tree* was published with a frontispiece by Alonzo Kimball, but by 1913 the only thing appearing opposite the title page of *The Custom of the Country* was “a dignified blank” (226). For Burlingame, the lack of illustrations in “serious fiction” in the second decade of the century marked the point when the reading public finally “grew up.” Burlingame was not the only writer to view illustrations in fiction as juvenile and their fall from favor as a sign of readers’ maturity. Mary Austin was “strongly prejudiced against illustrated fiction except for children” (Stout 83), for example, and several contributors to the “Saturday Review of Books and Art” felt that adults shouldn’t
need to look at illustrations in order to interpret a story. William P. S. Earle, of New Jersey, admitted that when he was younger “pictures were necessary for clear interpretation,” but as an adult, relying on illustrations “as a means of helping […] imagination” could only lead to “an avidity for idleness of thought.”

Throughout its fifteen-year existence, the advantages and disadvantages of illustrating fiction was a hot topic on the pages of the Saturday Review. When a *New York Times* editorialist complained in 1900 that “commonplace and meaningless illustrations” didn’t match the mental vision prompted by an author’s text, he was met with a flurry of replies (“Meaningless Illustrations” 232). A letter writer signing him or herself “S. Q.” responded by stating that “if the artist is given a free hand, he will illuminate the text […] and give it an added zest and charm for the reader” (10). Bret Gyle disagreed, claiming that “illustrations appeal chiefly to those […] who are unable to feel and appreciate the inward spirit of the writer” (13). He worried that for many readers, interpreting texts through the lens of their illustrations would result in “a loss of individual thought.”

Not all responders were equally circumspect. Many readers who wrote in to the *Times* weren’t as concerned with loss of meaning or cultural homogenization as they were with illustrations that didn’t accurately represent the characters or plot. John Hoyt, for example, complained when a heroine who was described in a story as an aristocratic beauty was painted, in his opinion, with the “face of a peasant” and an expression of “intense, sullen stupidity” (34). A. von W. Leslie, a professor of English Literature at Baylor University, sent off an angry letter when a character from Tolstoy’s “Resurrection” was pictured at dinner
wearing a Prince Albert coat even though the events of the narrative clearly didn’t give him enough time to change into formal evening dress. Although these complaints seem petty, they do illustrate the unease with which the reading public thought about illustrated fiction, to say nothing of the writers themselves. While Walt Reed claims that male writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald continued to seek out illustrators for their short fiction well into the 20s and 30s (163), women writers like Mary Austin demonstrated an unwillingness to submit their work to another artist’s interpretation much earlier in the century.

When Mary Austin published *The Land of Little Rain* in 1903, E. Boyd Smith’s illustrations were considered a major contributor to its success. When she published *The Flock* three years later, she was eager to have it illustrated and even made some provisional sketches to guide the artist. Her enthusiasm waned after *Isidro* (1905), however, when illustrator Eric Pape vastly misrepresented her main character. According to Janis Stout, Pape’s depictions of Jacinta were highly romanticized and emphasized her conventional femininity and dependence (83). Rather than picturing an independent woman who drew “deep breaths of freedom and relief” when she went horseback riding alone in men’s clothing (*Isidro* 353), Pape’s drawing shows the main character “languishing on the arm of her man” (Stout 83). By the time *Lost Borders* was being readied for publication in 1909, Austin begged her production editor not to include any artwork, stating, “I sincerely hope you will not insist on illustrating it” (quoted in Stout 83).
It is likely that part of Austin's reluctance to have her fiction illustrated was her recognition that male publishers and illustrators were sure to dilute her feminist message. It is also likely that the loss of control Austin experienced with Houghton Mifflin (her request that *Lost Borders* not be illustrated was ignored) made her more aware of the loss of power that writers endured when their narratives were imposed upon by unsympathetic illustrations. This was true of other women writers as well. When Willa Cather (who had considerable experience working with illustrators as an editor at *McClure's Magazine*) was able to take an active part in selecting an illustrator and guiding his work, as she did with W. W. Benda for *My Ántonia* (1918), she loved the resultant illustrations and considered them an integral part of her text. When she had no control over selecting or directing the artist, she deeply disliked having her work interpreted by other artists (159). She hated the illustrations in her first novel, for example, and felt that the artist who drew the pictures for her short story “Two Friends” made everybody look like a “galoot” (108). Cather’s ambivalent attitude toward illustrated fiction demonstrates that authors during the golden age of illustration were most likely to seek out illustrators and be pleased with the final product when they were allowed to take an active role in shaping the way that the illustrations interacted with the text. Since women authors of the period were less likely to be allowed that opportunity than their male counterparts, they realized much earlier that presenting their texts alongside somebody else’s illustrations was often inimical to their work. Writers like Ernest Hemingway and
F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had more control over the way their fiction was illustrated, took much longer to reject illustration in fiction.

In his introduction to the 1948 edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway explained how he felt about book illustrations: "unless the artist is as good or better a painter or draftsman than the writer is a writer, there can be no more disappointing thing than for the writer to see the things and the places and the people that he remembers making drawn and put on paper by someone else who was not there" (Hemingway, Bruccoli, and Baughman 96-97). This is not to say that Hemingway “hated illustrations,” as Charles Scribner III once claimed, but that he preferred illustrations that didn’t conflict with his own textual representations (12). The previous year, in fact, Hemingway had written to his editor Maxwell Perkins about asking Pablo Picasso to illustrate a reprint of one of his novels (Hemingway, Perkins, and Bruccoli 341). Perkins discouraged the idea, stating that he didn’t think the painter would “do what he should as an illustrator, and subordinate himself to the writer” (341). While Hemingway didn’t pursue his request further, it seems clear from his desire to include illustrations in other works that he didn’t mind the idea of attaching another artist’s vision to his text as long as he could carefully control the outcome.

While preparing the manuscript for *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), Hemingway initially planned to incorporate over two hundred illustrations. He canvassed Spain, purchasing drawings, photographs, and paintings, and wrote excitedly to his editor that the result would be a “very big book” with “wonderful pictures” (34). When his editor responded that the depression-era market
couldn’t sustain an edition with any more than sixteen illustrations, Hemingway fought back. Claiming that the images were “the most necessary part” of his treatise on bull fighting, (169) Hemingway offered to pay for the cost of including them himself (162). He also offered to let Scribner’s publish two of the chapters serially without charge, as long as the profits went toward paying for the illustrations in the book version, just to show that he was “damned serious” about their inclusion (164).

In the end, Hemingway and his publisher compromised with 82 photographs that were relegated to the back of the book because they were cheaper to print that way. Hemingway remained intensely involved in the presentation of the images, however, writing the captions, approving the page proofs, and drafting the layouts by hand (168). Only two of the paintings Hemingway had purchased made it into the final publication: a frontispiece by Juan Gris and a dust jacket image by Roberto Domingo. He insisted that both men get credit for their work and asked that reproductions of the paintings feature prominently in bookstore window displays (177). F. Scott Fitzgerald’s relationship with illustration wasn’t nearly so difficult.

In the twenty years following his first sale to The Smart Set in 1919, Fitzgerald published more than 150 short stories in illustrated periodicals (Bruccoli 13). Many of these, of course, were illustrated, and Fitzgerald took an active role in shaping their visual presentation, from selecting the artist to giving suggestions about how to compose the drawings. One of these artists was Arthur William Brown, who first illustrated “The Camel’s Back” for the Saturday
Evening Post and then continued to illustrate Fitzgerald’s fiction for other magazines as well. Fitzgerald, who liked Brown’s work and lobbied his editor to include it in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), would write to him with pictorial suggestions even before the stories were finished (Bruccoli and Baughman 54). According to Brown, this was because Fitzgerald was “always late on deadlines,” forcing the illustrator to “make drawings from his vague descriptions” (quoted in Fitzgerald, Bruccoli, and Baughman 527). It is clear from the substance of these descriptions, however, that Fitzgerald had definite ideas about how his stories ought to be illustrated and worked hard to communicate those ideas to the artist.

In a 1922 letter to Brown about “Winter Dreams” that begins with a lengthy rehearsal of the plot and ends with detailed descriptions of representative scenes, Fitzgerald expressed his hope that his descriptions would provide enough fodder for at least two illustrations. After reassuring Brown that “I like your work very much and was tremendously pleased at your illustrations for ‘The Camel’s Back’ and for ‘The Jellybean’,” Fitzgerald offered a suggestion for a third drawing (this time picturing Judy Jones hitting a golf ball into Mr. Hendrick’s stomach). Worried that his written descriptions wouldn’t convey his full intentions, Fitzgerald accompanied this last suggestion with a drawing of his own, complete with notes about the composition, clothing color, and a caption (Bruccoli and Baughman 55).

Comparing Hemingway’s and Fitzgerald’s experiences with Austin’s and Cather’s demonstrates that the prospect of having one’s text illustrated was not a gender neutral event. While the two men may have been displeased at times...
with the way their stories or characters were represented, they never expressed the reluctance or animosity toward illustrations that Mary Austin did. Furthermore, they appeared to have far more freedom to interact with and influence the editors and illustrators that contributed to their work. This is not just a matter of having more experience in the publishing world. Fitzgerald was brand new to the industry when he started communicating with Arthur Brown, while Cather had years of editing experience in a literary magazine before she began writing novels. Instead, the friction that so often resulted when female authors were paired with male illustrators is indicative of the social and political divide between the publishing establishment and the women writers of the period.

Authors who championed the notion of female independence must have been deeply unsettling to the publishers, editors, and illustrators of their work, who used masculine-oriented illustrations as one way of pushing back. The jarring divide between feminist texts and conservative illustrations was made increasingly evident as women writers became more outspoken about their political aims. While changing technology and economic forces undoubtedly played an important role in the end of the golden age of illustration, so did the politically and socially revealing disconnections between the texts of women writers and the pictures created by male artists to illustrate them.
WORKS CITED


Dawes, Henry L. “Have We Failed with the Indian?” *The Atlantic Monthly* 84 (1899): 280-85.


253


Hopkins, Pauline Elizabeth. Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South. Boston: Colored Co-operative Publishing Company,


---. “Mr. Dilsey in Hoboken.” *Life* 10 Apr 1884.


*Raymond and Gertrude Bonnin Collection.* MSS 1714. L. Tom Perry Special Collections. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University-Provo.


Reynolds, Joshua. “Mrs. Lloyd Carving Her Husband’s Name on the Trunk of a Tree.” *Sir Joshua Reynolds.* London: George Newnes Limited, 49.


261


Skeete, J. Alexandre. “After the Meats Came the Puddings and Pies.” *Colored American Magazine* Dec 1900: 82.


263


