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AMERICAN CULTURE OF SERVITUDE: THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN ANTEBELLUM LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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AMERICAN CULTURE OF SERVITUDE: THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN ANTEBELLUM LITERATURE AND CULTURE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

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2015
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

AMERICAN CULTURE OF SERVITUDE: THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN ANTEBELLUM LITERATURE AND CULTURE

My dissertation argues that domestic service alters a culture’s relationship to the laboring body. I theorize this relationship via popular literary and cultural antebellum texts to explore the effects of servitude as a trope. Methodologically, each chapter reads a literary text in context with social and legal paradigms to 1) demonstrate that servitude undergirds myriad articulations of antebellum power and difference; 2) show how servitude inflects the construction of these paradigms; and 3) trace Americans’ changing relationship to the concept of servitude from the Early Republic through the Civil War.

I begin with James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823), exploring the famous Leather-stocking character – not (as has canonically been the case) as an icon of American independence, but as an icon of American servitude. I historicize this reading with the legal history of master/servant statutes in the early nineteenth century. While public opinion quarantined servitude to an oppressed racial minority, the apparatuses of the law were dramatically expanding servitude’s purview, rendering the master/servant relation the touchstone from which to understand all employment relations.

Following, my second chapter examines Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* (1833). I show that Kirkland’s text dramatizes the narrativity of identity-formation and its potential class consequences. Throughout, Kirkland suggests that this is particularly a women’s problem, whose narratives of self are charged with maintaining the narratives of the family and, synecdochically, the nation.

Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854) is a revolutionary intervention into the narratives of laborless-ness. I read the adoptions within the novel alongside the legalization of bounded servitude for children, since antebellum minors could be adopted or sign indentures if doing so was determined to be in their “best interest.”

In my fourth and final chapter, I examine Civil War draft resistance. In her *House and Home Papers* columns for *The Atlantic* (1863-4), Harriet Beecher Stowe turned to the tropes of servitude to make sense of these violent eruptions. Yet this strategy laid bare servitude’s place as
the basis for many other forms of state power (including military service) and servitude’s incompatibility with principles of individual sovereignty.

KEYWORDS: Domestic Service, US Literature Before the Civil War, Nineteenth-Century American Literature, Domesticity, Providence

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Chapter One: Narrative and Experience in Dialogue: Making Meaning through the Servant Problem

In the decades preceding the Civil War, Americans wrote thousands of words in letters, periodicals, diaries, books, and official documents regarding “the servant question.” Its basic tenets asked how was a master/mistress to secure household employees who were honest, skilled, and ready to stick around? Considering this wealth of words, it is somewhat remarkable that scholars of antebellum US History and Culture have largely failed to theorize the importance of this topic. While there were several excellent histories of U.S. service written in the second-half of the twentieth century, and one book-length consideration of the literature of servitude, much work remains to be done.¹ These studies looked to service for what it could tell us about the home. For example, in her classic study of domestic service, Faye Dudden writes that in the nineteenth century, “the home, woman’s special sphere, remained a stable anchor in the increasingly stormy seas of social change … The change in household service is a way of understanding how the specifics of social change were experienced in women's lives both within and without the home” (7). I build upon Dudden and others’ work to explore what servitude can tell us about the articulations of class, gender, and the body in antebellum negotiations of labor.

The quotidian power relations of master/mistress and servant offer us important insight into the enormous conceptual category of servitude. Servitude, I will show, is a distinct form of labor and power relations that can be neither reduced to, nor considered a subset of any other form of employment relations. This is particularly important given, as Michael Lopez describes it, the “[nineteenth] century's preoccupation with power, a preoccupation with force in all its

¹ Ryan, Barbara. Love, Wages, Slavery; Dudden, Faye. Serving Women; Katzman, David. Seven Days a Week.
myriad forms, that seems to remain constant (though ever shifting in emphasis) through what are usually regarded as distinct periods, from the age of Hazlitt to the age of Nietzsche” (13-4). To fully understand the terms of this “preoccupation,” it is critical that we fully explore servitude, which served as one of the key conceptual categories by which power could be effectively imagined, and therefore effectively negotiated.

To conduct this investigation, it will be crucial to establish the literature of servitude as a narrative, recognizing that this widespread archive is not, exactly, a record of historical fact so much as a cultural production. Since at least the 1980s, literary and cultural theorists such as Frederic Jameson have posited “that narrative or 'story' … once floated loose from its instantiation in novels or myths or epic poems, is really not so much a literary form or structure as an epistemological category… a contentless form that our perception imposes on the raw flux of reality” (Dowling 94-5). Porter Abbot goes so far as to say that narrative is “found in all activities that involve the representation of events in time” (xi). Following this tradition, I use “narrative” throughout this dissertation to refer not merely to literary, or even to written productions, but to all forms of “story,” including the stories one tells oneself.

I contend that the so-called servant problem is a collectively-produced narrative rather than documentary evidence of a genuine labor shortage because, with the particular exception of those who lived in rural areas, there were always plenty of antebellum Americans willing to go into service. According to Historical Statistics of the United States, domestic service remained the most common occupation for women until 1920 (Sobek, “Major Occupational Groups – Females: 1860-1990”). And yet, Americans of the master/mistress class claimed in print, en
masse, that finding good servants was nigh on impossible, and that this problem would dramatically affect all of American life if left unresolved.

I argue that the servant problem offers the middle class, particularly women, a focus for anxieties that might otherwise find no outlet. In October, 1854, Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine published an anonymous article titled, “The Servant Question” (n.p.). The narrator recounts “a group of fair dames and gayly-dressed spinsters” who have little to talk about other than clothes, until one begins to discuss her cook. “Now” says our narrator, “we shall have the great subject for women’s eloquence … the ever-fertile servant question!” The group commiserates with the woman’s struggle, and “each comely dame had a story to tell.” The trouble, it seems, is that the cook in question had fallen in love, and planned to leave. According to the crowd, servants are careless, too ready to leave their places, and educated beyond contentment. Though one woman “gently” suggests that “we are apt to expect perfection from our servants, never remembering we are very far from being perfect ourselves,” the comment goes unnoticed as “the ladies had grown animated, and stories of the untruthfulness, deceit, and general low morale of servants were related on all sides.” The narrator then thinks to herself that much of the problem lies in the fact that “human beings never can be treated as machines,” she confesses, “and this is just the wrong we ladies are so prone to fall into.”

She offers “remedies,” including, “we must disabuse ourselves of the idea that our duty is discharged towards the human beings we hire into our houses, with the payment of their wages,” and instead take on the “other and higher responsibilities” of the servant’s character and soul, and “cease to act as though our domestics were of a different constitution from ourselves.” Mistresses should make servants understand the importance of their work to “give them interest in how the details of their service become an important contribution to the general order, beauty,
and happiness.” Masters and mistresses must also allow servants some time to their own devices, since, “we are too apt to take it for granted their time is (or should be) always at our disposal.” As part of this, servants who are ignorant of “book-knowledge” should be taught to enjoy it so that their recreation might be more profitable, and offer “interests of a healthy kind.” Women should “heed … the physical health and comfort of our servants,” and “influence them for good with regard to habits of economy.” The narrator claims, “Let it be once admitted that mistresses take certain serious responsibilities in accepting the help of aliens in their families” and “the beauty and holiness of raising others with themselves toward some higher and nobler platform of life,” and women will cease to “fail in our duties to our dependents.” This little piece gives a representative picture of the complexities adhering in antebellum literature of servitude, particularly its narrative qualities. We witness the telling of a servant problem, but from the perspective of an auditor who is unsympathetic to the teller’s ethos. Privy to the narrator’s interior monologue, we know that she is inclined to blame employers for failing in their duties to servants and thereby creating their own dissatisfaction.

The narrator’s soteriological view of servitude also demonstrates that the servant question engages master narratives of the providential functions of the body and labor, and offers key insights into the evolution of the intellectual topoi available to antebellum Americans navigating questions of class. Rick Altman contends that, “If we would understand the ways in which humans interact, we must take up the challenge of narrative. What is it? How does it make meaning?” (1). Given the omnipresence of servant problem narratives, we would be remiss not to carefully examine the ways that they “make meaning” of the quotidian experience of living with, or working as, domestic servants.
This narrative was both a common property, created collectively through periodicals, letters, and conversation; and an intimate domestic experience occurring in relative isolation. Key to this dissertation will be Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s contention that

…a potent means of testimony through which identities are constituted and critiqued, autobiographical storytelling has played a major role in the making of Americans and the making, unmaking, and remaking of 'America' … [autobiographical storytelling] cannot escape being dialogical, although its central myths resist that recognition. Autobiography is contestually marked, collaboratively mediated, provisional. Acknowledging the dialogical nature of autobiographical telling is implicated in the microbial operations of power in contemporary everyday life. (Getting a Life 4, 9)

Though speaking of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, Smith and Watson offer us a means of understanding the ways that the collective and the individual versions of the servant problem operated in dialogue; and of the ways that this dialogue was shaped by and helped to constitute “the microbial operations of power in … everyday life.”

If “we do not have any mental record of who we are until narrative is present as a kind of armature, giving shape to that record” (Abbot 3), then we also cannot know who others are until we are able to incorporate them into available narratives. The servant problem offered antebellum Americans, particularly of the middle- and aspiring classes, a way to not only make sense of the world around them, but to form that world into systems that could operate in comprehensible dialogue with the narrative of the servant problem and the master narratives of which it is a part. Authors found servant problems particularly fertile ground for addressing these master narratives, particularly the role of Providence in individual lives. At the same time, by
resisting narratives of the servant problem, working-class Americans incrementally revised the master narratives legitimating their oppression.

The nuances and benefits of this narrative approach will emerge in the subsequent chapters. In what follows, this introduction seeks to give a documentary overview of servitude’s demographics and the literature of the servant question from 1820 to 1865, offering several interpretive categories through which this literature might be broadly divided and understood. Readers familiar with scholarship on nineteenth-century women will immediately recognize several themes in the story above: the sanctity and power of the home to reach higher planes of existence; the paternalistic presumption that servants have something to learn about life from their mistress, who happens to have more money; and a desire to interact with others through sympathetic connection. While many excellent studies of nineteenth-century labor account for domestic service, many others overlook the fact that being a servant, or being served by a servant, was most Americans’ most enduring inter-class relationship.3

This project focuses upon the literature of antebellum servitude in order to theorize servitude as a lived experience; to argue its significance as a cultural trope; and to explore the effects of these findings on the study of antebellum literature and culture. What we must learn to recognize are the ways that discussions of servitude engage questions of the body, labor, and the providential organization of personal and national life. My study concludes that upper and middle-class antebellum Americans constructed a culture of servitude, in which domestic service was rendered necessary and right. Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, speaking of the Indian Subcontinent, have defined a “culture of servitude” as a culture in which domestic service is

3 Jeanne Boydston’s invaluable work, for example, includes list of urban women workers and their visibility, but does not include the servant who was everywhere and perhaps the most visible (Boydston “The Woman” 29). See also: Gilje, Paul A. ed. Wages of Independence.
considered *necessary*. In the American context, a culture of servitude further posits that servitude is *right*, thereby engaging questions of cosmological design in addition to quotidian practicalities. Antebellum Americans regularly used servitude as a short-hand or test case for discussing questions of labor and class as a whole; therefore, in addition to shedding light on a prominent feature of daily antebellum life, theorizing the terms of a culture of servitude is an important bedrock for understanding contemporaneous discussions of labor and class.

Like the story above, the literature of servitude and the servants in literature simultaneously highlight and obscure the material consequences of class. While the narrator is keen to assert that servants are not machines, we nevertheless fail to see any of the back-breaking labor that they actually conduct. Readers are charged to attend to the servant’s health, but given no idea which facets of household service so dramatically affect it. Instead, a servant’s health is construed as a matter of habits – ensuring they wash and take care of themselves appropriately – rather than an earnest conversation about whether the labors asked of household employees are themselves unhealthy. The discussion of servants’ physical well-being is overshadowed by talk of their character, their education, and their souls. The “duties” a mistress owes her servants are paternal – to teach them to learn to love and live by middle-class standards. The ideal servant in this, and in most pieces on the servant question, becomes part of the family. She\(^4\) becomes a prosthetic for the mistress’s hands, performing tasks exactly as the mistress imagines her ideal self would do so. This narrative act has the effect of eliding the servant’s body, and the effects of their labors upon that body. The material conditions of servitude are overshadowed by discussion of family feeling. No longer an “alien” in the home, the ideal servant takes the family’s interests into his or her own heart, accepts the value of the home into which they have fortunately fallen.

\(^4\) By the early nineteenth century, servants were overwhelmingly female. See the appendices.
and profits from their humility and obedience.

This discussion is couched in deliberately soteriological overtones. Though largely committed to a servant’s freedom to worship in the manner of their choice, the literature of servitude primarily conforms to a Protestant providential worldview, arguing that God has established a pattern for life on earth to which humans should righteously conform, and that global conformation is the duty of every Christian. The reward is the splendor of heaven, and the punishment for failure is being denied those splendors. This theological premise affects the social and political aspects of service by suggesting that the proper form of society is fixed, can be known, and should be considered in matters of economic and labor policy.

Martin Burke offers a tidy summation of how this seeming contradiction affected the view of social class. He writes, “America was not a classless but a naturally classed society. The points of contention were where exactly the divisions should be drawn, who had the authority to make them, how these classes related to each other, and what the political consequences of classification were” (52). The class debate in antebellum America was often not about whether there should, or shouldn’t be class differences, but about ensuring that class distinctions were properly drawn – including ensuring that they were drawn according to Providence’s designs.

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5 As Bruce writes, “Very few people during the antebellum period failed to give lip service, at least, to the propriety, even the desirability, of religious freedom and a toleration of diversity as bases for the nation's religious life” (Bruce 2).

6 The nineteenth century was increasingly vexed by the concept of hell, and the literature of the servant problem largely doesn’t weigh into this debate. While eternal consequences for failure to conform are evident, there is no clear consensus on just what those consequences would be. As Balmer & Winner write, “As the differences between evangelical and liberal developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, liberals … attacked the notion of hell, arguing that a gracious and benevolent God would never consign one of his children to damnation, and they gravitated toward universalism or universal salvation, the doctrine that everyone will be saved, in this world or the next” (70).
Antebellum Americans walked the line between rigidity and fluidity. As Amy Schrager Lang writes, “Specifying only the transitory social location of individuals, in the hands of northern economic thinkers, the language of class fixed neither relationships of production nor human 'types' that some saw as produced out of these relationships. Nor did it, they hoped, differentiate groups whose different life chances might bring them into direct conflict” (Lang 69).

Lang’s articulation of class-mobility’s conflict-evading potential will be important throughout this work. Many antebellum Americans were committed to the idea that the proper stratifications of classes would allow all those within them to exist in harmony. This idea allows discussions of individual labor rights to always already also be discussions of the collectivity, and for genuine resistance to the systemic forces disproportionately oppressing the lower classes to be overridden as ineffective attempts to change what cannot be changed – to fight against not only the social and the structural, but against the cosmological.

The Statistics of Nineteenth-Century American Servitude

To offer a clear picture of servitude’s demographics in America, I have appendixed tables that elucidate its makeup. First, of all persons (male or female, white or non-white) with an occupation in 1860 (the first year for which data is aggregately available), 6.2% were employed in domestic service. In 1870 this number was 7.8%, and in 1900 it was 7.6%, suggesting that servitude became a more common occupation as a whole over the latter-half of the nineteenth century. From the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, less than 1% of occupied males

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7 For details and source information on all statistics, please refer to the original tables in the appendix to this introduction, which were compiled using Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Online Edition.

8 Before emancipation, statistics on labor do not include enslaved persons.
were employed in domestic service, with non-white males being more likely to be servants than white males. However, non-white males were still far more likely to engage in an occupation other than domestic service.

For women, however, the story is much different. In 1860, 45.5% of all occupied women were employed in domestic service. In 1870 this number was 48.4%, and in 1900 it remained 36.7%. As mentioned above, domestic service was the most common employment for women until 1920, when “operatives” and “clerical” workers became more numerous. While the number of white women employed as domestics was far greater than the free, non-white women thus employed, non-white women were more likely to be employed in domestic service than other occupations. In 1860, 75% of all occupied, free, non-white women were servants, whereas only 43.9% of occupied white women were servants. Following emancipation, these numbers alter dramatically, so that in 1870, 50.7% of all occupied white women were servants, whereas only 43.4% of occupied non-white women were servants. At this time, non-white women were more likely to be farm laborers than domestic servants. By 1900, however, 33% of occupied white women were servants, whereas 49.9% of non-white women were thus employed. Servitude remained the most common profession for non-white women until 1970, when it was surpassed by “other service” and “clerical” occupations. “Operatives” became the most common profession for white women, by contrast, in 1910.

The literature of servitude would suggest that almost all servants were immigrants, but this is not borne out by the data. In 1850, 56.4% of all male servants (women were not included in this survey) were foreign born, while 43.6% were native born. By 1860, however, of all

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9 As Lucy Salmon suggests at the end of the nineteenth century, many homemakers would have considered persons born in America, but to foreign-born parents, as also “immigrants” (Salmon 109).
servants, male or female, 43.9% were foreign born, whereas 56.1% were native born. In 1870, 31.2% of all servants were foreign born and 68.8% were native born. By 1900 the division was still greater, with 26.3% being foreign born versus 73.7% being native born. Few foreign-born servants arrived in America with experience as domestics. From 1860-1869, for example, only 3.5% of all arriving immigrants listed domestic service as their occupation. In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century this number was even smaller, with 1% listing the occupation in the 1820s, 0.4% in the 1830s, 1.5% in the 1840s, and 0.8% in the 1850s.

On the whole, American domestic servants were most often white women. While a significant subset were foreign-born, statistics demonstrate that as the nineteenth century progressed, they were much more likely to be native-born. The literature of servitude would therefore seem to over-represent immigrant women. These statistics furthermore suggest that there was no dearth of women willing to engage in service. If a woman was obliged to work (which roughly 20% of women, white and non-white, over the age of 16 were obliged to do throughout the nineteenth century), then domestic service was her most likely option.

The Narrative of Servitude, 1820-1865: An Overview

Having characterized servitude quantitatively, how might we characterize the literature to discuss it qualitatively? Surveying hundreds of articles that contain the word “servant” in either title or keywords, I discovered five interrelated themes by which the literature of servitude may be broadly categorized. Readers will note that the following discussion makes no overt mention

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10 With very few exceptions, this literature is written from the perspective of and for the master/mistress class. If there exists a wealth of literature, archival material, or ephemera written from the servant’s perspective, it is yet to be found or remains scattered through various archives.
of race. The reasons for this are manifold, but primarily, I argue that servitude is the broader concept of which slavery is a part. I therefore contend that it is crucial to understand servitude’s terms discretely before exploring how a renewed understanding of cultures of servitude might contribute to a fuller understanding of slavery and its literatures. In future work, I hope to explore the ways that abolitionist writers used the narratives of the servant problem to bring home to readers the nuances of the legalized enslaving of human beings; and of how pro-slavery writers used the same narratives to legitimize enslavement.

Therefore, while a full treatment of domestic servitude in the United States must surely address race, slavery, and the legal battles over both, this dissertation brackets those questions in the interest of fully exploring the practice, tropes, and ideologies behind so-called “free” servitude. Toward this end, I propose the following broad categorization for articles on servitude. Many articles could fall into several categories, but the key themes I have defined are: 1.) Contentions that poor service is the master/mistress’s fault; 2.) Explanations of the master/mistress’s duties toward their servants; 3.) Cautionary tales of servitude’s dangers from the master/mistress and the servant’s perspective; 4.) Humorous accounts of service; and 5.) Articles exploring the effect of servants upon children.

By far, most articles about the servant problem are directed at the Mistress (and sometimes the Master), and frame the servant problem as one of domestic management. The answer to the problem lay in oneself. Beginning primarily in the 1830s, articles such as “Bad Servants” appear in publications such as the Episcopal Recorder. This article proposes that unchristian mistresses are to blame for bad service, and that they should exercise more patient forbearance in dealing with those who serve in their homes, lest they “ruin” the souls in their charge. Masters and mistresses, the authors argue, will be accountable for the souls of their
household, including the souls of their servants. In 1835, *Godey’s* published “On the Relations Between Masters and Mistresses and Domestics,” which argues that all the clamor about bad servants overlooks the fact that bad masters and mistresses are typically to blame. It offers rules of behavior for each, advising masters not to expect perfection of their servants.  

Throughout the 1840s, the tone is very much the same, with some increasing notes reflective of national labor movements. “Servant Girls” from the *American Masonic Register and Literary Companion* claims, “there is a certain class who look with contempt upon females that work in the kitchen; as if they were made of better blood, and wore, more indelibly stamped upon their browns the impress of the great Jehovah.” It reminds readers that many women who today employ servants were themselves servants earlier in life. A young woman who treats her servants haughtily is shocked to find her “mother was glad to work in the kitchen for support. Yes, that very girl’s mother was once a kitchen girl. Her father was a poor man; he saw his future wife performing the menial service in a wealthy family; he admired her industrious habits; he married her, and finally became wealthy.” “Two Ways with Domestics” from the “Ladies’ Department” of the *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* uses a little story to illustrate two modes of dealing with domestics, arguing that being unwilling to do anything for oneself, and refusing to overlook even small faults in performance or temper create the majority of domestic “collisions” between mistress and maid.

Over the 1850s, the tone becomes more pejorative toward housewives, encouraging them less to practice Christian charity than derisively chastising them for their failures. “On the

11 See also: “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice”; “Miscellany: How the Servants Will Lie”; and “Mistress and Servant.”

12 See also: Graham, Mrs. Mary, “Household Sketches: Trouble With Servants”; Pamela Squaw’s “The Character of Servants”; and “Good Domestics.”
Treatment of Domestics” by Mrs. AB Whelpley for the *Ladies’ Wreath*, argues that mistresses need more instruction in managing servants than servants need in their tasks. The *Youth’s Companion* included a story, “The Little Servant Girl,” in which the servant, “Jenny,” “ruminat[ed] over her hard lot, and wonder[ed] if ever she should have time to rest her tired feet and hands, have nice clothes to wear, and enough to eat.” Jenny’s mistress punishes her for not meeting her inhumane expectations by denying her food. This treatment, plus her mistress’s tendency to lie, tempts Jenny to steal and to lie and the author shames the mistress for corrupting her household. Similar articles, such as “Ms. Pettigrew’s Trying Servants,” “A Wife’s Lesson; or, Managing a Husband,” and “Mrs. Morrison’s Mistake” use biting humor to chastise women whose petulance and poor characters disrupt, even destroy the harmony of their households. These women volubly blame their servants, but the articles inevitably show that the fault lies, in fact, with them.13

Articles on the master/mistress’s duties to their servants are a close second in volume. Many of these articles could also be put in the above category, as most suggest that were a mistress to properly fulfill her duties, her problems would be over. The 1820s were primarily concerned with encouraging servants to take part in family devotions, as seen in “Care for Servants” from *The Pittsburgh Recorder*, which argues that allowing servants to take part in family devotions will help them withstand temptations (including those from other servants) and make them better employees. Several articles likewise stress the evangelical duties of masters and mistresses, and remind that failure to live up to these duties threatens the salvation of one’s

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13 Moore, August, “Mrs. Pettigrew’s Trying Servants”; “A Wife’s Lesson; or, Managing a Husband”; Barstow, Sarah K, “Mrs. Morrison’s Mistake.” See also: “Governesses”; “Husband and Servant”; “Interesting to Ladies: Domestic Service”; Blaisdell, Susan, “Helen Worthington: - or – Family Government”; “Editor’s Table: Housekeeping and Help.”
own soul.14 “Original Communication: Duties to Servants” from the Christian Register suggests that teaching servant women household morality and economy will eventually influence the poorer classes as a whole, since servants will be laborers’ wives. Other articles like “Sickness of Domestics” point out that employers should be financially responsible for servants when sick.15

The 1830s and 1840s continue to highlight the moral duties toward servants in overtly theological terms. “Masters and Servants” from the Episcopal Recorder argues that “it is the duty … of every master and mistress to point out to their servants, both by precept and example, the road to heaven and happiness.” As immigration from Ireland increased, so too did concerns about the moral welfare of Roman Catholic servants. “Domestics at Family Worship,” for example, questions whether Catholic servants should be allowed to evade Protestant family worship, and what effect this would ultimately have upon the employer’s authority. Stories in The Youth’s Companion, such as “Morality: A Faithful Servant” preached the value of forbearance and forgiveness when servants have erred, arguing that a servant is more likely to be loyal to the master who gives them a second chance.16

In the 1850s, articles continue to exhort employers to mind the moral welfare of their servants.17 The number of articles stressing the peculiar difficulties of Roman Catholic servants predictably increase. “Our Duty to Our Servants” wonders if Catholic servants will infect children, and “Catholic Servant Girls May Be Converted” offers tips for (as the title suggests)

14 See “Christian Conduct Toward Domestics”; “Strictures: Dialogue Between Priest and His Servant George, A Black Man”; and “Roman Catholic Female Servants.”

15 “Sickness of Domestics” 7/21/29.

16 See also: “The Baronet’s Servant”; “Christian Duties to Domestics.”

converting one’s servants without, *exactly*, impinging upon their religious freedom.\(^{18}\) We also begin to see articles suggesting that society, as a whole, has a duty to protect servants from the dangers inherent in the position. “Christian Homes for Female Servants” argues that intelligence offices (where servants would apply for new positions and employers would list vacancies) do nothing to ensure that the servant is placed in a morally and physically healthful home. A Christian Home for them would ensure that they have a surrogate family to depend upon in periods between employments. “Duties of Mistresses of Families to Their Domestics” from *Pennsylvania Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* suggests that former servants are overrepresented in the prison population because they have been poorly educated by the homes in which they serve.

Servants’ effect upon children concerned several authors over these decades. The 1820s and 1830s saw the rise of several chapters of the “Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestics,” a trend that began in London and spread to major cities, such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Their mission statements and annual reports regularly proclaim the possible “contamination of children” to be a primary impetus for their formation, and that the “morals and manners of the rising generation depend” upon the character of servants.\(^{19}\) Nurses, particularly, could infect children with their vulgar speech, folktales, and improper suitors. *Anderson’s Book for Parents* points out that a servant should be surveilled to ensure that their behavior when out of the employer’s sight is not detrimental to children, and some authors suggested that allowing

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\(^{18}\)See also: “Roman Catholic Servants.”

\(^{19}\) See, “Society for Encouragement of Domestics”; and “Third Annual Report.”
servants to converse with children at all is simply too risky.\textsuperscript{20} “Positions and Wages of Domestics” responds to the claims (increasing through the 1850s) that servants should be given higher wages to promote better behavior and a better class of women to take to the profession. The author points out that servants must be judged on a case-by-case basis, since their level of refinement can have an earnest impact upon the employer’s children, and since the refinement they learn in the employer’s household will affect the next generation of working-class children who they will bear after leaving service for marriage (Bateham).

Articles proclaiming the danger of children under improperly vetted and supervised servants tend toward the histrionic, using language of plague and pestilence to illustrate the influence of servants throughout the family. There is a second class of articles on the dangers of servitude, however, which are even more sensational. These fall broadly into two categories, in that they are about the danger either of having servants, or of being a servant. The first category include humorous tales (usually set in London or other areas of Europe) where servants take terrible advantage of lax employers to steal and prosecute immoral lifestyles.\textsuperscript{21} More sensationaly, “Domestic: A Shocking Murder at Morristown, New Jersey” from the New York Observer reports on a couple and a servant murdered by a second servant who wished to steal from the house. “Female Courage” tells the story of a woman left alone by her husband, who fends off a band of robbers that her female servant had let into the house, and “The Housekeeper

\textsuperscript{20}“Original Communications: Persuading Servants from Places”; “Servants & Children”; “Influence of Servants.” See also: Wellmont, E. “Housekeeping,”; and “Roman Catholic Servants.”

\textsuperscript{21}See “Servants in High Life”; and “A Crayon Sketch: A London Servant’s Hall Before Breakfast.”
and the Robber” tells the story of a group of female servants left alone by a manservant, and their efforts to fend off robbers who take advantage of their man-less state.22

A similar sensationalism is found in articles delineating the dangers of being a servant. *The New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery* for April, 1820 reports the case of three servants who accidentally ingest arsenic carelessly left by an employer where it might be mistaken for sugar (M’Leod). Stories like “Mistresses, Masters and Servants” give sensational accounts of the unreasonable and immoral demands of certain employers, and “Murders by Poison” recounts the story of a servant poisoned by her master after his wife found out that he had seduced her. “Female Domestics” from *The New Yorker* offers a less sensational account of the evils the other articles also address: the fact that servants are often women in “youth and friendless circumstances” who are placed in danger of the “brutality of lust,” and forced to rely on intelligence offices to find them a place of safety amongst a sea of strangers.

On the other hand, servants were often fodder for humor. This humor often came from a male’s perspective, and included overt or covert sexual overtones. “The Maid Servant,” for example, offers humorous generalizations about kinds of servants, positioning them as objects of observation and desire (Bazeth). “Odds and Ends” puns upon a servant who claims she cannot “enjoy” her bed since she’s only allowed to sleep there, and “Women and Their Masters” reminds women who would complain about the tyranny of men that women with male servants also become sexually tyrannous, themselves. Less salaciously, articles used servants’ ignorance for humorous effect, such as “The Breaker,” in which a bachelor reaches his wits’ ends trying to accommodate a nice female servant who, unfortunately, breaks everything she comes into

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22 See also: “Society for Domestics.”
contact with. Atypically, “Romance and Reality; or, the Poet and His Servant” from *Scientific American* juxtaposes the poet’s view of nature to his servant’s. While the poet describes the wind as a “gentle zephyr” that “breathes among the single trees,” the servant feels it is a “plaguy north-east wind” that “makes me wheeze.”

*Exemplary Servants*

Articles on the above themes collectively offer a picture of the ideal employer and the ideal servant. The ideal employer is patient, Christian, and p/maternal. The construction of the ideal servant will be significant for the chapters to follow. Antebellum periodicals contain many accounts of exemplary servants, from the employees of great and famous men to sensational stories of servants who give up their lives for the sake of their employers and their families. More generally, articles on exemplary servants exhort them to be trustworthy and faithful, often using biblical precedence as justification. In “Advice to Domestics” from the *Religious Intelligencer*, servants are advised to “keep [employers’] secrets, and have none of your own,” and in “Fidelity in Servants” from the same publication, servants are reminded that since trust is crucial to society, as a whole, they must live up to the contract of honesty they accepted when they signed onto the job. Many articles offer biblical servants as models, such as “Good and Bad Servants” in the *Boston Recorder*, which argues that since Providence controls the constitution of society, one should look to the Bible for how to meet the expectations of the Divine. Likewise, “The Wicked Servant who Became Good” from *The Youth’s Companion* recalls the story from...
Paul of a servant who steals and escapes from his master, repents, and returns.

In addition to offering direct biblical models, articles regularly offer particularly pious servants as exemplars. Often praised for their simplicity and honesty, these servants are exemplary both to their fellow employees, but also to the class of employers who might consider such lowly examples beneath their notice. By their simple piety and faith, these servants often convert their employers and the other servants around them. The ideal servant, then, is a positive influence in the home. Their morals make no waves in – or perhaps even encourage the improvement of – the family’s own moral life. The most laudible servants make themselves part of the employer’s family completely – sharing in their struggles, their misfortunes, and their happiness so fully that a life outside the family is all but negated.

A Culture of Servitude: Necessary and Right

A Necessity: The Labor of the Home in Antebellum America

A reader and editor’s exchange over the publication of Dr. William Alcott’s Young Wife: or, the Duties of Women in the Marriage Relation offers insight into the reasons servitude was considered necessary. Dr. Alcott believes that too many rely on servants. The editor of the Zion’s Herald retorts that this is an “error” the doctor. will recognize when he “comes to have a family of five or six children.” A reader writes a response challenging the necessity of servants for healthful living:

I can prove that there are thousands of mothers in New England – nay, tens of thousands, who bring up their four or five children without servants; of those, too, who form the

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‘bone and sinew’ of our country. Nay, more; the world, taken as a mass, never have had servants. It is only a few who have had them. What then becomes of the impracticability of which you speak? I beg you will reconsider that point, and remember that the ‘Young Wife’ was not written solely for the small proportion of people who live in cities and towns, and who fancy they need servants – whether they do or not – but also for the very large proportion of the community who have never yet had servants, but are constantly tempted by custom to employ them.

The reader’s response approximates the response of many twenty-first-century persons who come into contact with the proposed need for servants. Given that servants are only ever held by a select few of the population, by what logic does middle-class culture claim that servitude is necessary? The editor answers the reader’s letter, saying that, yes, while bare subsistence does not require servants, the finer things in life do. What’s more, mothers with large families and no servants work themselves into an early grave. He writes that women who raise “four or five children without help, and have lived through it, that is, have dragged out an unhappy existence, constantly worn down by unremitting toil in bearing, nursing, clothing, feeding, governing and washing for these children” deserve to hire help. He continues, “we know of many mothers who, although, once rugged, have worn themselves down to the quick, by excessive anxiety and labor in the performance of their domestic duties, without help; and many others who are fast making their way thither” (“Dr. Alcott’s Young Wife”).

Raising a large family without servants is characterized as physically taxing, even unhealthy work that runs a woman to an untimely death. In the parlance of the day, the mother who has too many children and not enough help “breaks down” quickly. The editor never denies that this is the fate of many who have no choice but to do without servants – or that there are
many women with small families who have servants they don’t need. But for those women with a number of children, he proclaims, “It remains to be proved how much better the children of these thousands and tens of thousands of parents would have been, had their mothers had time to educate them as they ought, instead of devoting the whole of their time to an attention to their bodies, which, after all, is but partial attention” (“Dr. Alcott’s Young Wife”).

But this exchange is not over. In response, the same reader writes in once more, scoffing, “Is it true that the thousands and tens of thousands of mothers, constituting the mass of society, even in New England, have ‘dragged out an unhappy existence’ for want of servants?” This incredulity stems from the reader’s belief that generations of New England women have raised large families without servants, and that, since New Englanders are known to be the best, most healthy persons on the planet – a common nineteenth-century claim – the editor’s suppositions are absurd. But furthermore:

Is not the family institution divine; and is it not the general duty of both sexes to sustain it by their example? Now in a community, which had fulfilled these conditions of the Creator, where could servants be had? How could they be obtained without going abroad – of country, or color; except by exchange of families? But what would be the gain of a mere exchange? Could a mother educate others’ daughters better than she could her own? Here the reader poses a fascinating scenario: a community that cares and supports all families so that none need hire a servant and – crucially – none need become one. Rather than fuss over the wealthy’s need for servants, the reader argues, perhaps we should, as a community, focus on helping one another maintain family stability so that women don’t have to seek employment and so that they don’t feel so overwhelmed by their duties.

This communitarianism is overlooked by the editor, however, who replies once more that
the duties of a woman with a large family are simply overburdening. He writes, “a mother has six children. Her incessant care, anxiety and labor are fast undermining her constitution, and after all she only provides for the bodies of her children. There is no time to improve their mind, or heart …Where is the time to be found for the performance of her own religious duties, attention to her husband, and improvement of her own mind?” It is cruel, he contends, to tell this woman to simply reorganize her household systems and find ways to do without servants. To layer guilt for her inability to do it all on top of her exhaustion and care is helpful to no one (“Letter to the Editor: Servants or No Servants?”).

It is unclear whether the “reader” who writes in is a man or a woman, though the editor is addressed with the male pronoun. Both sides of the debate have valid points. Most women live without servants; and yet, the work of a large family is onerous, and shouldn’t a woman feel comfortable paying another to help her? The facts of household management in the United States before the Civil War clearly support the contention that housework could be debilitating, not merely to the mind, but to the body. How curious, then, that when servitude is discussed, it is treated as a “healthy” occupation. When the mistress performs the tasks alone, it is “undermining” to her health – yet when a servant takes over those tasks, it becomes something else. Thus the U.S.’s culture of servitude was able to acknowledge the body – the mistress’s body’s limitations are the primary means for hiring a servant – but when the servant takes over those labors, her body recedes, and the back-breaking work that this editor describes becomes “an education” in housewifeliness.

Proper and Right: The Providential Organization of Individual and National Life

Servitude, then, was considered necessary because without it many women would simply
succumb to the work of their families. This practical consideration, throughout the nineteenth century, was wed to the cosmological. Take, for example, Theodore Sedgwick’s 1836 treatise, *Public and Private Economy*:

> One of the humblest class of labourers known in the United States is that of domestic servants. This is a class that exists in every civilized country in the world, and always will exist … Civilization is nature – it is natural that men should be divided into different professions and employments… It is idle, then, for the people of the United States to revolt against what is natural and proper – they must submit to it … Common sense teaches, that the time of the President of the United States ought not to be spent in boiling his tea-kettle; and that a man, whose business it is to administer justice as a judge, or set broken bones as a surgeon, has not the time to clean his own house and stables. Here, then is the foundation of higher and lower classes.

With the confidence of an economist, Sedgwick blithely encapsulates a culture of servitude’s argument that systems of domestic service are not only necessary, but also right. The facts, as many antebellum Americans saw them, were simple: important people should not spend their time on menial tasks, so they employed other people to perform them. This is a “natural” and “civilized” way of dividing labor, and submission is the only practicable response. Furthermore: “As there must be higher and lower classes, it is Providence that assigns us our places in the one or the other; but he does not order us to remain there…The higher situations in life are meant to be the rewards that shall urge men on to exertion – these are so many prizes to superior virtue, skill, and industry” (Sedgwick, 224-5). Antebellum Americans often repeated this combination of claims: that Providence places one in the social scale, but that this placement can be overcome through “exertion…superior virtue, skill, and industry.”
One must acknowledge that Sedgwick’s words have a logic to them. Perhaps surgeons’
time is better spent perfecting their medical knowledge than mucking out stalls; and there are
many instances in American history in which effort and talent brought someone from a low birth
to a high station. But it is not difficult to begin to see flaws in this logical veneer. First, the
concept that “higher situations in life” are “rewards” urging men to greater feats of ingenuity
obscures those who are born into that higher situation and do little or nothing to remain there; as
corollary to this, it also does not acknowledge that the “exertions” required to rise from utter
poverty exceed those required to rise from, say, a comfortable middle class. Being rich, by
Sedgwick’s own logic, is sometimes the reward of virtue, and sometimes an act of Providence,
alone. Sedgwick’s rhetoric does not deny this at the same time that it overlooks it in favor of the
classic bootstraps thesis.

Sedgwick’s brief summation of the facts concerning domestic servitude belies the
complex web of factors that contributed to the practice and constitution of American domestic
servitude at any given point. For example, he broadly elides the international political and
economic forces that urged immigration to the United States, the global racialism that made
servitude one of the few available occupations to those immigrants, and the trans-national gender
trouble that, for example, encouraged many single Irish women to travel to America alone. To
reduce this amalgam of forces to a measure of the “virtue, skill and industry” exerted over a
lifetime seems facile until one remembers that “Providence” ordains the starting point in this web
of international human relations. All complications of race, gender, or nation can therefore fall
under the Providential umbrella, and the skill of overcoming them is once more in man’s control.

Nicholas Guyatt defines “providentialism” as “the belief that God controls everything that

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26 See: Lynch-Brennan, Margaret. *The Irish Bridget.*
happens on earth: providential commentators from the early modern period to the nineteenth century liked to quote Christ’s words from the Gospel of Matthew that not even the killing of a sparrow could take place without God’s knowledge and involvement” (5). While, as Guyatt claims, “Britons and Americans came to regard personal providentialism as superstitious and backward,” they continued to have faith that “God directed the fates of nations” (5).

Unlike their colonial forebears, antebellum Americans were unlikely to believe that every event of their life was controlled by God’s hand. However, Sedgwick’s text exemplifies the ways that a blended personal-national providentialism continued to operate in theories of American social and economic life. To believe that “Providence” places one on either side of a “natural” division between higher and lower classes is to believe that God has placed one on a scale that is itself ordered by a higher power, since the “natural” was, throughout the nineteenth century, another way of referring to a transcendent plan. The organization of society, and one’s starting place within it, were often still understood as ordained by God. While this could mean that the man born in poverty could find ways to raise himself – even his nation – to extraordinary heights, it could also mean that men born in riches could find ways to lower themselves – and even their nations – to extraordinary lows. Antebellum Americans walked a complex theological line, believing both that Providence was active in their lives and that they were in control.

Servitude, being ensconced within the all-important family, was a subject particularly rife with the complexities of this providential, soteriological, and eschatological balancing act. As Colleen McDannel writes, “[Victorian-American] Catholics and Protestants assumed that God instituted the family and that it had certain spiritual functions to perform. Neither tradition would have acknowledged that the nature of the family or Christianity had undergone radical changes throughout history” (1). The structures of the family (and synechdocically, the nation) were
determined by God, and it was the duty of every home to match those divine expectations. Protestant-Americans, however, mostly did not believe that doing so meant utter submission to the guiding hand of God. Instead, their Arminianism contended that people must autonomously work to meet God’s expectations.27 As Dickson Bruce explains, this worldview required a careful blend of respect for autonomy and for authority. Bruce writes, “individual autonomy in the shaping of one's life and destiny had come to play an important role in American thinking, including religious thinking, by early in the nineteenth century” (40). And yet, this autonomy “had to rest, they argued, on a due regard for order and civility,” given the lingering “deep-seated concerns about the properties of human nature and human motivation” (Bruce 45-6). Unwilling to adopt a post-structuralist relativism, antebellum Americans believed in the autonomous human will to make and re-make human society – but they did not believe that the justifiable forms of that society were limitless. Instead, antebellum Protestant liberalism argued that humans could, through hard work and careful attention, pattern human existence upon the given, divinely ordained plan.

A continued belief in the designs of Providence led to a combination of arguments in favor of man’s power to affect change and of man’s obedience to the unchangeable. This we see, again, in the passage from Sedgwick: the “natural” order of civilization cannot be changed – but one’s ultimate place within it is under one’s own control. As Christopher Newfield writes, “when asked whether America exists for each person or the people, for private property or national

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27 Balmer and Winner concisely summarize the Calvinist/Arminian distinction, which was critical to antebellum religious debate: “Those in the Reformed tradition (the theological descendants of John Calvin) hold to the view of election: Salvation comes only to the elect, who are chosen according to the mysterious councils of God rather than with regard to good works or individual merit. Arminianism, on the other hand, became popular among American Protestants after the American Revolution; it insisted that the individual could initiate the salvation process by the exercise of his or her own volition” (14).
providence, the antebellum consensus liberal simply answers ‘both’” (Newfield 65). Newfield argues that this confluence results in a “possessive and collective individualism,” and those terms will be important for this work. The American culture of servitude casts a high-powered lens upon the angst created by this combination of personal-national providence and the possessive individualism suggesting that men and nations control their own fate. It also demonstrates the narrative power this combination has to simultaneously argue that change can and cannot be affected – that individuals can change, but the systems themselves, cannot, or should not – for the strains of providentialism remaining in the culture continued to suggest that human actions could take an entire nation off course. The question of Providence for nineteenth-century Americans, then, was deeply vexed: was society progressing toward an increasingly perfect state? If so, was American society on the right path toward that perfect state? And if not – why? Because of man’s actions, or because God was sending the nation through a trial in the interest of some greater millennial, cosmological goal?

Articles about servants from 1820 to 1865 abound with the terms of Providence, demonstrating the uneasy confluence of personal providentialism, national providentialism, and human autonomy. For example, in “The Servant’s Friend” from the January 21st, 1843 issue of the Episcopal Recorder, the author writes, “In the providence of God you are placed in the condition of servant. It is clearly his will, that distinctions of rank and circumstances should prevail … the welfare of the community consists, in part, in the various gradations that obtain. But character is independent of circumstances.” The structures of society and one’s place within them are ordered by “the providence of God,” however “character” – or one’s behavior within that place – is in one’s own hands; and, more complicated still, the prosecution of character can affect “the welfare of the community” in allowing or disallowing “the various gradations” to
“obtain.” The organization of society is at once determined by God, and susceptible to human alteration. This uneasy combination results in an anxious balancing act between accepting what cannot be changed (the will and designs of God), and making sure oneself and one’s home live up to the expectations of that will so that the community is not driven from the ordained path. What should be is unalterable – but one’s and one’s community’s ability to actually be as they should is profoundly ambivalent.28

No longer comfortable with aristocratic notions of servitude’s place in society, Americans developed a narrative combining providentialism with individualism to justify their continued use of household employees. Scholars of American women’s writing are familiar with the nineteenth-century Cult of True Womanhood’s belief that the domestic synecdochically affects the national and the cosmological, and the combination of power and anxiety that this produced.29 The peculiarities of the servant problem, however, place in stark relief the ways that

28 Two more examples of Providence appearing in articles on service: “A considerate woman therefore, whether surrounded by all appliances and means of personal enjoyment, or depending upon the use of her own hands for the daily comforts of life, will look around her, and consider what is due to those whom Providence has placed within the sphere of her influence … [Servants] know and feel that their lot in the world is comparatively hard; and if they are happily free from all presumptuous questionings of the wisdom and justice of Providence in placing them where they are, they are alive to the conviction that the burden of each day is sufficient, and often more than sufficient, for their strength” (“Considerateness towards Domestics: From ‘The Women of England’”). Similarly, “Is it not worthy of some reflection, for what end persons of an inferior station in society should have been brought home to dwell, of necessity, in such close contact with your children? … Can it be for no valuable end to them and yourself? Or is it providential? Certainly it is. It is for you to instruct them how to behave, and how to feel towards these individuals; for so important is the connexion formed between them and your servant, that either a proud or tyrannical, a benevolent or gentle spirit, will be formed, by means of the conduct which they are taught to observe towards those with whom, in their earliest years, they thus so far associate” (“Servants and Children”).

29 Barbara Welter and Jane Tompkins were among those at the forefront of defining the “cult of domesticity” and of using it to historicize and elucidate women’s literature. See Welter, Barbara. “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860” (1966); and Tompkins, Jane. Sensational Designs (1985). Linda Kerber’s Women of the Republic (1980) solidified the political implications of the
this narrative was used to elide the material effects of class. It would be too simplistic to suggest that the literature of servitude doesn’t care about the embodied experience because it is more concerned with salvation. Rather, in the narratives created by America’s culture of servitude, the servant’s material body is not belittled so much as it is simply absent. While servants’ cleanliness and “tidy” appearance are important (as seen in our opening article), the effects of servitude upon the body are largely elided. When, therefore, servitude was used to metonymically and metaphorically discuss larger questions of labor and class, this elision of the material effects of class remained implicit in the conversation, dramatically affecting the articulations of power over the nineteenth century.

**Bringing a Culture of Servitude to Bear on the Study of Antebellum America: Chapter Breakdown**

Within the thousands of words written about dishes and dusting and diapers lies a sophisticated discussion of the individual’s responsibility to self and to society, and the eschatological implications of both. I begin using this contention to explore antebellum literature and culture with James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823), exploring the famous Leather-stocking character – not (as has canonically been the case) as an icon of American independence, but as an icon of American servitude. Cooper’s contemporaries overlooked the fact that Natty Bumppo is a servant throughout the text, and chose him as a model of frontier skill and ingenuity for a national *we*. Yet these readers only figure *themselves* as a Leather-stocking in a characterological sense. He stands in for the nameless many they hoped would do the grunt work domestic in American history, and important works like *The Culture of Sentiment* (1992) expanded upon the socio-political consequences of the domestic.
of opening the pioneering spaces of America. Like the servant’s master, they receive credit for his virtues without having to labor at them. I historicize this reading with the legal history of master/servant statutes in the early nineteenth century. While public opinion quarantined servitude to an oppressed racial minority, the apparatuses of the law were dramatically expanding servitude’s purview, rendering the master/servant relation the touchstone from which to understand all employment relations. *The Pioneers* therefore replicates, in Natty, the secret-servant status of all Americans employed by another person. While Americans were telling themselves the story of independence and ingenuity, legally, they were subsumed beneath the rubric of master/servant law. By making Natty’s servitude a fact easy to forget, the text demonstrates the discursive strategies that allowed this legal revolution to be reconciled with narratives of individualism.

Following, my second chapter examines Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* (1833). This text records the process of learning to treat the “help” as if one is grateful for their assistance, rather than as if they should be grateful for being allowed to assist. Michigan’s frontier culture refuses to figuratively erase the servant’s body, conversely highlighting the boundaries and limitations of the mistress’s body, or, her need for help. Arguing that we should not collapse the distinction between Caroline Kirkland, the author, and Mary Clavers, her narrator, I show that Kirkland’s text dramatizes the narrativity of identity-formation and its potential class consequences. Specifically, Kirkland shows that urban women who use domestic servants live by a fiction in which the labor of day-to-day life is obscured. When Mary Clavers arrives on the Michigan frontier and is unable to escape this labor by consigning it either to another person or to another space, Kirkland uses irony and humor to record the challenges Mary’s self-image faces, and how these are resolved by the intricate, but ultimately incoherent
ideology of a culture of servitude. Throughout, Kirkland suggests that this is particularly a women’s problem, whose narratives of self are charged with maintaining the narratives of the family and, synecdochically, the nation.

By contrast, Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854) foregrounds the ways that embodied labor alters lived experience. Cummins’s text is a revolutionary intervention into the narratives of laborless-ness by which inequalities are rationalized. I read the adoptions within the novel alongside the legalization of bounded servitude for children, since antebellum minors could be adopted or sign indentures if doing so was determined to be in their “best interest.” Cummins’s protagonist, Gertrude Flint, is regularly called “like family” by those who seem to adopt her, but Cummins persistently avoids clarifying whether she is family in the adoptive, or the servile sense. The novel suggests that the distinction between adoptive daughters and family-like servants is not terribly significant, since what matters most is the way one is treated and the way one treats others. By denying the significance of legal identities, Cummins foregrounds the significance of ethical and moral identities, thereby valuing individuals for what they do, rather than for who they are.

Written at the height of abolitionist fervor, however, Cummins’s treatment of legal identities seems insufficient, since it elides some of the most violent abuses to which the law could contribute. In my fourth and final chapter, I examine Civil War draft resistance, arguing that in challenging conscription’s legal abuses of class difference, these resisters also rebelled against the principles of servitude upon which those legal forms were based. In her *House and Home Papers* columns for *The Atlantic* (1863-4), Harriet Beecher Stowe turned to the tropes of servitude to make sense of these violent eruptions. Yet this strategy laid bare servitude’s place as the basis for many other forms of state power (including military service) and servitude’s
incompatibility with principles of individual sovereignty. By resisting the draft, Americans protested the conceptual categories that those in more powerful positions (like Stowe and her fellow *Atlantic* contributors) used to legitimize state violence, and changed the very terms by which power could be persuasively imagined.

This extraordinary class resistance marks the beginning of the end of servitude as a salient trope in American culture. But this is not to say that the *practices* of servitude have also ended. By more fully theorizing servitude itself, I hope to help our culture recognize and unmask the gendered class relations in which servitude persists under different names. The study of narratives like the servant problem are critical for evaluating the conceptual categories available to those attempting to address the problems witnessed in the world around them. The ability to imagine solutions is shaped by the stories we imagine those problems partaking of. As Cristopher Nash writes, “our sensations and understandings are inextricable from the systems of signs through which we articulate them to ourselves” (xi). Experience, meaning-making, and problem-solving interact indivisibly, creating an amalgam from which the conceivable is drawn. Speaking of Cooper’s novels, Larzer Ziff beautifully sums up narrative’s potential to create conceivable ways of being and interacting with the world: “Although the noble savage who filled this role was a creation of social philosophers, once he existed on the page those who responded to his symbolic significance also located him in the life” (174).

Americans have long looked at class and community as wholes. From the decks of the *Arabella* (maybe), John Winthrop spoke of the body and its constituent parts as a model for a new society in a new world. This rhetoric would be adapted and amended through the centuries that followed, but many antebellum Americans continued to believe that the most apt metaphor for the proper organization of society was organic, cooperative, and hierarchical. This affected
the way they approached problems adhering in class stratification, including the problem of domestic service. Through their culture of servitude, we see the way that lived experience was dialectically shaped by such rhetoric, demonstrating that a full picture of the experience of servitude is in neither the narrative, nor the statistics, but in the interplay of both.

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APPENDICES

Table 1.1- Domestic Servants in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(excludes women &amp; enslaved persons)</td>
<td>(excludes enslaved persons)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>509,569</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>10,614</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>285,658</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>13,749</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>223,911</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13,046</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>41,983</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>9,508</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>32,844</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Male</td>
<td>3,538</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>9,139</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>467,586</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>429,194</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Female</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>38,392</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2 - Women's Workforce Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1810</th>
<th>1820</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1900</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 10 to 15</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 16+</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 10 to 15</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 16+</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White Free (numbers estimated before 1870)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 10 to 15</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 16+</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3 - Immigrants Arriving in America Listing Domestic Service as Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>% of total immigrants</th>
<th>Total # Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820-1829</td>
<td>1,305</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>128,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830-1839</td>
<td>2,354</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>545,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840-1849</td>
<td>21,100</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1,427,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1859</td>
<td>23,264</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2,814,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-1869</td>
<td>73,218</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2,081,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-1899</td>
<td>315,783</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3,694,294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38 Weiss, Thomas, “Female workforce participation rate, by age and race: 1800–1900 [Weiss].”

39 McCusker, John J., “Population of Maryland, by age, sex, race, slave or servant status, and taxable status: 1704–1782.”
Chapter Two: “A kind of *locum tenens*”: the Leather-stockling and the Body of 

American Servitude

James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (1823) introduced the Leather-stockling, Natty Bumppo, to a global audience. Bumppo is an important figure for any study of the cultural representation of antebellum labor and class because he was adopted as an icon of American independence and ingenuity.\(^\text{40}\) This chapter, however, will argue that Bumppo is also an icon of American servitude. Since the plot of Cooper’s novel is rather complicated, first, allow me to present a tertiary summary of the twists and turns that are important here. Following the American Revolution, Judge Temple founds the village of Templeton upon confiscated Loyalist land. Natty lives in a hut on the land when the Judge arrives, presumably as a squatter. In the novel’s present, 1793, two strangers join Natty, and this piques the town’s interest to the extent that they attempt to use New York’s game laws to enter his hut. Natty resists their attempts to serve a warrant, is tried and jailed - escapes, is chased, and ultimately cornered at the mouth of a cave. Here it is revealed that the three men were watching over the death of Major Effingham, former loyalist owner of the land. One is, in fact, the Major’s nephew, Oliver, and we learn that Natty is the Major’s servant who had been stationed on the land as a *locum tenens*, or legal

\[^{40}\] In 1859, the *North American Review* opined: “Cooper then becomes … the literary representative of our nationally, - the enchanter through whose spells we are transported, at will, to the …adventurous ordeal through which our ancestors passed to win the heritage that is their children’s vast and vaunted home” (Tuckerman 299). This reading persists in many critical assessments. Take, for example, Joel Johnson’s claims in *Beyond Practical Virtue* (2007): “Natty is perhaps the supreme example of how liberation itself calls forth excellence, having learned on his own how to live in the wilderness, survive on his hunting skills, and avoid the dangers of the forest” (95). In claiming the power of Natty’s “liberty,” Johnson seems to overlook the full biography of Bumppo, who is only “on his own… in the wilderness” in his old age, having been part of an active household and military community prior to the American Revolution.
place-holder of his Master’s claim. Major Effingham dies, Oliver Effingham and Judge Temple’s daughter marry, and Natty departs for less populated areas to the west.

The novel’s characters are surprised to find that Natty has been someone’s servant all along. Likewise, readers are prone to forget that his position on the banks of Lake Otsego is predicated upon his servitude to Major Effingham.\footnote{In 1826, the \textit{North American Review} summarized Natty’s history, saying, “after serving through the French wars, he had built for himself a hut near the shores of he Otsego Lake, then an uninhabited wilderness, and there lived a hunter’s life, unmolested for many years by the noisy tread of civilization, and depending wholly for subsistence upon his rifle and his rod” (“Cooper’s Novels”). This is not \textit{exactly} inaccurate, but it elides the fact that Natty lives on Lake Otsego at his master’s behest.} When they do remember, it’s quickly dismissed, as when Charles Swann writes, “One ...right to carry a gun, to hunt, can be seen as deriving from the fact that Natty is, in effect, the Major’s gamekeeper...but this is not the only right he can be read as standing for; he appeals (with good reason) to custom and to law” (Swann, “Guns” 115). Swann’s reading is otherwise impressive, but it devalues the fact of Natty’s servitude.

I will argue, instead, that keeping the precise social structures of the novel in mind is integral to understanding the politics of community Cooper’s text establishes. For instance, remembering Natty’s servitude significantly affects interpretation of such scenes as the Christmas Eve religious service. This scene marks Elizabeth Temple’s public debut in her rightful place as mistress of her widower father’s estate. Cooper paints this scene via the politics of the religious space, detailing the all-important process of who is allowed to sit where within the meeting hall: “a few benches lined this space that were occupied by the principal personages of the village and its vicinity. This distinction was rather a gratuitous concession, made by the poorer and less polished part of the population, than a right claimed by the favoured few” (122).
Our narrator contends that the prized position on the benches is not “claimed by the favoured few,” but “gratuitous[ly]” given by the “poorer” many. Following this claim, however, Cooper points out that “One bench was occupied by the party of Judge Temple, including his daughter; and, with the exception of Dr. Todd, no one else appeared willing to incur the imputation of pride, by taking a seat in what was, literally, the high place of the tabernacle” (122). This incident encapsulates a primary tension in *The Pioneers*: namely, that power gratuitously given must still be *taken*.

Crucial, here, is the threat of incurring “the imputation of pride.” This threat of public censure highlights the fact that those *giving* the place of honor are not wholly free to *take* it. Whereas the more low-born would be accused of presumptuous pridefulness, The Temple family and Dr. Todd have the sanction of the community, and can therefore take the place without censure. That communities police themselves is nothing new in the study of literature and culture. However, this incident highlights the complex construction of an American individualism at once congruent with Lockean terms of individual sovereignty and amenable to the type of communal social structures demonstrated within the meeting hall.

This combination of communalism and autonomy stood out to Cooper’s contemporaries, such as Alexander de Tocqueville, of whom Joyce Appleby writes, “nothing had struck him more forcibly than the general equality of condition in the United States. To it he attributed the paradoxical self-reliance and powerlessness of the individual in America. At once capable of taking care of himself without reference to any authority, the single citizen was impotent before the collective will of the majority” (51). Drawing on this nuanced reading of republicanism, I argue that in Cooper, the collaboration and collectivism critical to the formation and function of a town like Templeton instantiates social control under the rubric of freely given consent. Those
at the back of the church, unable to truly choose to sit at the front, are nevertheless credited with having chosen to sit at the back.

The Judge’s family, therefore, engages in a calculated risk assessment when they decide to sit at the front. Over repeated instances this decision comes to seem permanent, but Cooper cannily signals that while it may be habitual, the organization of a society along these careful and clear terms can be easily disrupted. He does so when Natty enters and sits in neither the front, nor the back of the room, but off to the side upon a log (123). The text suggests that one must consent to be placed within a community’s social hierarchies; but also that, having consented, one gives up the right to choose exactly where one sits.

This would seem to suggest, as many critics have argued, that Natty is incapable of being incorporated into Templeton.\textsuperscript{42} However, we must remember that Natty holds himself apart from Templeton society not only because he hates their “wasty ways,” as he is fond of saying, but also because he still considers himself loyal to the original Anglo-proprietor of the land, Major Effingham, and believes that Judge Temple has usurped the Major’s claim. The narrative that follows traces the wedding of these two societies - literally, in the marriage of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple - but also in the Leather-stockings ultimate reconciliation of his obligations to both potential landowners. The battle between the aristocratic Effingham and the republican Temple for control of the town is, as Dana Nelson argues, “a carefully historicized

\textsuperscript{42} For example, in Donald Ringe’s introduction to the 1988 Penguin Classics edition, he writes, “It is appropriate, therefore, that only two men of the supplanted culture - Leather-stockings and Mohegan - should remain near the lake, and that Billy Kirby should call the former a “sapless stub.” They are the human counterparts of the majestic trees, the forest giants that have been destroyed and remain around Templeton only as the charred remnants of their former selves” (xii).
account of how people constructed communal economies - for good and ill - on the frontier, and how they reacted to the imposition of more systematized ('modern') economies through the combined force of federal government and private capital” (162). One of the text’s mechanisms for representing this transition is Natty’s transformation from an aristocratic retainer to a loyal servant.

Cooper’s text, therefore, is prelude to the class politics like those Amy Schrager Lang discusses in Syntax of Class. Lang argues that mid-century and later discourses insist:

The existence of class divisions in America need not … signal antagonism, much less open hostility...the language of class was merely descriptive, identifying the broad social groupings natural to “civilized” communities. These groupings might be hierarchical in their arrangement, but in the American context they were entirely fluid in their composition. (1)

Bumppo’s “antagonism” toward the Temple family and their tenants is ultimately reconciled and rendered a “natural” bond of loyalty and duty. In this way, his servitude is a key trope for plotting the transformation from rigid aristocratic social classes to the more “fluid,” if “hierarchical,” class structures of midcentury. This trope satisfies the need to deny antagonism without denying class difference by claiming relationships of harmony.

The question of the proper organization of social classes was germane both to Cooper’s contemporaneous moment and to the historical time period of his text because, as Burke writes:

The outcomes of the American Revolution … led to a significant conceptual change. As the focus of public debate shifted from the feasibility of independence to the proper organization and operation of republican government in the years after 1783, the terminology of 'classes' began to eclipse the older socioconstitutional language of 'orders'.

41
With no titled nobility or other legal distinctions made among men - that is to say, among white, property-holding men - socioeconomic categories came to be more useful to Americans in the emerging republican discourse on politics and society. These were to become the 'natural' categories with which to speak and write about the workings of a presumedly 'natural' society. (Burke 22)

The text cleverly avoids entirely overthrowing older systems of loyalty, and instead constructs a narrative in which old world servitude becomes commensurate with the new world’s obligations of employment, and calls this union a politics of consensual, hierarchical collectivism.

Alan Taylor writes, “During the 1780s and 1790s the American Revolution played out its social implications…The combination of centrifugal expansion and revolutionary legacy opened to question the values and institutions of the colonial past, permitting the emergence of a more dynamic and competitive social order” (5). Cooper chooses to represent this new “dynamic and competitive social order” in Templeton, but by the end of the text, the competitive spirit is largely elided by Bumppo’s example of internalized forms of loyal servitude. While capitalist competition continues to allow the industrious to move between classes, inter-class competition is subsumed in favor of a picture of harmonious hierarchical social relations. This picture of harmony masks the forces that constrain individuals under the veneer of a smoothly functioning cooperative between those with power and those without.

The Secret History of Master-Servant Law

The history of servitude helps elucidate the techniques by which class discord was cloaked. Christopher Tomlins has shown that the claim, “None but negers are sarvants” was “the transcendent principle of the legal culture of work that had emerged from the colonial period” as
forms of bounded servitude became obsolete. However, “during the first half of the [early
nineteenth century] the claim became increasingly hollow. The ambit of master and servant grew
until it absorbed the employment contract as a whole” (“Early British” 150). Quoting Timothy
Walker from 1837, Tomlins writes, “what distinguished [nineteenth-century employment law]
from what had gone before was its all-encompassing quality, finding disciplinary authority in the
contract of employment itself, rather than in the particular sociolegal status - youthful,
indentured, and so forth - characteristic of the worker. ‘We understand by the relation of master
and servant nothing more or less than that of the employer and the employed’” (“Early British”
151). Whereas the laws of Masters/servants had, prior to the early nineteenth century, been
applicable to certain kinds of waged workers, all waged workers were now, in the codified
discourses of the law, rendered servants.

Traditionally, Masters held “jurisdictional” power over their servants as heads of
households (Steinfeld 56-9). This included the right to punish, confine, and direct the servant’s
activities and movements virtually twenty-four hours a day.43 Cooper’s text shows that this
power has been externalized from the Master/servant paradigm within the household, and
rendered general to all members of the community, many of whom are, legally speaking,
servants before the law. Throughout The Pioneers, Natty’s secret-servant status, which seems so

43 Douglas Hay and Paul Craven summarize the three “defining characteristics” of the
Master/servant contract: “The first was the idea that the employment relation was a matter
of private contract or agreement for work and wages between an employer who thereby acquired
the right to command and an employee who undertook to obey. The second was the provision
for summary enforcement of these private agreements by lay justices of the peace or other
magistrates, largely unsupervised by the senior courts. The third was punishment of the
uncooperative worker: not damages to remedy the breach of contract, but whipping,
imprisonment, forced labor, finds, the forfeit of all wages earned” (2).
at odds with his persona (according to both characters within the text, and to readers) parallels a disconnect between the law and public opinion. Tomlins writes, “at a time when popular discourse treated linguistic claims to vested status and authority in the employment relationship as highly controversial, legal discourse did not … the court represented employment as properly a relationship between a superior and a subordinate, a master and a servant” (*Freedom Bound* 225). While “vested status and authority,” such as the status of master and servant, were decried in public opinion, behind the scenes the apparatuses of the law were rendering the master/servant relation the touchstone from which to understand all employment relations.

Cooper therefore replicates, in Natty, the secret-servant status of all Americans employed by another person. The Leather-stockings seems to be a character out of place in the new Templeton; but he is actually a doppelganger for the mass of Templeton’s population whose servitude remains tacit, coming to the fore only when confronted by the law. Natty’s conflicting identities gesture toward the deep implications of the schism between how Americans publically and privately imagined themselves, and how the law made sense of their employment status. By failing to acknowledge the legal status of every employee as that of a servant before a master, the dominant narrative of employment relationships kept the public from addressing the subterranean inequalities being systematized by the law (*Tomlins Law, Labor* 290). The employment relationship was being legally codified as inherently unequal and exploitative, while being called a consensual, protected transaction between freely equal parties. Cooper’s tactic of calling the domination/subordination of Templeton - particularly the servility of Natty Bumppo - *consent* is a similar mischaracterization that obscures the impositions upon the individual’s sovereignty and choice. Most clearly, we see this in Natty’s decision to stay in Templeton at all. Bumppo complains about the place for the length of the novel - he leaves not when his own
inclination urges him to, but when his loyalty to his master no longer binds him to the spot.

During these changes in legal precedence, the interpolation of the servant’s body (and that body’s labor power) seems to undergo a shift. However, a closer examination shows that this shift is ultimately ephemeral. English Common Law understood the servant as part of the master’s household, legally akin to the wife and children, and therefore legally intelligible only through their connection with the patriarch. When possessive individualism came to challenge older forms of patriarchal authority, patriarchal authority, instead, adapted its terms to the language of individualism. Tomlins writes, “Patriarchal authority and its social relations of subordination did not decompose. Far from it. Both the civic realm (the state) and the domestic (the household), was composed anew” (Freedom Bound 342). The servant was now construed as having consented to become one of the master’s dependents. Robert J. Steinfeld articulates the ways that this both was and wasn’t progress: “Achieving legal autonomy represented a real gain for laboring people, but it also helped to obscure the systemic ways in which law continued to contribute to their oppression through the operation of the ordinary rules of property and contract in a world in which productive assets were unequally distributed” (9). This subsumed systematization of inequality was mirrored in the daily experience of servitude. The practice of servitude, wherein the servant’s body, choice of day-to-day activity, and even expressions of personality (such as dress and hair) are theoretically subsumed beneath the will of the master, remained unchanged.

Therefore, what was presented as a change from the corporal power the patriarch exerted over his dependents to a contract between two free parties actually resulted in very little change in the legal and material interpolation of the servant. American law continued to conceive of the servant as part of the master. For example, “Digest of Recent Decisions” from the American
Jurist and Law Magazine of April, 1833 explains that the master of an apprentice (legally construed as a servant) is entitled to the “value of the earnings” of his apprentice when he is hired by a third party. The apprentice’s work belongs to the master, therefore the master is owed the proceeds of that work. Similarly, in 1843, it is recorded that the master is also liable for work done by that servant (“Practical Points”). The full extent of the master’s ownership of the servant’s labor power is exemplified in another case from 1843, which decides that a servant who gives extra corn to the horses has committed theft – not of corn, but of his own labor time. The servant who gives more than enough corn at any given time ostensibly does not have to return to re-feed the horse, and thereby robs the master of parts of his labor (“Larceny by a Servant”). In “Synopsis of Law” from 1842, if a servant has been beaten or maimed, the master (not the servant) may recover losses from the party who inflicted the injury. Again, in 1844 the law states that a master is not liable for injuries one servant causes to another servant in his employ; but that he is responsible if his servant causes injuries to another person not in his employ (“Digest of American Cases”). Since both the injuring and the injured servants are legally understood as parts of the master, the legal damages would be owed back to himself. The servant’s injuries are only interpolated via the master’s loss. In a further clarification of this issue, a court in 1856 argued that the servant injured by other servants could not sue his master because he was, implicitly, partly to blame for his own injuries (“Farmers’ Law”). Servants, then, are legally indivisible from one another because all are covered by the master’s legal

44 Steinfeld elucidates this point: “If a servant was hired out to a third party, the master was entitled to collect the servant’s wages. This arrangement was considered perfectly natural since, during the term of service, the underlying labor was quite literally the master’s, not the servant, and not available for hire without the master's permission” (71).
Constructing a Collective

The preceding history of Master-servant law casts a different shadow upon the collective individualism described by scholars of the antebellum period. Like the professional and amateur poets in Mary Louise Kete’s *Sentimental Collaborations*, Cooper’s text understands the self as something constructed by one’s connections with others. Whether, as in Kete’s examples, this self is created through the exchange of affective material objects, or (as my example will show) via the exchange of personal freedoms, the self that is created is profoundly corporate. Cooper’s text concludes, as if in answer to Crevecouer’s question “What, then, is the American, this new man?” that the American is *not* an individual man. An American is not an I but a we. But the material consequences of this collectivism are, as master-servant law shows, matters of the body as well as matters of subjectivity.\(^45\) Given that master-servant law has become the basis for *all* employment law, antebellum culture continues to build itself upon control of the bodies of those with less power, but tells itself the narrative of consent and loyalty, industry and reward. The narrative claiming that America has transitioned from a rigid aristocratic caste system to a new fluid hierarchy belies the corporal control that has remained constant through both models.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the novel’s final scene, in which the new Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Effingham show Natty Bumppo that they have incorporated his name into Major Effingham’s epitaph, which reads: “The morning of his [Major Effingham’s] life was spent in honor, wealth, and power; but its evening was obscured by poverty, neglect, and disease, which were alleviated only by the tender care of his old, faithful, and upright friend and attendant

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\(^{45}\) Chapter two will elaborate upon how these divisible, but deeply entwined realms interact dialogically.
Nathaniel Bumppo. His descendants rest this stone to the virtues of the master, and to the enduring gratitude of the servant.” Natty is thrilled by his name being “placed in such honor,” and leaves Templeton, pleased that he will be remembered (423).

While Natty’s departure seems to expel him from the community, I propose that this moment firmly establishes his incorporation within that community, albeit in a subordinate position. We must remember that Oliver and Elizabeth do not know Natty plans to leave when they compose and order the engraving upon the Major’s tomb. Imagining that Natty will stay, their words construct a place for him within their community. Like the perfect servant of lore, he is firmly set in his place as an addendum to his master’s life. If we look closely at the grammar of that last line, the nuances of this construction come into focus. The monument is raised by the Major’s “descendants” in honor of “the virtues of the master,” but here the grammar breaks down. What follows is: “and to the enduring gratitude of the servant.” This implies that the stone memorializes “the enduring gratitude of the servant,” which would suggest that Natty’s enduring gratitude to the Major is being remembered, rather than that the descendants will continuously remember their own gratitude to Natty. By phrasing the epitaph in this manner, Oliver and Elizabeth flip what we might expect to be the relationship between master and servant. The Major appears to have done a service for Bumppo by allowing him to faithfully serve. The Effinghams reconstruct the inversion of consent and obligation we saw in the Christmas Eve service. Natty is construed as being grateful to be allowed to serve, rather than as having been

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46 I disagree, for example, with Jonathan Arac’s discussion of The Pioneers: “Not all of the parties are so integrated, however. Drunken Indian John - whose people bestowed the land - is burned to death, and Natty Bumppo- whose woodcraft made Effingham’s success possible - sets out for the wilderness…The Pioneers … operates by exclusion. Cooper does not depict the Indians and woodsmen as part of the future…even though they are central to the Leatherstocking novels that follow” (Arac 8).
compelled to serve by myriad socio-economic reasons. The “descendants” construct themselves and the power they inherit as “gratuitous concession[s]” from those over whom they are powerful.

The Effingham’s objectives in creating this tomb can be elucidated by exploring the meanings of tombstones, themselves. According to Keith Eggener, the tomb is anthropologically considered a sign of a society’s civilization and advancement, signifying a responsibility to the dead and to those obliged to remember them (9). Major Effingham’s tombstone indicates more than his personal significance to Templeton, it is a sign of Templeton itself’s stature. Natty’s incorporation upon this monument establishes him as crucial to the town’s understanding of itself. Furthermore, tombs have traditionally been a way of keeping the departed alive within the community (qtd. on Eggener, 12). Philippe Ariés reports that this was particularly the function of tombstones in the nineteenth century: “Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the tomb became a place of family pilgrimage. Early nineteenth-century American mourning pictures … frequently depicted a tomb - or, in America, a little family cemetery - which surviving relatives would visit” (260). Rather than truly disappearing into the wilderness, the Leather-stocking remains highly visible, an emblem and exemplum to those left behind as he progresses ever westward to reestablish his example elsewhere in the growing Americas. Indeed, Cooper’s later novel, Home as Found, shows subsequent generations of Templetonians visiting the Major’s tomb and the site of Natty’s hut.48

47 See also Philippe Ariés, “From that time onward [after ‘our most ancient cemeteries, dating back almost forty thousand years’], the cemetery or the tomb was to be the permanent sign of human habitation, testifying to the continuing relationship between death and culture. This relationship started with burial grounds, then extended to other types of material representation - that is to say, images. Death loves to be represented” (1).

48 See Person: “Home as Found … occupies a pivotal place in relation to the Leatherstocking novels. Not only is Natty Bumppo mentioned several times in the novel, which features the
This highlights the paradoxical qualities of Natty’s character: he is a significant individual who is, nevertheless, best understood via his subordinate connections with others. Likewise, the tombstone, itself, has paradoxical qualities. In addition to being a way to keep the departed alive for a community, the tombstone also contains the dead (Eggener 21). The dead are put to use by the living, and thereby their lives are rendered meaningful once those meanings are beyond the dead’s control. Nancy Isenberg writes, “Bones and the nation are linked symbolically: graves of ancestors stake claims to the national landscape and its history. They are political relics, deployed...to gain control of the nation's collective memory, and in support of particular cultural and political agendas” (148). By being set in stone, the dead are controlled by their living connections. However, by having those connections, the story of the dead remains visible for posterity. Eggener shows that the individual grave was a product of a new belief in the sovereignty of the individual (18). Cooper’s decision to mark the Major’s final resting place with a multi-person monument is a subtle way to signal that the individual sovereignty of those memorialized by it must be limited for the monument and the new society it celebrates to exist.

Our text tells us that Natty’s identity as a true and faithful servant is the best way to encapsulate him in words few enough to fit upon someone else’s tombstone. He will not even tell his own story - but be told by others and through others - and yet, by being connected with those others, his story is told, unlike the many who remain nameless. His story can be lived and can be told, not because he is independent, but because he is attached to someone else. When his name is recorded for posterity his servitude is carved into stone, and its grandeur reminds those who descendants of Oliver and ELizabeth Effingham...Natty presides over the lake in spirit; for, as Eve conducts her family and guests on a tour of the lake, she points out the site of Leatherstocking’s original cabin... and eulogizes his character” (19).
would likewise be without the resources to raise their own monuments that they may attach themselves to someone greater and therefore have a lasting place in this new culture.

I argue, then, that Natty is originally constructed as a footnote, and yet, Cooper’s most successful subsequent novels feature him as protagonist. If, as Alex Wolloch writes, novels register the becoming minor of characters, then the public reception of Cooper’s Leatherstocking poses an intriguing challenge. Wolloch argues that characters are made minor through their emplacement within narrative space and through their established and constructed relationships to the protagonist (44). In The Pioneers, Cooper’s characters seem to follow this pattern - but the response to the novel results, counter-intuitively, in the becoming major of a minor character. Despite Leatherstocking’s relatively small page-time, Cooper’s readership waxed rhapsodic about his importance as a type - not as a model for themselves, but as a model for the nameless, faceless many they hoped would follow in his wake and do the grunt work of opening the pioneering spaces of America. A retrospective from The North American Review registers this, arguing that Cooper is “the literary representative of our nationality” and that in his early works “the philosophic reader will discern the wholesome self-discipline, the inevitable self-dependence, the absolute freedom, the simple manners, the integrity, and the courage, which constituted the original basis of American character” (Tuckerman 299, 295). Additionally, Francis Parkman recounts that “The tall, gaunt form of Leatherstocking, the weather-beaten face, the bony hand, the cap of fox-skin, and the old hunting frock, polished with long service, seem so palpable and real, that, in some moods of mind, one may easily confound them with the memories of his own experiences” (Parkman, “The Works” 4).

Bumppo is treated as a type of American Adam, the boilerplate from which sprang all subsequent “Americans.” And yet, those who revere Natty Bumppo never see themselves as him
in anything more than a characterological sense - they imagine they have his qualities without imagining that they are set to his tasks. He is “the American”: the “us”, but never “I.” In this sense he is the becoming major of the minor: the importance of the many to the few is admitted, while the few are justified by their sincere appreciation of the many. They take him unto themselves and benefit from his virtues without having to labor at them.

Therefore, while Leather-stockings is memorialized at the end, his body has been pushed to the edges of the narrative, and is no longer necessary to his interpolation by Templeton’s powerful. Thomas Hill Schaub points out that his position on the tomb makes him already a member of the past (58), but beyond that, he’s always already dead, not just gone. Though he remains alive, they have narratively incorporated him amongst the dead. By concluding with this monumental union, Cooper’s text dramatizes the process of uniting disparate individuals into a corporate identity conducive to republican society, and the ways that aspects of outmoded aristocracy (such as unswerving loyalty and generational hierarchy) can retain their power. The Leather-stockings’s seemingly independent spirit is actually a counter-loyalty that must be reconciled with the demands of the growing Templeton. He represents how the one may be united to the many in order to collectively create an identity. Cooper’s text proposes this as a harmonious settling of status, but the text also registers the corporal force that continues to undergird such structures of power. By divorcing the narrative of Natty’s life from his body, the text leaves that body open to exploitation. What happens to it after connection with the major is severed? This text is silent. The monument is multi-person, but it does not actually mark the resting place of Natty’s bones. The material state of his body (dead or alive) is inconsequential to the construction of his place within Templeton society. Its absence is meaningless since, according to the culture of servitude, it is almost unintelligible unless united with his master’s.
The connections that allow his story to be told simultaneously obscure the material effects of that story upon his body.

**Aristocracy vs. Democracy**

In the figure of the Leather-stocking, Cooper’s text models a style of internalized servility that can save a community from devolving into ruthless competition. Dana Nelson writes, “If Americans no longer felt compelled to mind their place in a hierarchical social order, what would their place be? … What would democratic American relationships look like?” (“Cooper’s Leatherstocking” 124). Natty and the conflicts that surround him dramatize an answer to these questions. This becomes complicated, of course, because it’s unclear exactly who has a legal right to the land around Lake Otsego, and who, therefore, has a legal right to act as magistrate in a court of law. If we take the major conflict of the novel - Natty’s right to hunt on the land - and look at it through the lens of Natty’s servitude, it becomes clear that the right he feels he has to hunt deer is not a “natural” right, per se, but a right based upon Major Effingham’s claim to the land. He should be allowed to hunt because he’s the Major’s servant and *locum tenens*; not, necessarily, because everyone naturally shares that right.\(^{49}\) The whole conflict about whether a man has the right to eat – to stay alive or to starve because the law says he must – is germane, but also a feint behind which Natty hides his true motives.

Regarding this complexity, Nelson writes, “[Natty's] objection to the Judge is not a

\[^{49}\] I revise the argument, therefore, that “In the language of political philosophy, Natty and Temple exemplify the conflict between the use-right and exclusive-right theories of property. At the heart of Natty's argument is a conception of property as a contingent or limited possession which extends only to use and falls sort of absolute ownership” (Goodman 5).
prepolitical objection, as many critics have assumed. It is fully invested in the question of who governs. Natty is questioning where good governance comes from: formal federal or state laws influenced by lawmakers with major propertied interests, or those communally negotiated by the residents of a particular community” (164). I disagree, however, that “laws” and “lawmakers” and “communally negotiated” governance are directly at odds in the text, for the community is responsible for upholding the legal status of the Judge. Cooper dramatizes the ways in which this communal governance can have the stability of older aristocratic systems without sacrificing the Republican principles of the Revolution. I argue that Cooper offers servitude as a bridge between old and new systems. While this servitude is coded as republican because based on freely given loyalty, it continues to materially operate via the corporal coercion endemic to aristocratic structures.

To recognize this, we must dissect the systems of power in Cooper’s novel. While, as Nelson says, Judge Temple’s authority comes from his money, rather than his title, his ability to make that money is established in a field emphasizing reputation and appearance. In providing Temple’s origins, Cooper writes that “the consequence of an immigrant into these provinces was generally to be ascertained by the number of his white servants or dependents, and the nature of the public situations that he held.” Since “Old Marmaduke [the current Judge's great-grandfather] became the master of many thousands of acres of uninhabited territory, and the supporter of many a score of dependents,” he was considered a great man and “was entrusted by his associates with many important political stations.” Upon his death, however, it was revealed that he had “died, just in time to escape the knowledge of his own poverty”, it being “his lot to share the fortune of most of those, who brought wealth with them into the new settlements of the middle colonies” (30). One’s standing in the American colonies is purported to be based upon
one’s ability to support a number of “dependents.” In other words, one’s reputation was dependent upon one’s dependents. That this is not a merely economical relation is made evident by Old Marmaduke’s seeming largesse being compared to his actual poverty. Apparently, his reputation was such that his poverty could be concealed even from himself. While his station seemed to be predicated upon tangible assets, such as land and servants, it was in fact predicated upon the appearance of these things, and by agreement among “his associates” that he was a man to be trusted.

Cooper suggests that this was a temporary arrangement in American history, as “most of those, who brought wealth with them into the new settlements of the middle colonies” were ultimately bankrupted. He continues, “It is, however, a subject of curious inquiry at the present day, to look into the brief records of that early period, and observe how regular, and with few exceptions how inevitable, were the gradations, on the one hand, of the masters to poverty, and on the other, of their servants to wealth.” He attributes the fall of the master-class and the rise of the servant-class to the master-class’s “indolent, and comparatively uneducated offspring” who “were compelled to yield precedence to the more active energies of a class, whose exertions had been stimulated by necessity” (30-1). Here, the ephemeral element of reputation is superseded by the more tangible “active energies” borne of “necessity.”

And yet, all is not lost for the well-esteemed family. “The same pride of family, that had, by its self-satisfied indolence, conducive to aid their fall, now became a principle to stimulate them to endeavour to rise again...in this undertaking he [The Judge's father] was not a little assisted by a marriage, which aided in furnishing the means of educating his only son” (31). Endeavoring to regain both the tangible and the intangible forms of reputation, The Judge’s father exerts himself to acquire that oldest of status-climbing associations: an advantageous
marriage. Cooper deftly signals that status is a combination of actual merit and the recognition of others. There is little question that the Judge’s father deserves respect; yet he can only capitalize (literally) upon his deserts by being recognized by those in a position to help him do so. As Taylor writes, “Cultural acceptance, rather than formal law, underlay the ideal of genteel authority in eighteenth-century America … An American was a gentleman only if other people, common as well as genteel, publicly conceded that he had crossed - by breeding, education, and acquisition - that critical but subtle line separating the genteel few from the common many.” In this manner, “claims to genteel superiority in America depended on public acceptance. By giving or withholding deference, the public played a key role in defining who enjoyed genteel prestige” (14). Cooper’s text explores this facet of American life in detail. The many and varied shifts in social status so commonly touted as a peculiar feature of the American experience, are communal performances. To characterize these as freely given, however, obscures and perpetuates structural asymmetries in the avenues to authority.

In *The Pioneers*, we witness a community attempting to establish and come to terms with its asymmetries, hierarchies and dependencies in the aftermath of the initial, tumultuous stage of land settlement. This process depends upon and encourages the integration of individuals into the systems of the community. The curiosity that drives the text’s main conflict (between the Leather-stocking and those wishing to enter his hut) is a naturally upwelling feature of a community attempting to place friends, neighbors, and interlopers into its schematics of status, and to establish the validity of the legal codes and procedures that will undergird them. The

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50 As Erin Atchison writes, “With no hereditary nobility in America, gentility was entirely a matter of how all members of society viewed a person. In this respect, public opinion held more influence in America than in the more stable, but by no means static, class systems of Europe” (38).
novel seems to conclude with harmony established and ratified by the community. By constructing Natty’s ultimate incorporation under the aegis of the Effingham/Temple family as a matter of conflicting loyalties (and therefore a matter of choice), however, Cooper’s text obscures the fact that the very possibility of privileged, leisured classes, depends upon the subordination of the many. What seems like Natty’s freedom to choose his loyalties actually highlights that he, like those sitting in the back of the meeting room, has his choices severely curtailed by his incorporation into either the Temple or the Effingham family, and the communities they attempt to construct. The articulations of power in a hierarchical village like Templeton or a manorial family like Major Effingham’s quite specifically involve curtailing the choices of the majority of society.

**Curtailing Choice**

Catharine Allgor’s reading of Dolley Madison’s White House is useful here. She writes, “In her efforts to renovate and re-create the president's House, Dolley acted as a political woman, designing a tangible and concrete place for the expression of republican ideals and the political power used to extend them but also making room for aristocratic longings in the new Republic” (58). Madison’s staging of elaborate parties – which depended upon legions of servants (enslaved and free) – satiated “aristocratic longings” for pomp, circumstance, and luxury, using the ancient techniques to help create a functioning republican government. The type of servitude that Natty Bumppo comes to exemplify over the course of *The Pioneers* similarly satiates longings for aristocratic forms while putting those forms into the service of republican ideology. The servant’s participation in the construction of power does not grant the servant any, but Cooper contends that servants don’t want it, to begin with.

This masks the coercion latent in the use of others, like employees, for gain – particularly
the capitalistic gain that leads to the civic-judicial authority of Judge Temple. Laurie Ousley argues that Cooper’s contemporaries, like Catharine Maria Sedgwick, offered contract in place of “a past model of political economy,” and as “the solution to a class struggle” (141). While in an aristocratic society such as Major Effingham’s the asymmetry created by distinctions in authority is predicated upon state-granted title and land ownership, in the Republic of Templeton this construction is solidified by legal discourses of employment and wage relations. As Tomlins writes, “For the minority to get its leisure subsidized [for the rich to be able to live off others' labor], [the worker’s] exercise of his own leisure-preference - had to be curbed … Once bodies had chosen to work, inuring them to that work required that they be prevented from working only as they chose” (Freedom Bound 351). The right to labor when one chose (based upon a personal interpretation of needs) was severely curtailed. Instead, having contracted to work for another, laborers were legally unfree to change their minds and quit. Should they do so, their employer could sue for damages resulting from the loss of the laborer’s time. The freedom to quit was considered incompatible with the political and social structures of capitalism. The individual’s sovereign right to work only when and how he chose was mitigated by the law’s imposition of disciplinary penalties upon him for leaving his position before the appointed time, or before the appointed work was complete.52

51 Speaking of Alexis de Tocqueville, Appleby writes, “In aristocratic communities all occupied fixed positions, one above the other, the result being that each man always sees someone above himself whose patronage is necessary to him and below him another man whose cooperation he may claim” (Appleby 51).

52 Steinfeld elaborates: “In the seventeenth century, unfree labor represented the 'normal' legal form that contractual labor took in the Anglo-American world. Free labor- labor undertaken under legal rules that did not give employers either the right to invoke criminal penalties for departure or the right to specific performance - represented, when it first appeared in the American colonies early in the eighteenth century, a special rather than universal form of contractual labor” (4). He furthermore offers an ideological basis for this practice: “These regulations were rooted in the idea that one who was a member of the community owed his or
While this is a change from being forcibly removed back to the master’s worksite, it remains a punishment against the body since it exacts a monetary punishment, and money is needed to eat. As Steinfeld explains, “Direct coercion would not be permitted, but legally sanctioned economic compulsion would” (151). This seems to have eliminated corporal coercion, but it has merely shifted the corporal effects of the law down the chain of events. The contractual, consensual construction of this agreement obscures the fact that the material necessity of laboring for another (which was increasingly more common) in effect negated the freedom to negotiate. One had to work, and having to work, one had a limited field in which to contract an exchange of labor, and very little opportunity for changing the field.

Cooper demonstrates the flaws of laboring when one chooses through the character of Billy Kirby. Kirby labors to meet his own immediate demands, and then quits working until he needs more money. His predilection to benefit society only insofar as it benefits himself butts up against the society’s need to command the labor power of its members. As Godden explains, Kirby has to be corrected by the powerful: “The gap that opens between experience and economics deprives a man like Kirby of his indexical relation to himself; his selfhood ceases to be his body and becomes his labour power, a power appropriated by another” (128). Godden points out that Kirby’s “selfhood” has become intelligible only when it is “appropriated by another.” Furthermore, this vision of the self is codified in the legal discourses of the new society in which “Temple … holds all the cards: much of the land and most of the laws. To follow JP McWilliam in reading those ‘civil laws’ as based upon ‘moral law’ is to declare them innocent of economic interest; such a declaration misses the political point. Judge Temple envisions a

her labor to other community members first and was not free to depart from the town unless that labor was not needed” (61).
particular kind of future, and he will have it, 'legally.' (Godden 128). Billy’s freedom must be curtailed so that his labor benefits the interests of those who have the legal power to punish him if he refuses.

Corporal Coercion Deferred

Cooper seems to be contrasting the coercion of legal proceedings with the force of arms. A military society, such as the British Commonwealth and the former colonies, seems to more greatly affect the body of those under its charge, whereas the newer forms of law use economic and legal persuasion, instead. The Leather-stocking broaches this subject in the novel’s opening conflict. Natty, Oliver, and the Judge simultaneously shoot at a deer. In the ensuing debate over whose bullet struck the fatal blow, Natty says, “although I am a poor man, I can live without the venison, but I don't love to give up my lawful dues in a free country. Though, for the matter of that, might often makes right here, as well as in the old country, for what I can see” (21-2). Natty suggests that “in the old country,” “might … makes right.” His comments imply that the new country is supposed to have progressed beyond this form of power, but that he fears the Judge’s methods are similarly “might” based.

But just how is “might” expressed? The Judge has no military background or force at his disposal. This, at least, is an improvement upon the British system, according to the text. Cooper writes that anyone who has crossed the border into Canada “may easily observe, not only the self-importance, but the real estimation enjoyed by the humblest representative of the Crown ... Such, and at no very distant period, was the respect paid to the military in these States, where now, happily, no symbol of war is ever seen, unless at the free and fearless voice of their people” (32). In the Revolutionary tradition, Cooper objects to the presence of a standing army, whose
“symbol[s] of war” generate an inappropriate “respect” for even “the humblest representative of the Crown.” He critiques the effect militarism has upon a population by posing a corporeal threat to the people.53

And yet, The Pioneers shows that no law can force a man to obey it - a man must be forced to obey a law by the force of other men, not their abstract principles. This, however, is no basis for a society, particularly a society reflecting upon a period when mob violence threatened to disunite the fledgling nation. As James Rogers Sharp shows, the 1790s were rife with fears of sectional violence, particularly following uprisings such as the Whiskey Rebellion (204-8). The very real threat of armed resistance from those already within the collective had to be addressed by a text seeking to fashion a new national symbolic upon which to grow.

This combination of informal social policing and the manpower behind the law’s efficacy are encapsulated near the end of the novel when Ben Pump ridicules Jotham Riddle and Hiram Doolittle while defending the mouth of the cave where Major Effingham hides. Benny cries, “I've logged many a hard thing against your name, master, and now the time's come to footup the day's work, d'ye see; so square yourself, you lubber, square yourself, and we'll soon know who's the better man.' 'Jotham!' cried the frightened magistrate - 'Jotham! call in the constables. Mr. Penguillum, I command the peace - I order you to keep the peace“ (378). The ability of the law to “command the peace” is not synonymous with the law’s ability to “keep the peace.” Riddle and Doolittle are on the right side of the law – but they lack the physical dominance needed to force Ben to recognize and honor their legal position. Persons, and the

53 James Rogers Sharp writes that the reaction to Alien and Sedition Acts reflected a real fear of violence, both from opposition, and from the new standing Federal Army (203). The threat of armed resistance, therefore, was particularly salient during the time in which Cooper’s text is set.
physical force of their bodies, must act in concert with the letter of the law for the peace to be kept. We see, however, a secondary type of policing going on here, in which Ben’s record of Hiram Doolittle’s past offenses labels Doolittle unworthy of his office. Ben suggests a contest of force to determine “who’s the better man,” but the question here isn't about who is the better man, but rather, who is the man on the right side of the law. As the novel will bear out, the fact that a magistrate has been vested with the power of the law is not alone sufficient to accord him the ability to effectively wield that law. The community through which and upon whom that law is to be exercised must respect his right to that power.

Should the community fail to respect one’s right to power, there will be consequences. Natty’s decision to remain loyal to a different power (Major Effingham), results in his legal difficulties. In America, one cannot have two masters, and society has the right - indeed, the obligation - to funnel its members’ loyalty into certain channels. Speaking to Elizabeth in the interlude between Natty’s trial and his sentencing, the Judge argues that “Society cannot exist without wholesome restraints. Those restraints cannot be inflicted, without security and respect to the persons of those who administer them; and it would sound ill indeed, to report that a judge had extended favour to a convicted criminal, because he had saved the life of his child” (382).

The power of the law, as the Judge’s statement indicates, rests upon the physical power of those enforcing it, or “the persons of those who administer them.” Without this, the “wholesome restraints” that the Judge identifies as the law are unenforceable and therefore null and void. So, then, would be the society that they help to form. The safety of a deputy’s physical body is therefore a matter of public concern, demonstrating that the physical expression of the law and the intangible expression of the law are inseparable.

The protection of the deputy’s body is the law’s job - and to prevent future instances of
such violence, the law makes a display of punishing the offender so that others will learn by the
eexample. The Judge explains that Natty’s age precludes the jury from ordering him to be
whipped, but that “as the dignity of the law requires an open exhibition of the consequences of
your crime, it is ordered, that you be conveyed from this room to the public stocks, where you
are to be confined for one hour” (369). The law, in the Judge’s formulation, needs to protect the
body of a deputy, and is therefore given freedom to harm another’s body (the criminal’s). Natty’s
protection of Elizabeth, however, does not afford him any especial privileges to harm anyone
else. The law’s protection of the body grants it the privilege to harm the body, whereas the
layperson’s protection of the body does not. They remain subservient to the law itself, and this
subservience must be witnessed.

Lauren Berlant’s theories of the national symbolic help elucidate the function of these
legal shows. She writes, “the state's need for subjects who love the law, thereby loving the
covenant, stands behind its periodic use of juridical spectacle to transfigure individuals into
'collective subjects' or civil law. Juridical spectacle works to install New Law by harnessing two
different temporalities: first, that of New Testament eschatology...and second, that of the
duration of the legal spectacle itself” (97). During this “spectacle,” “while the criminal
experiences punishment directly on the body, the state theorizes the proper citizen's 'body' as an
abstraction constituted by a certain configuration of knowledge and memory” (161). By both
punishing and abstracting the body – and wedding both practices to the fate of nation and
 cosmos, the law both singles out the individual and submerges the material effects of its actions
upon that individual. The individual becomes a sign, and, counterintuitively, thereby disappears.
Therefore, while the Judge affects a stance of impartiality toward Natty’s protection of his own
daughter, he actually exhibits a clear partiality toward the actions of the law, which are
inseparable from the persons who enact them. Arbiters of the law are afforded special jurisdictional power over all others by virtue of their socially and politically conferred statuses within the “house” of the law, and this, like being a head of household, grants them special privileges over the bodies of those subordinate to them.

Judge Temple construes his actions as protecting the status of the law; however Cooper shows that the law is constructed in a way that does not evenly protect the people. Tomlins explains how the genteel few were able to control articulations of power, even in a democracy at least nominally structured to give greater equality of voice to the many:

The disproportionate influence of the few was attributable to two major and related weaknesses of the many: ignorance and lack of organization. These weaknesses left the many easy prey to oppression on the part of those notables (mostly lawyers) to whom in their naivete they turned to act as their representatives. The result was that constitutions and laws embodied the interests of the few not only in their interpretation but in their actual form and content. (Law, Labor 5)

The impartiality of the law is mitigated by an individual’s access to information. Those who come before the bar, then, do not stand on equal footing with one another. Cooper addresses this legal quandary in his depiction of Natty’s trial. While Natty is praised for his “simplicity” before the bar of the court, this very simplicity is what allows individuals like Natty to be imposed upon by the law - not just at the individual level, when or if their case happens to come to the courts; but at the systemic level, when laws, themselves, and the constitutions guiding them, are made.

The text relates this matter of law to Natty’s servitude, and the Republican principles founded upon servitude, in two ways. First, when the town is gathering to enter the courtroom for Natty’s trial, Cooper writes that Judge Temple and the lawyers were followed by, “another
posse of constables, and the mob followed the whole” (359). This chain of legal officers extends from the Judge, down to “the mob.” Cooper’s text therefore acknowledges that the mob is an integral part of the law’s operation. The numeroseness of the mob allows the less numerous constables, lawyers, and judges, to be effective. Each distinct group is made more solid by being part of the chain, and collectively, they form the body of the law.

Cooper subtly acknowledges the danger of the mob by suggesting that one should not be free to choose associations – these, too, must be sanctioned by the community. Natty’s loyalty to the Major requires him to ignore his own desires, and to keep his motivations secret from those around him. The conflict in *The Pioneers* stems largely from Natty’s refusal to make himself and the contents of his home known to those around him. But Natty’s right to his personal property might have gone undisputed if he had stayed alone in his cloister. It is when the Leatherstocking’s associates appear that the town’s curiosity can no longer be put off. Elizabeth’s curiosity about the hut is first sparked by her contemplation of “the youth … the hunter and the Indian warrior; and she felt an awakening curiosity to visit a hut, where men of such different habits and temperament were drawn together, as by common impulse” (274). What form of association and society could form the odd companionship of the three? Natty alone was understandable by the settlers of Templeton; but Natty in communion with two such divergent and themselves mysterious figures is beyond reckoning. The town simply cannot accept it, and takes measures to reveal their connection, which they (correctly, as it turns out) believe to be predicated upon whatever is kept so secret within the hut.

Natty’s refusal to be known - to make the contents of his home, and even the contents of his life history, a matter of public knowledge, is often taken by critics as an argument for the individual’s right to privacy. However, we must reconsider this in light of Natty’s position as
Major Effingham’s servant, which changes not only our understanding of Natty’s character, but of his actions throughout the text. What earlier seemed to be Natty’s preservation of his own privacy is shifted - he was, in fact, protecting not his own privacy, but his master’s private right to die without the scrutiny of Templeton strangers. Whereas Judge Temple had been welcomed into Natty’s hut upon his first appearance at the lake, others are now barred from it. Natty used to open his hut to strangers, but now does not because of Major Effingham’s secret residence within.

We must, then, reevaluate all that readers generally attribute to Natty’s frontier independence, viewing it not as independence, per se, but as liberty within the constraints of his servitude. Natty is given considerable freedom for a servant because his commitment to his master’s interests is not in question. This type of liberty, far from erasing the subordinate link between master and servant, suggests that it has been wholly internalized - the master no longer has to give minute orders because the servant’s decision-making is trusted to mirror the master’s. Natty has, in other words, internalized the Major’s perspective and prerogatives so deeply that their division in body is no longer of consequence. He is, as Oliver Effingham declares, “a kind of locum tenens” for Major Effingham - a place holder for the Major’s mind (440). His body has become a conduit through which the Major’s legal claims retain validity.

Once Natty is able to speak of his servitude (because doing so would no longer throw unwanted suspicion upon his Master’s privacy), our narrator gestures toward the subsumation of Natty’s bodily interest within that of his master’s. With the mob quieted for the moment by the Major’s appearance from the cave, our narrator relates: “Natty had followed the supporters of this unexpected object to the top of the cave, and took his station at a little distance behind him, leaning on his rifle, in the midst of his pursuers, with a fearlessness that showed that heavier
interests than those which affected himself were to be decided” (436). “Heavier” than his own bodily safety (he is, after all, being pursued by a militia) is the matter of Major Effingham’s identity and his lineage through Oliver. This includes, of course, the proprietorship of all Templeton, and what the narrative construes as a great wrong done to the Effingham family. These are weighty matters, indeed, but to suggest that they are heavier than the concern Natty should have for his own physical liberty and safety is to, again, subsume his person beneath that of his master’s. Natty’s decision to willingly, even happily, go to jail after the Major has passed, confirms that all the conflict surrounding letting people into his hut hinged not on his own freedom to protect his dwelling, but on his freedom to protect his master.

The text suggests that others should follow the example of Natty’s loyalty when Ben Penguillan (or is it Penguillian, Penguillium, or Pump?) reverts back to his original name of “Benjamin Stubbs.” Ben shouts at the militia mob: “If you call me Penguillan, you calls me by the name of the man on whose land, d’ye-see, I hove into daylight; and he was a gentleman; and that’s more than my worst enemy will say of any of the family of Benjamin Stubbs” (431). Ben’s reversion to his original name reveals a new class antagonism as well as a new class pride and consciousness. To be “a gentleman” is not necessarily a good thing - particularly when the “gentlemen” of Templeton are behaving like such fools. Proud, now of his class as a simple tenant, his name invokes the image of the stumps throughout the town of Templeton. Like the clearings that produced the stumps, Ben’s reclamation of his meager name converts the grand and lofty into the useful and low. No longer for show, Ben’s new-old name signals that he is ready to be put to use. The pride with which he makes this reclamation indicates that he has internalized the value of his usefulness, rather than his former pretensions to landed-ness. Rather than the owner of the land, he is like the land itself - to be used, productive, firm. The variations
upon his adopted name of “Penguillian” evidence the ephemeral power that such a name and the position with which it is associated provide. In this new world, to have power is to have usefulness, not merely to have a name. This re institutes class harmony without class competition (despite the dig at Templeton “gentlemen,” who have only the name of the class they aspire to).

The usefulness of the powerful and the usefulness of the low are harmoniously united in the society of Templeton by the novel’s close. By the conclusion of the text, the majors Effingham and the Judges Temple are gone - theirs is the way of life that has passed.\textsuperscript{54} Ben, taking his cues from his allegiance to the Leather-stocking, is the future, and he will proceed beneath the aegis of Oliver and Elizabeth Effingham, who have blended the competing cultures. Natty’s conflicting identities gesture toward the deep implications of the schism between how Americans publically and privately imagined themselves, and how the law made sense of their employment status. By failing to acknowledge the legal status of every employee as that of a servant before a master, the dominant narrative of employment relationships kept the public from addressing the subterranean inequalities being systematized by the law. The employment relationship was being legally codified as inherently unequal and exploitative, while being called a consensual, protected transaction between freely equal parties.

Taylor, again, offers an insightful way of understanding the function of Cooper’s literary production in the culture at large. “People made property, power, and stories reciprocally and all at once...William and James Fenimore Cooper were enmeshed in all three constructions ...
narratives have power because they are woven into life, not simply imposed upon a chaotic experience after the fact” (9). Upon the power of stories like Cooper’s, white men in the “early 19th century” could argue that they had “rehabilitated the wage relationship as a more republican and less dependent form of employment than traditional indentures or apprenticeships” (Roedigger 5). As Tomlin’s history shows, however, this narrative of rehabilitation belied the underlying inequalities systematized and codified by the law. Cooper’s tactic of calling the domination/subordination of Templeton - particularly the servility of Natty Bumppo - consent and, even, rugged independence, is a similar mischaracterization.

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Chapter Three: “The Great Gulf Between”: Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* and the Narrativity of a Culture of Servitude

Caroline Kirkland prefaces her 1839 frontier narrative, *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?*, by explaining that she had contemplated publishing her travel journals entire, “considering with myself that these my adventurous journeyings and tarryings beyond the confines of civilization, might fairly be held to confer the traveller's privilege.” Eventually, however, “conscience prevailed, and I must honestly confess, that there be glosses, and colorings, and lights, if not shadows, for which the author is alone accountable” (31). Her preface, which is signed “M.C.” for the author’s pseudonym, “Mary Clavers,” establishes that her text is the product of imagination borne of experience, not just of experience uncolored by “the author.” Turn the page and begin Chapter One, however, and confusion emerges, for Kirkland implicitly contrasts her text to novels like James Fenimore Cooper’s, writing, “I have never seen a cougar - nor been bitten by a rattlesnake. The reader … must expect nothing beyond a meandering recital of common-place occurrences...a very ordinary pen-drawing; which, deriving no interest from coloring, can be valuable only for its truth” (33). So, which is it? Are Kirkland’s “sketches” of frontier Michigan life colored, or not?

Caroline Kirkland really did move to the Michigan frontier with her husband in support of his speculations upon a new town. She wrote about her experiences and sent them back to New York to be published as, *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* The title page lists “Mrs. Mary Clavers, An Actual Settler” as the author. Kirkland’s neighbors were unbeguiled by the pseudonym, however, and responded to her witty depictions of their foibles with ill humor until
the Kirklands eventually returned to New York.55 This publication history, plus the prefatory material described above, has made the genre of Kirkland’s text a vexed issue. She claims to be skewing real life experiences for the benefit of the reader’s entertainment; yet her neighbors could clearly identify themselves in her portrayals. Is this a novel? A travel journal? Or something in between? As Nathaniel Lewis writes, hers is “a text that resists easy codification” (63). This question has become less urgent as critics have embraced the belief that no text - whether claiming to be nonfiction, or not - is without artistic colorings; but I would like to reopen the question now for the ways that genre affects a reader’s view of authorial intent, and how this view affects the field of plausible interpretations.56

Like many, I first considered Kirkland’s text insufferably class-biased and ugly in its treatment of her more rustic neighbors. I scoffed at William S. Osborne’s 1965 Introduction to the College and University Press Services edition of A New Home (ANH), which argues that “[Kirkland] recognized her own pretenses for what they were, [and] the folly of holding to them in a frontier community...When it came to 'reconciling' fashionable opinions of propriety or good taste to backwoods conditions, she was willing to confess that the practical advantages outweighed the fanciful notions with which she had come West” (12-3). She recognized her own

55 Scott Peeples reports that “The Kirklands had been part of a wave of emigration that increased Michigan's population sevenfold between 1830 and 1840 ... yet like thousands of others, they were ruined financially during the depression that followed the Panic of 1837” (305).

56 The precise definitions of different genres are of longstanding debate. I, along with many contemporary critics, argue that genres often overlap, for example in Tim Youngs’s explanation of the overlap between travel writing and fiction: “Neither Gulliver’s Travels nor Typee would be considered travel writing any longer, but their form illustrates how fiction has borrowed from travel texts. The borrowing happens the other way, too. Travel writers draw on the techniques of fiction to tell their stories. Plot, characterization and dialogue all play their part. Whereas some travel writers insist on absolute verisimilitude, others readily admit to the manipulation and invention of detail” (Youngs 4).
pretensions, I could acknowledge, but she most certainly did not conclude that they were “fanciful” enough to be dismissed. Kirkland, it seemed, supports a temporary suspension of genteel standards in the face of wilderness exigencies - but she does so, in part, to comfort her genteel readers that the proper order of society will eventually be restored. With increased population, especially from the polite classes in the east, even the west will eventually become civilized. In one of the most influential readings of Kirkland’s text, Lori Merish writes, “As a self-consciously feminine alternative to previous traditions of frontier literature, Kirkland's text registers in detailed form the role of women and material refinement in the civilizing process and illuminates the ideological underpinnings of American consumer culture” (491-2). Merish participates in the scholarly tradition of those who, like Ann Douglas, seek to highlight the hypocrisy in much middle-class literature and culture, interrogating the text for schisms that symptomatically reveal the ideology of the author and/or the milieu of production.

I first approached A New Home in this vein, but upon re-reading, I began to feel that I was, in fact, doing Kirkland’s authorial finesse a disservice. Merish says, “By the 1830s, a wide range of Protestant authors acknowledged the ‘civilizing’ influence of luxury and tasteful surroundings, especially domestic surroundings, which constituted the material environment over which an individual exercised the most control and which would be most habitually experienced” (489). She sees that Kirkland addresses the way the material world affects consciousness, but doesn’t see Kirkland’s text critiquing this in any way. When I re-read without supposing that the text’s contradictions and hypocrisies were symptoms, however, things changed. Certainly her class-bias was present - in fact it was so present that it suddenly seemed ridiculous for me to suppose that I was aware of it in spite of the author rather than by her design. This feeling was enhanced when I made the observation with which I open this chapter:
that Kirkland muddies the genre of her text by first insisting that it is “colored” and then insisting that it is not. Having made this observation, I was faced with a question: was this deliberate, or not? Was I noticing a consciously created contradiction, or an unconsciously created symptom of the author’s unavoidable biases? Perhaps Kirkland was merely writing quickly and reused the turn of phrase without recognizing the contradiction it created; or perhaps she had quite deliberately toyed with her reader’s expectations; or perhaps the author of the paratextual preface should be distinguished from the narrator of Chapter One, and this contradiction is, therefore, a sign of the narrator’s unreliability; or perhaps the preface is not paratext at all, but - being signed “Mary Clavers” - is text, proper, and the contradiction is, therefore, a proto-postmodernist use of metanarrative.

My point here is not that we should definitively determine the right choice among the above possibilities, but that we think critically about the ways that our interpretation of a text’s genre generates presumptions with which we approach a text’s contradictions. Both authorial intent and genre establish parameters governing reader expectation and critically defensible interpretation. As Tim Youngs writes, genre “is not merely a descriptive label but a way of making sense of the structures by which we describe our surroundings and perceive meaning in them” (2). When we approach a literary text with the understanding that it is one genre or another, this affects the meanings we expect it to create. So, for example, if, like Judith Fetterley, we claim that “A commitment to realism provides the essential impetus for Kirkland's work. Consciously defining herself against the romanticism of previous western chroniclers, such as Charles Fenno Hoffman and James Hall, Kirkland asserts at the outset that she will write what is 'valuable only for its truth,’” we might conclude, as she does: “Thus much of the structure of A New Home derives from a contrast, implicit or explicit, between expectations and reality”
(Fetterley 120). Or, if, like John Nerber, we approach ANH as “a documentary book,” we might value it for its “authoritative and rounded view of the life of the average man on the frontier, and more particularly his wife, for Mrs. Kirkland was one of the first writers to examine the pioneer woman’s daily life unromantically and in detail” (Nerber 5).

Conscious of these consequences, I disabused myself of my own pretensions and evaluated the text’s literary aesthetics anew. Its contradictions emerged as intriguing signs that the text was wrestling with questions of authorial intent and genre in the narratives of day-to-day life, and with how real men and women are materially affected by the narratives through which material life is given shape and meaning. Kirkland addresses the question raised by Eric Wolf in Envisioning Power: “how were human minds constituted to deal with experience? … were human minds so tutored by custom that external stimuli could only manifest themselves in behavior after passing through the cognitive detectors of language and culture, which processed them into templates for action?” (22). Written in a conversational style, regularly addressing the reader, ANH particularly addresses the narratives of daily life. Smith and Watson argue that narrative is constantly surrounding us: “If we are not telling our stories, we are consuming other people's lives. Consuming personal narratives on an everyday basis, we imbibe the heterogeneous 'lives' authorized by and authenticated in the institutions through which we negotiate daily existence” (Getting a Life 3). According to much narrative theory, the daily events of Kirkland’s text could not be narrated without being colored: “the first rule of [narrative] is that it leaves its mark on the stories it tells. So if things are really happening in the world, we nonetheless cannot pick them up with our words, or scripts, or film, or paint without adding, framing, coloring, and generally inflecting those events in a multitude of ways” (Abbott 33).
When, therefore, Lewis asks of \( \textit{ANH} \) “…what realism – or whose realism – is at work here?” (68) he alludes to what I would argue is one of the main structural elements of Kirkland’s text: the question of where one finds \textit{the real} against which one’s understanding of the world should be judged given that the individual is enmeshed in so many narrative strands. By persistently highlighting its author’s personality and the acts of reading and writing, \( \textit{ANH} \) dramatizes the intertwined processes of experiencing, telling, and listening. Jerome Bruner writes, “telling others about oneself is, then, no simple matter. It depends on what we think they think we ought to be like - or what selves in general ought to be like...Our self-directed self-making narratives early come to express what we think others expect us to be like” (66). Mary Clavers has an experience, that experience is written down (i.e. narrativized), and read by a presumed audience. By highlighting the occurrence of events, their telling, and their reception, the text highlights the gaps between. In the space between experiencing and telling, narrative has intervened to impose shape upon the events – even the events of storytelling themselves.

For example, in her preface, Mary Clavers writes, “I am glad to be told by those who live in the world, that it has lately become fashionable to read prefaces” (31). This pithy line evokes several images: a reading public conscious of fashionable reading practices; the image of the east coast as “the world,” and Clavers’s current home in Michigan as someplace alien; the image of correspondents both composing and reading letters through which Clavers learns of fashionable reading practices; the image of our narrator choosing which things to include in her preface given that it may not be glossed over by her readers; and the image of someone opening her book to read her preface. Each image highlights spaces between the author and her auditors; the events, and their emplacement in personal narrative history.
Let us further explore the image of a reading public creating a “fashion” of practices – how is this fashion created and how is it policed? How could anyone know if the preface has been read, or not? Only by constructing a reading public can private acts of reading be swayed by currents of fashion – and then there is no telling whether they truly are swayed, or whether the narrative of that private reading practice is the only thing altered. This attention to the narrative layers of the act of reading, itself, begs the question of where the unmediated experience actually is. If it is in neither her text, nor her reader’s homes, nor in the interplay between her readers and her text, or between readers, themselves - where can we find it?

This question is begged once more by the repeated references to Kirkland’s work as “Sketches” or “Drawings” of her Michigan life. While her preface distinguishes between “colored” and uncolored drawings, the use of a visual arts metaphor again highlights that these “sketches” are drawn from a particular perspective. The text offers two key examples of the way that the same material reality may actually appear differently to people from different

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57 Kirkland’s use of the term “sketches” surely references Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-20). More often, Kirkland’s contemporaries related her sketches to the rural life pieces of Mary Russell Mitford’s *Our Village* (1824), with its picturesque, but “true to life” portraits of English villagers. For example, an article reprinted from *The Spectator* reports that her chosen scenes, “being obviously dramatized by Mrs. Clavers, they throw an air of fiction over her work, which is not completely removed in the other parts by her own ornate style, and an imitation of the peculiar, not to say somewhat affected manner of Miss Mitford” (“Mrs. Clavers Glimpses of Western Life”). “Wending its way through three and a half centuries of American poetry and prose, the image of America as a community was popularized in the 1820s and 1830s in the village sketch, a new kind of fictional narrative that proliferated in the magazines, annuals, and gift books of the era and took the form of book-length works” (Zagarell, “America as” 146). Zagarell explains the significance of this genre further, “...village-sketch literature...is more than the source of a group of quaint, enduring cultural motifs; it constitutes one important site of an ongoing debate about the composition and character of America - a dispute about the place of difference and diversity in this nation” (“America as” 146).
perspectives. When Mary is “fourteen days from the city” she is astonished to find that “my ideas of comfort were by this time narrowed down to a well-swept room with a bed in one corner, and cooking-apparatus in another” (78). The text, therefore, not only acknowledges its biases, but is about the bias of perspective. ANH highlights the web of narratives in which daily life is conducted, demonstrating that all lives are deeply imbricated in and made intelligible via the networks of storytelling, reception, and retransmission. But furthermore, her text argues that those narratives can have earnest material consequences, particularly when they are adopted and propagated by a group. In their collection of essays on the body, Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar write, “the body… is co-opted and subordinated to human intentions and to the demands of the social collectivity, as people everywhere seek to create a moral order for daily life and construct meaning out of the worlds in which they live. These goals are achieved, often very successfully, by objectifying the body” (23). We have already seen the ways that servitude objectifies the body and cloaks the material effects of class. Kirkland’s text offers insight into the collective and individual narrative strategies that make this possible.

Mary Clavers’s Servant Problem

One of the ways that Kirkland offers this insight is through the familiar tropes of the servant problem. Annette Kolodny argues that Kirkland, “In offering to explore the housekeeping chores and social habits of a frontier village … saw herself not as any innovator but as a writer simply extending the concerns of eastern ladies’ magazines to western neighborhoods” (157). While I disagree with Kolodny’s assessment of Kirkland’s lack of innovation, Clavers does spend a good chunk of her narrative discussing the tried-and-true problem of hiring a servant. She wants a maid of all work who will live in her home. What she finds are plenty of women willing to do chores for remuneration, but no one willing to live under
her roof. Furthermore, even with other women’s help, she finds that cooking and cleaning and child-rearing are incredibly difficult in a woodland log cabin or frame house because they lack modern conveniences (such as stoves and ovens), are permeable (critters and drafts are always getting in), and are too small to divide into work spaces and genteel spaces. These details are a source of rich humor in the text, but also, I would argue, of important irony extending beyond Mary’s good-humored self-deprecation. Mary Clavers’s exploration of the material changes wrought in her day-to-day life by her change of place ironically reflect back upon the life she had been living before.

From the moment she finds herself installed in her frontier home, she reports that “My first care was to inquire where I might be able to procure a domestic” (71). Upon inquiring, she is told that there are plenty of women who would be willing to offer their labor, but none who would like to live with the Clavers family, or make a career of service. To this, the distressed Mrs. Clavers responds, “My spirits fell at this view of the matter. Some of my dear theorizing friends in the civilized world had dissuaded me most earnestly from bringing a maid with me” (71-2). Mary’s urban friends had theorized that an eastern maid would always be unhappy and wishing for home, and that surely there would be plenty of country girls eager for the employment. She finds, however, that though she can get plenty of “help,” none arrives in the expected form of “a maid.” Without a traditional maid, Clavers finds herself at a bit of a loss, and the first half of her text records the various curiosities and complexities that ensue.

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58 As Nancy Walker writes, “What may have been considered necessities back East, such as the ‘cushioned rocking chair’ and certain cooking utensils, have been sacrificed to the exigencies of the journey and the cramped conditions of the log cabin, so that cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and the care of the sick must be accomplished without the accoutrements of a more settled way of life. Mary Clavers is sensitive to this transition, having experienced it herself” (97).
Clavers reports that though she has seen many desperately poor frontier homes, never “yet saw I one where the daughter was willing to own herself obliged to live out at service.” Young women would frequently “hire out” for a short while, “but never as a regular calling, or with an acknowledgment of inferior station” (72). Though initially “appalled” by the fact that women were unwilling to accept the role of domestic servant “as a regular calling” and thereby acknowledge their “inferior station,” she ultimately develops a scheme for securing household help. On the Michigan frontier, Mrs. Clavers finds that a gulf has opened between performing household labor on someone else’s behalf, and the performance of inferiority that, in urban spaces, accompanies it. While the material realities of having someone else do her labor remain the same, the narratives by which that labor is understood have altered.59

By acknowledging this, the text implicitly acknowledges that the narratives of servitude with which her urban companions exist are also constructions. Joyce Warren argues that “Kirkland's … experience with frontier life - living away from eastern prescriptions of the proper behavior for middle-class women and forced to deal with situations in which such behavior would have been silly or even suicidal - enabled her to recognize that her society's definitions of gender were neither natural nor essential” (9). Building upon this reading, let us take, for example, the narrative that there is a difference between a girl “ready to live with you for the sake of earning a little money,” as her urban friends insisted would be the case, and a girl ready to “‘hire out’ long enough to buy some article of dress perhaps, or ‘because our folks have been

59 Rachel Azima points out: ”[regarding needing others to do her washing] Pride is not absurd because everyone in the system has become equal; rather, it must be avoided if one still wants to be able to displace one’s labor…Clavers only agrees in order to preserve a certain degree of class separation – someone to help her do her chores” (409-10).
sick, and want a little money to pay the doctor,’ or for some such special reason” (72). What, after all, is the difference between working to “ear[n] a little money” and working toward “some special reason”?

Clavers seems to object to the second girl’s having already a designated object in mind for the money she earns. She earns not for the virtue of it in an abstract sense, but to achieve a specific goal. This seems short-sighted to Clavers - after all, wouldn’t a regular income allow one to achieve more goals than sporadic income, and increase the overall quality of life? It also, however, refuses to admit that the woman is “obliged to live out at service.” The key word here is “obliged” - Clavers resents that these women disagree with her interpretation of their material and financial circumstances. When poor, one is obliged to serve others, according to the urban narrative by which she has been living. One serves in order to make money in order to alleviate the poverty of self and family. But to register this as a circumstantial necessity (as one does by viewing it as a temporary situation) upsets the narrative of obligation with which Clavers’s culture of servitude is invested. Both narratives admit that women work for money - but to work for the temporary relief of specific material objectives is to suggest that one might not need to work for money tomorrow.

Faced with this dilemma, and without the social pressure of her middle-class peers by which to bully the “servant classes” into playing their part appropriately, Clavers must concoct a new narrative. Finally accepting that she will not get someone to live with her as a servant, Clavers writes, “I find no difficulty now in getting such aid as I require, and but little in retaining it as long as I wish… Since living with one for wages is considered by common consent a favor, I take it as a favor; and, this point once conceded, all goes well … I have little or nothing to complain of on this essential point of domestic comfort” (72). Outnumbered by those who would
work in her home, Clavers is forced to adapt to their narrative of the situation. Her “helps” are there because she needs their help as opposed to because she is due the privilege of their labor. She has, not an excess (of money), but a dearth (of skill).

She concedes, but embarks upon a new method of “wearing round” her neighbors’ behavior. However, this is, as Merish suggests, merely a feint behind which the real refining process may go unnoticed. Merish identifies the primary tension between Clavers and her neighbors in ANH as “that [the neighbors] want too little, and she hopes to develop and “refine” her neighbors' desires” (499). Consumer goods, she argues, held a sentimental and moral place in homes of this period. “They afford cultural values a lasting physical presence and continually recall them to cultural participants, embedding these values within the very structure of self and need” (Merish 498, 501). By seeming to acquiesce to her neighbors’ opinion of consumer goods, Clavers is actually slowly inculcating them into her style of life.

Whereas Merish’s reading collapses the distinction between Kirkland and Clavers (she uses the two names interchangeably to refer to the implied author), maintaining that distinction allows us to see that Clavers’s persistent belief in her superior knowledge is fodder for Kirkland’s humor throughout the text. When she first moves into her log cabin, Clavers writes, “It was no easy matter to get a 'lady' to clean the place... Then this lady must be provided with the necessary utensils... Mrs. Jennings 'couldn't do nothin’ without a mop and I had not thought of such a thing, and was obliged to sacrifice on the spot sundry nice towels, a necessity which made all the house-keeping blood in my veins tingle” (75-6). Clavers can admit that she didn’t think to bring a mop, and in the next breath claim to have “house-keeping blood in [her] veins.” What kind of housekeeper doesn’t know that you need a mop to clean floors? The kind of housekeeper who hasn’t cleaned a floor herself in a very long time, Kirkland’s text suggests. The
ironic spaces of the text construct her dependence as helplessness and ignorance by showing the fissures in Mary’s narrative of her experience.

Clavers’s belief that she can be a housekeeper without knowing how to keep house is foregrounded again and again in her introduction to the wilderness. While Mrs. Jennings cleans their log cabin, Mary tries “occasionally to throw out a hint for the instruction of Mrs. Jennings, who uniformly replied by requesting me not to fret, as she knew what she was about” (76). Mary’s audacity in thinking she might know something to teach Mrs. Jennings (even though she didn’t know that she would need a mop) is comic relief that also highlights the entrenched nature of the narrative of servitude - that the mistress must constantly teach the servant what needs to be done and the proper way of doing it. Clavers’s wilderness experiences reveal this practice to be a way of asserting dominance and control over the servant- of creating the fiction of expertise vs. ignorance to justify the mistress’s abnegation of household duties. Developing ever more complicated and idiosyncratic house-keeping methods, the urban woman solidifies her position as more educated and capable than the servant in spite of never practicing the labors she commands.

The significance of this is highlighted when we consider Farquhar and Lock’s gloss upon Gabriel Marcel’s theory of the body and consciousness: ”to have a body means inevitably that one is embodied; consciousness can exist only as mediated through experienced embodiment. The body is never, therefore, simply a physical object but rather an embodiment of consciousness and the site where intention, meaning, and all practice originate” (Lock 6).60 The consciousness generated by the embodied experience of performing daily household labors for a mistress cannot, in this formulation, be understood by proxy. Though a mistress may have

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60 Farquhar & Lock here gloss Marcel’s Le Mystere de Petre (1997).
performed the labors required at some point in her life, the embodied experience of her particular servant in her particular home is untransmittable.

Saidiya Hartman’s influential *Scenes of Subjection*, though written about enslaved laborers, helps us understand the ways that the body’s experience is difficult to share. She writes, “the endeavor to bring pain close exploits the spectacle of the body in pain and oddly confirms the spectral character of suffering and the inability to witness the captive’s pain.” Furthermore, “while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body's being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies” (Hartman 21). Hartman argues that the proxy experience of the body’s pain (here the weariness and pain of drudgery) cannot be represented because the body must always be replaced by “other signs.” The unavoidable narrativizing that makes sense of the body’s experience almost by necessity elides that body’s materiality.

It may be surprising to find that Caroline Kirkland, in 1839, was writing a sophisticated analysis of the ways that bodily experience affects consciousness, which thereby affects the narratives structuring life – and that these narratives, when constructed by a collective, could return to affect the bodily experience. The mistress who rarely performs any of her own household tasks *imagines* that she can sympathize with her maid’s labors, and constructs a narrative in which being a servant should be a healthful, happy employment. With the pressure of her middle-class cohort, this narrative perpetuates a form of domestic service that elides its effects upon the body (and therefore the subjectivity) of the servant.

The changes in place and in space that form the impetus for Kirkland’s text offer her irony almost free reign to reflect upon the changed consciousness resulting from a changed embodied experience. Dawn Keetley offers a particularly nuanced reading of the ways that space
and subjectivity are constructed in *ANH*. She writes, “literally moving, pioneer women were also figuratively in transition. Literally between places, they were figuratively between the ‘locations’ and the ‘locators’ of identity … Creating themselves in movement away from the domestic spaces and characteristics of antebellum womanhood, travelling women challenged such definitions” (18). Keetley’s analysis connects 19th-century travel with its transformative potential. She continues, “In connecting ‘place’ and ‘being,’ and in describing the change, even dissolution, of the familiar self as it moves across the frontier, Kirkland’s texts show that women can evade the interiorized, home-bound identities and places of idealized womanhood: both self and space are transformed by travel” (23). I would add that Kirkland’s connection between place and being is part of the larger project of addressing the ways that space, experience, and consciousness mutually constitute one another for the self and the collective.

Mary Clavers often refers to the collective of her readership, as when, near the beginning of her narrative, she addresses them:

> A home on the outskirts of civilization – habits of society which allow the maid and her mistress to do the honors in complete equality, and to make the social tea visit in loving conjunction … may certainly be expected to furnish some curious particulars for the consideration of those . . . who are apt occasionally to forget, when speaking of a particular class, that ‘those creatures’ are partakers with themselves of a common nature. (34)

Clavers’s eastern readers are promised not only an intimate glimpse at life “on the outskirts of civilization,” but also an intimate glimpse at “those creatures” removed from a civilized habitat and let loose in the wilds. By transferring the urban classifications of mistress and maid onto her new social milieu, Clavers offers readers an epistemology of difference and class with which
they are familiar, thus rendering her narrative intelligible to her audience. While Mary attempts to install a feminine community of refined consumerism, as Rachel Borup and Merish have demonstrated, she simultaneously attempts to install a method for constituting and organizing difference. This method is deeply related to her identity as a genteel woman. Alongside her carpets and astral lamps, Mary Clavers imports an eastern culture of servitude not merely for the purposes of getting her housework done – but also for the purposes of fitting her new neighbors into the narratives of life that substantiate her identity. The text dramatizes the ways that Mary must change the narratives of her self to accommodate her neighbors’ resistance to, among other things, her culture of servitude.

This passage also highlights the ways that “habits of society” affect the field of acceptable social narratives. Mary writes that the wilderness “allow[s]” equality between mistress and maid, and that this change in acceptable social custom might affect what one can see. The “curious particulars” of the lower class are rendered visible by their change in social status – even though this same social class is readily accessible in homes throughout the urban reader’s current social milieu. This change in appearance signals Lauren Berlant’s contention that “the experience of identity might be personal and private, but its forms are always ‘collective’ and political” (3). By acknowledging this, the text denaturalizes the “habits of society” in which her readers reside, revealing their place within a social narrative of class and difference.

And yet, Kirkland’s contemporaries overwhelmingly praised her work for its “truth.” An essay devoted to Kirkland from Godey’s in 1846 writes that ANH “wrought an undoubted sensation. The cause lay not so much in picturesque description, in racy humor, or in animated individual portraiture, as in truth and novelty … With a fidelity and vigor that prove her pictures
to be taken from the very life, she has represented 'scenes' that could have occurred only as and where she has described them.” The author continues, “She has afforded us no means of judging in respect to her inventive powers, although fancy, and even imagination, are apparent in everything she does” (“Caroline M. Kirkland”).

This peculiar combination of descriptors is typical of contemporaneous assessments of Kirkland’s work. Readers (at least the readers of the type who wrote for publication) found a “truth” in Mary Clavers’s descriptions, which draws not upon her “inventive powers” but upon the “fidelity and vigor” of her “pictures...taken from the very life.” Given that most of her readers had never been to the Michigan frontier, themselves, one wonders how they managed to judge the verisimilitude of Mrs. Kirkland’s sketches. Kirkland’s near neighbors certainly had a thing or two they would like to edit about her “portraiture,” but eastern readers report again and again that her text’s popularity lies in its truthfulness. Part of this may be because her sketches represent how readers imagine they would feel in similar circumstances. For specific instances (such as giant mud holes, prairie fires, or the virulence of a lynch mob) they must trust to Kirkland - but for her reaction to these circumstances they look to their own experience and find Mary Clavers realistic. Kirkland’s “truth” then, is based upon narrativizing the experience of

61 Upon her death, the New York Times wrote, “Mrs. Kirkland was among the most original and vigorous of all our female authors; her sketches of Western life have never been surpassed for fidelity of detail, and liveliness of humor; they exaggerate, perhaps, the traits of character, and the incidents of the rude life of the border; but they are conceived in the most kindly spirit, and only likely to give offense to those who feel themselves satirized by her pen” (“The Death of Mrs. Kirkland”). Likewise, the North American Review’s review of ANH in January, 1840, proclaims, “she spreads no romantic coloring over the scenes she describes; she has no paradise to offer him ‘who’ll follow’; and, on the other hand, she does not write in the churlish tone commonly inspired by extravagant hopes, which have been disappointed. Far from it. The real enjoyments of forest life are set forth in their true colors; but the real inconveniences, and annoyances, and sacrifices, which belong to it, are not extenuated” (“A New Home”).

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displacement and its challenges to domestic life. Lewis is right in pointing out that, “in
discussing the realism of [ANH], critics actually treat two distinctly different kinds of realism
(too often conflated), historical realism and literary realism, the first being a condition of factual
record, the latter being a genre of imaginative fiction.” Her realism extends not, I would argue,
from its documentary fidelity to events as they actually happened, but to the human response (of
the narrator and the others surrounding her) to those events. Lewis contends, and I agree, “that
Kirkland is implicitly destabilizing the difference between the two kinds of realism; by playing
fiction against fact, or, more accurately, authenticity against romance, Kirkland not only subverts
any established hierarchy, but nearly eradicates the system” (68).

This is furthermore in keeping with contemporaneous understandings of the text. The
author of a September, 1842 review of *Forest Life* in *Graham’s* writes,

Mrs. Kirkland has opened a new vein in our national literature. Her sketches of forest
scenery and wood-craft, with all its varied details, are not less true than graphic. … She is
sometimes *extravagant*, indeed; but a tendency to extravagance has its foundation in
nature, and is necessary in all works of art, from pen or pencil, to produce a true
impression… we thought after glancing at a few of Mrs. Kirkland's chapters that she had
exaggerated too much their peculiarities; but on closing her volumes we are as confident
of their truth as of their extreme cleverness. (“Review”)

Reviews proclaim the “truth” of Kirkland’s texts, even as they acknowledge that they may not be
entirely factual. The emotional, political, and social realism overshadowed any seeming excesses
in the events described, and the overall picture of life in a settler community was deemed “true.”

Kirkland’s destabilization of the genre through which a life experience is told further
destabilizes the states of being formulated by and through those genres. Warren offers a helpful
historical context for the significance of this destabilization in the antebellum period: “In the nineteenth century … the term 'realism' was difficult to challenge because its practitioners maintained that they were writing the 'truth,' and it is difficult to argue against what is termed the truth when society's power structure reinforces the discourse as true. If a society supports the definers of truth, how does one whose 'truth' differs from the dominant truth assert the reality of her very different truth” (4). As I have said, Kirkland’s play with the genre of “the servant problem” particularly demonstrates the complexities of her text’s construction of experience, place, and self, and of how “the dominant truth” can affect those with “different truth[s].” By having her narrator expound upon the difficulty of her daily labors, Kirkland ironically highlights that Mary Clavers has been ignorant of these labors in her previous urban life. While her urban dwelling contained many of the same chores (baking, cooking, cleaning), the narrative of that life did not include them excepting that they were done in an out-of-the-way space by out-of-the-way people. This creates a fiction of laborless-ness. The condensed space of the woodland dwelling, by contrast, does not allow the materialities of domestic labor to be avoided, and they therefore become an urgent part of the narrative.

By particularly attending to the bodily consequences of being forced to live in contact with the labor that sustains life (whether by being forced to do it herself, or by being unable to escape its effects in a rustic domestic space), Kirkland subtly acknowledges that the life she had been living glossed over the hard work of the home. Take for, example, Mary Clavers bemoaning the processes of perpetually getting dinner, baking bread, and ironing. Dinner “which is passed sub silentio in imaginary forests, always recurs, in real woods, with distressing iteration, once in twenty-four hours.” Furthermore, baking and ironing make the log-cabin so hot that Clavers and her children are forced to escape out of doors, or be stifled (82-4). Kirkland’s
narrator humorously presents these as surprises found upon arriving at her new locale. They are the perils of living in a space where the kitchen cannot be separated from the rest of the house. But they simultaneously acknowledge that living in a space where the kitchen can be separated from the rest of the house produces a skewed relationship to the necessary labors of cooking, baking, and ironing. Clavers’s former servants, surely, had no illusions about the heat produced by bread-baking and iron-heating. They similarly must have known the perpetual pressure of preparing meals for the family. Clavers’s responses evidence an ill-acquaintance with the uncomfortable labor necessary to produce the day to day life she had been living. When we read this alongside her critiques of novelistic portrayals of the frontier, which similarly elide the uncomfortable labors necessary to day to day life in the wilderness, we see that she critiques both forms as romantic fictions. City women, her text demonstrates, exist within a framework of literary “colorings” as profoundly as do the heroines of a wilderness novel.62

Competing narratives again flare up at the dinner table. Clavers hates the fact that Mrs. Jennings insists upon serving herself from the plate of meat and the bowl of potatoes. Jennings construes this practice as self-helpfulness, saying “invariably with a dignified nod, 'I'll help myself, I thank ye. I never want no waitin' on.' And this reply is the universal one on such

62 Zagarell offers a summation of Kirkland’s relationship to western literature: “[ANHWF] critiques several popular genres within which contemporary writers evoked the West … such travel literatures as Charles Fenno Hoffman’s popular A Winter in the West (1835). It exposes the supposedly ‘realistic’ celebration of the West as the site of untrammeled nature in the newly emerging western literature … as the mere reproduction of conventions of continental, British, and American Romanticism … Kirkland’s satire is explicitly grounded in women’s perspective, for women’s experiences were ignored or falsified by these representations of the West and women were in reality often faced with learning to live among people unlike the friends and family they had left behind and with building a domestic life in alien and difficult circumstances” (“Introduction” xxvii).
occasions, as I have since had vexatious occasion to observe” (Clavers 85). Mrs. Jennings and the culture to which she belongs believe that sitting still and letting someone else put food on your plate is a form of laziness, or weakness (and we might add that it produces additional dishes and utensils to clean). By helping themselves they demonstrate that they can help themselves, and are therefore capable. Urban life, alternatively, privileges the woman who isn’t obliged to help herself. To abide by the urban narrative that values helplessness would be foolhardy in Kirkland’s new surroundings. To be helpless would be dangerous for oneself and one’s family. Valuing helplessness, the text reveals, is a sign of security.

Though Clavers cannot help but dislike this state of table affairs, she counsels any urban readers who might venture west to accept this mode of eating and ready themselves to weather it in silence. She adds, however, “I must insist, that a greasy cook-maid, or a redolent stable-boy, can never be, to my thinking, an agreeable table companion - putting pride, that most terrific bug-bear of the woods, out of the question” (Kirkland 87). The cook-maid’s grease, and the stable-boy’s smell - i.e. evidence of the labors they have undertaken in order to produce the meal that the family is presently enjoying - do not belong at the genteel table. The idea that servants are rendered unfit to share a meal by the very labors necessary to produce that meal again sets up a hierarchy of leisure in order to assert a hierarchy of tastes and character. One might concede that Clavers complains because they haven’t cleaned up before coming to the table - but when we couple this episode with the many previous ones in which Clavers suffers the difficulty of maintaining personal and family hygiene in the wilderness without servants, we see that her judgment of her dirty servants is more than an olfactory matter. Their smell is unpleasant – yes – but so is what that smell represents: the nearness of the labors that sustain day-to-day life.
Faced with this dilemma of narrative dissonance, Clavers tries an impressive array of rhetorical maneuvers by which to reconcile her frontier neighbors’ narratives with her own. For example, she writes that urbanites relocated to the wilderness “soon find that there are places where the ‘almighty dollar’ is almost powerless; or rather, that powerful as it is, it meets with its conqueror in the jealous pride of those whose services must be had in order to live at all” (86). This puts a fine focus upon the combination of needs that result in a labor relationship. The urban woman needs a servant; the urban servant needs money; so a mutual relationship is produced. But the fact that the laboring classes can collectively eschew demeaning laboring circumstances once they have the upper hand socially reveals that in the urban setting the mutual relationship is built upon the coercion of numbers as much as on any practical or logical circumstance. In this formulation, the relations of servants and masters are not truly agreed upon by all parties, but the financial straits of one party require them to accede to the narrative demands of the other. Once able to avoid it, they do so en masse.

She contrasts the “jealous pride” of her neighbors with her own sense of humility and pragmatism. Clavers writes “What can be more absurd than a feeling of proud distinction, where a stray spark of fire, a sudden illness, or a day's contretemps, may throw you entirely upon the kindness of your humble neighbor? If I treat Mrs. Timson with neglect to-day, can I with any face borrow her broom to-morrow? And what would become of me, if in revenge for my declining her invitation to tea this afternoon, she should decline coming to do my washing on Monday?” (100-1). These exchanges of needs and gracious favors reinforce the interrelatedness of Montacute society. It seems somehow ridiculous, however, to suggest that urban dwellers are not similarly always at the mercy of chance, given the perpetual declines her text has enumerated, and her own husband’s failures as a speculator. The urban dweller relies upon others.
via fire companies and servants and bakers and laundries – but these others are often anonymous and unseen. The bare-faced contingencies of wilderness life highlight the dependence one has on other people, rather than (like at the dinner table) suggesting that each sits within their own isolated space disconnected to those around them. Again, the facts of interrelatedness are not changed – the urban dweller is as dependent upon those around them as the wilderness dweller, even if those dependencies have been transformed into social and industrial services – but the narrative of those facts has shifted.

The increased visibility of dependencies in the wilderness is bothersome to our narrator. When someone needs to borrow something on the Michigan frontier, Clavers reports, they simply ask for it. “It is so straight-forward and honest, none of your hypocritical civility and servile gratitude! Your true republican, when he finds that you possess any thing which would contribute to his convenience, walks in with, 'Are you going to use your horses to-day?' if horses happen to be the things he needs” (103). Clavers here conflates “convenience” with “needs”, and it’s unclear which we are meant to take earnestly. Does the farmer “need” the horses for an occupation that cannot be completed without horses? Or does the farmer “want” the horses because having them would facilitate something that would be laborious without them? Either way, the problem here is not so much that the farmer would like to borrow the horses, but that he seems to feel entitled to do so without constructing himself via “hypocritical civility and servile gratitude.”

Part of this critique is based upon the melding of feminine and masculine cultures. As scholars have shown, Clavers’s distaste for the masculine culture of perpetual relocation and subsistence registers distaste for the discontinuity of domestic life created by this culture.63 Only

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63 See Borup, “tacitly taking issue with the values of nomadic individualism, Kirkland undercuts this dominant masculine frontier ethos by showing that the individual is always already
with a stable community can the influence of gentility and refinement be truly effective.

Clavers’s plan, then, is for the long-term, continued exertion of genteel influence on her surroundings. This is evidenced in her formulations of frontier society, in which supposedly eliminated distinctions are revealed to be maintained, only temporarily submerged, waiting to reassert themselves once a sufficient number and duration of population has been achieved. But Kirkland, again, signals that this is a fiction Clavers tells herself by contrasting her expectations with the defeated similar expectations of those around her.

Mary Clavers is not the only genteel woman in the woods. She early spends the night “in a wretched inn” where “the horrible drunkenness of the master of the house, whose wife and children were in constant fear of their lives, from his insane fury” sticks with her long after. She writes, “I can never forget the countenance of that desolate woman, sitting trembling... in the midst of her children...The poor wife could not forbear telling me her story - her change of lot - from a well-stored and comfortable home in Connecticut to this wretched den in the wilderness - herself and children worn almost to shadows with the ague, and her husband such as I have described him” (37). The story that this woman “could not forbear telling” is an attempt to justify the current state of her home. By telling the story of her initial comfort and ultimate decline, this woman makes it clear to her refined guest that she knows how bad things are. To describe her storytelling as a compulsion suggests present embarrassment on the part of the wife, and the need dependent on the community in the West, and that savvy people realize their reliance on their neighbors and treat them well” (242) And Kolodny, “What distinguished this first sustained expression of American realism from its European cousins was that it derived, as well, from a woman’s need to reject (for herself and for others of her sex) the available male fantasies” (157).
to atone or defend herself in some way. It also bespeaks a desperation for someone who would truly understand the horror of her current circumstances because of their contrast with former circumstances. Mary Clavers, a genteel woman, can therefore sympathize with the wife as she imagines herself reduced to this state.

The inclusion of this and similar stories makes it clear that the material effects of noxious narratives affect the upper classes as well as the lower. The subjectivities available to middle-class women as they make narrative meaning of their lives are detrimental to their servants, the text shows, but they are also detrimental to themselves. The text suggests that men are able to hurt women in various ways by the narratives accepted by the urban elite. These narratives allow men to drag women about and to drastically alter their living circumstances – and to do so with the sanction of society. The Michigan woods make such behavior easy to spot – but the text makes it clear that this behavior is also popular in the urban center. In the wilderness, the isolation and the desperation of the family is highlighted, rather than cloaked by the glitz of urban life. Kirkland will later contrast this woman’s story with the story of another woman, Mrs. B-., whose husband similarly lets her down. Mrs. B-., Clavers reports, responds to her husband’s embarrassed circumstances “as women so often do in similar situations, making always a great effort to keep up a certain appearance” (113). Her attempts to continue doing so in the wilderness are resented by her neighbors, and the B- family finds themselves living the shadow of a genteel life, with all its proprieties, but none of its comforts. Mrs. B- is doing exactly what Clavers encourages her readers to do - to set a good example that will ultimately influence those around them. By including Mrs. B-’s narrative, therefore, Kirkland signals that Clavers’s hopes rest on rather uncertain foundations.
Mrs. B-‘s narrative also demonstrates that many women perpetually tell stories to cover the faults of the men whose foibles have cast them into this position. The nineteenth-century was well-acquainted with the vicissitudes of fortune, but even more fearfully, Kirkland shows that a woman is profoundly at the mercy of her husband. To exist in the world is, often, to exist at the whims of others. The wilderness, as the place to which the urban dweller retreats after his decline, refuses to allow this narrative to be hidden. Furthermore, Kirkland even highlights the troubling consequence of socially-sanctioned narratives that codes the actions of people (such as a reckless husband) the results of the inscrutable actions of Providence. When she tells Mr. and Mrs. B-‘s story in full, she writes:

Mr. B-- was born to a large fortune, a lot which certainly seems in our country to carry a curse with it in a large proportion of instances. Feeling quite above the laborious calling by which his father had amassed wealth, the son's only aim had been to spend his money, like a gentleman; and in this he had succeeded so well that by the time he had established himself, at the head of the ton in one of our great Eastern cities, and been set down as an irreclaimable roue by his sober friends, he found that a few more losses at play would leave him stranded. But he had been quite the idol of the 'good society' into which he had purchased admission, and the one neverfailing resource in such cases - a rich wife, was still perhaps in his power. (112)

There are many layers of narrative operating here. First, Mr. B-- is allowed to believe that 1.) he is “above” a “laborious calling,” and 2.) that his wealth can somehow be maintained without it. Second, the fiction that “a gentleman” is defined by the money he spends is sanctioned by the urban “ton,” and Mr. B-- is embraced, becoming “quite the idol of the ‘good society.’” That “good society” is in quotation marks suggests that the notion of a good society is, itself, a fiction.
So, Mr. B-- has used money he believes can be maintained indefinitely without labor to paint himself as a gentleman so that the supposedly good people of his city will accept him. When this fiction begins to unravel because his money begins to run out, the “good society” is still committed to their fiction of his worth enough to allow him to marry a wealthy man’s daughter and thereby continue the fiction that wealth can be earned without labor. This facade is finally broken and they resort to the wilderness to hide their shame (under the fiction of seeking a new land for a new start), but here Mrs. B--’s continued reliance upon the standards of her old neighborhood make it impossible for her to feel comfort, and her husband’s continued fecklessness continue to diminish their circumstances.

When, therefore, Mary Clavers writes that “the earlier settler has a feeling of hostess-ship toward the new comer. I speak only of women - men look upon each one, newly arrives, merely as an additonal business-automaton - a somebody more with whom to try the race of enterprise, i.e. money-making,” we must contrast it with the story above. Men are always looking to make money, according to the story of Mr. B-. One of the ways they do so is through marrying women. The money-making impulse of the wilderness is just more openly acknowledged; and in some ways it is more kind to the women involved, since they are not mistaken for vessels by which to transfer funds from one man to the next. While Clavers denounces the “money-making” impulses of Michigan men, the text shows that men’s cupidity and ambition are not peculiar to the forest; rather, the narrative by which that cupidity is integrated into social life is distinct.

The Body and Meaning

Just as narratives have material consequences, so too does materiality affect narrative. In his introduction, Osborne argues that “Material success, their neighbors would agree, led inevitably in Michigan frontier society to a feeling of equality - and mental or cultural
accomplishments counted for nothing. The real lack of Western living, the Kirklands discovered, was that there was no concern for the 'inner man'; only the 'outer man' dictated life in the clearings” (21). Yet this, to me, seems a misreading of the effect of presenting Michigan’s focus upon the “outer man.” Mary Clavers certainly feels the lack of sympathy with her “rustic” neighbors, who cannot discuss the polite topics that she prefers. However, the structure of Kirkland’s text indicates that the ability to enjoy these polite topics rests upon others’ labor, and that the idea that some simply aren’t interested in or capable of polite topics is a gloss upon the exhaustion that keeps them from it.

In one of the Clavers family’s first meals in another’s home, Clavers is appalled that the mistress of the cabin and her daughter comb their hair in the middle of the kitchen, so that they “scattered the loose hairs on the floor with a coolness that made me shudder when I thought of my dinner, which had become, by means of the morning's ramble, a subject of peculiar interest.” Clavers is hungry, but vows not to eat a bite given the unsanitary conditions of its preparations. When she is made to wait for all the men to eat before having “a more lady-like meal, and having learned wisdom by former disappointment,” she eats gratefully. “Alas!” she concludes, “who can be sentimental and hungry?” (44-6).

Her question, “who can be sentimental and hungry?” gives the lie to Osborne’s interpretation of her text. The necessities of the human body overtake the desire to be sentimental. The ability to politely decline food, therefore, is coded as the privilege of being sure that there will be food. Clavers’s initial denial highlights that she, in this space, cannot be sure of a next meal without also being sure that she will have to labor at it. The woman who can reject a meal does so upon the fiction of the ease with which a next, more suitable meal, will be achieved. The labor that produces that meal is hidden from view - but in Clavers’s account, that
labor is made to be foremost in the narrator’s eyes. There is no dinner that is prepared without labor - but urban middle-class life allows that labor to be hidden from view, so that the refined are allowed to imagine themselves more capable of cultivating the luxuries of leisure. The log cabin presses together all the labor that is always already going on in the urban center, but the limited domestic space makes that labor visible whereas it is otherwise rendered unseen. A genteel woman like Mary Clavers is therefore forced to face, directly, the work that goes into keeping her body in a position so that she can enjoy the sentimental facets of life.

But where is our narrator left, having made all these observations? Despite these shocks to her identity, Mary Clavers seems to recover her original self. Kirkland here signals the dialectic between the experience and the will of the autobiographer, and the text suggests that a change in place is not enough to overcome that will. The second half of Kirkland’s novel offers a model for reinstituting a culture of servitude, showing that this dialectic process is neither easy nor swift. Kolodny argues that Kirkland places women in charge of establishing an Edenic Western paradise, and that Kirkland specifically offers Cora Hastings and her husband Everard as models (147). While Cora and Everard are disabused of their romantic pastoral notions, and the near death of their infant establishes the frontier as a place of isolation and danger, they are an ultimately successful frontier family. Their success depends, however, upon the labor of a lower class. Clavers is clear that Cora and Everard do not run their farm by their own hands, but through “a practical farmer and his family” (ANH 212). This nameless, faceless family of laborers is the necessary corollary to the Hastings’ exemplary gentility.

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64 For more on the dialogic nature of storytelling, see Smith and Watson, particularly: “autobiographical narrators become agents in and of the story, momentarily and not uncontradictorily agents of their own ordering imperative. Seizing the occasion and telling the story turn speakers into subjects of narrative who can exercise some control over the meaning of their ‘lives’” (Getting a Life 14).
Again, Clavers signals the reinstitution of her narrative of society by writing a little disquisition upon just why it is that the wilderness folk seem so much more uppity than urban folk:

The inequalities in the distribution of the gifts of fortune are not greater in the country than in town, but the contrary; yet circumstances render them more offensive to the less favored class. The denizens of the crowded alleys and swarming lofts of our great cities see, it is true, the lofty mansions, the splendid equipages of the wealthy – but they are seldom or never brought into contact or collision with the owners of these glittering advantages. And the extreme width of the great gulf between, is almost a barrier, even to all-reaching envy. But in the ruder stages of society, where no one has yet begun to expend any thing for show, the difference lies chiefly in the ordinary requisites of comfort; and this comes home at once ‘to men’s business and bosoms. (230)

Having spent pages concerned with domestic service, it is remarkable that Clavers could conclude with this description of urban spaces. For in asserting that lower classes “are seldom or never brought into contact or collision with the owners” of the glittering mansions they see, she deliberately obscures the fact that many lower class people serve as domestic servants in those “lofty mansions.” After outlining Cora and Everard Hastings’s ideal frontier home, in which their livelihood and comfort is dependent upon a set of unseen and unnamed laborers, Clavers has fully reinstated a culture of servitude so that this glaring omission is once again possible. The story of Cora and Everard Hastings, whose charmed youth is as romantically painted as any of Cooper’s cougar attacks, takes over the conclusion of the narrative. Clavers, herself, gets lost in its telling, and emerging from it once more, the reader finds her newly convinced of her urban narrative’s ability to thrive. But this contradiction may, again, be commentary upon the power of
narrative, itself. Clavers mentions that near-death of the Hastings child, but the text does not mention that three Kirkland children died while they lived in Michigan (Borup 231). Disappearing into this story, once more, the fear of the lost child is translated into the promise of future safety – albeit a safety that depends upon others and may be swiftly taken away.

Her text concludes with the last mention of the only true domestic servant found living on the frontier: Mrs. Doubleday’s Betsey. In earlier descriptions, Betsey is a pitiable figure, who receives the brute force of Mrs. Doubleday’s “neat devil.” In the penultimate paragraph, however, Kirkland writes “Many new buildings are springing up in Montacute. Mr. Doubleday has ensconced himself and his wife and baby, in a white and green tenement, neat enough even for that queen of housewives; and Betsey, having grown stout, scours the new white-wood floors, a merveille” (233). Betsey, whose plight as a laborer operating beneath an unreasonable mistress was earlier cause for concern, has again been narratively subsumed within the mistress-servant relationship. Here her health, stature and labors are discussed only in their relationship to the comfort of her mistress. Alongside the “many new buildings,” a new, hopeful culture of servitude has “sprung up,” covering over Betsey’s individual embodied experience once more.

But Kirkland gives the astute reader one last hint that, perhaps, Clavers should not be trusted. Clavers finally concludes with a self-conscious and “unceremonious adieu to the kind and courteous reader”: “As some rustic damsel who has, in her simplicity, accepted the hurried ‘Do call when you come to town,’ of a fine city guest, finds that she has already outstaid the fashionable limit, yet hesitates in her awkwardness, when and how to take leave; so I - conscious that I have said forth my little say, yet scarce knowing in what style best to make my parting reverence, have prolonged this closing chapter” (233). Constructing herself as a “rustic damsel,” she highlights the literary registers of even the most basic “fashionable” exchange. The invitation
of the “fine city guest” was misunderstood by the rustic damsel to be sincere, whereas the fashionable would know that it was a matter of politeness. If she is going to mistakenly suppose it a sincere invitation, she should at least not mistake the fiction of propriety with which she’s met as an actual invitation to stay, or as an actual sign that her hostess enjoys her company.

Visiting, this fashionable city guest knows, is for the symbolism, not for the actual exchange of pleasantries, information, or intimacies. The narrative struggles persist - for having misread her hostess, the untutored guest is unsure how to author the next step and leave without compounding her offenses. Clavers regularly compares her text to a guest invited into the reader’s home. Her persistence in highlighting her authorship of the text blurs the boundaries between herself and that text - she is like the damsel, and her text is like the damsel’s conversation. Together, these highlight the literary nature of many fashionable interactions, with generic conventions and standards that only an insider can interpret correctly. The imagined country guest, through this experience, learns something about herself – and Kirkland, by narrativizing it, demonstrates something about herself. As Bruner writes, “self-making, anomalously, is from both the inside and the outside” (65). The opinions of others, particularly those of a collective, affect the self’s ability to authorize itself. Kirkland’s images of telling, listening, contemplating,

If there “are no true stories,” as narrative theory would contend, then the question of genre makes little difference. If, however, we recognize that the terms of genre themselves construct a narrative of critical expectations, we find the field of plausible interpretations expanded. Kirkland’s use of Clavers’s narration-making to dramatize the story-telling processes by which antebellum women give shape and meaning to their lives. Such a reading may raise Kirkland and her text in our scholarly estimation, encouraging continued study. Additionally, it
offers key insight from one of the period’s most respected writers on the daily material consequences of maintaining genteel standards, and the narrative strategies by which those material consequences are elided.

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Chapter Four: Like Family: *The Lamplighter’s Daughter-Servants*

Like Caroline Kirkland’s work, Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854) directly addresses the embodied experience, particularly the experience of the body’s limitations. Here, however, the narratives that elide the embodied experience are expanded beyond the drawing room to the globe, and Cummins makes a more overt foray into the question of how Providence interacts in daily life. In a novel in which almost everything is in flux, readers can at least count on the fact that bodies will break. Consider a partial list of impairment and death in the text: Gerty’s mother’s death; Gerty’s childhood malnutrition; Trueman Flint’s workplace accident and subsequent decline; Willie Sullivan’s first employer’s death; Mrs. Sullivan’s failing health under the strain of caring for her aging father; Nan Grant’s decline and delirium; Emily Graham’s blindness and frailty; Philip Amory’s near-death by malaria - to say nothing of those already dead when the text opens (Mr. Sullivan, Mrs. Cooper, two Mrs. Grahams, Mrs. Clinton and *six* of her seven children).

Readers of this list are almost certain to find an omission, since there are an enormous number of deaths, injuries, and incapacitations in the novel. This may be unsurprising since, as Nancy Isenberg writes, “Constant illness and frequent death were the most significant elements in the lives of the common people” in antebellum America, “far outweighing any other concerns, including the problems associated with economic change” (177). But *The Lamplighter* goes beyond merely mimicking the demographic realities of its time to explore how the breaking of one person’s body affects those around them, creating dependencies and obligations. The novel’s protagonist, Gertrude, is orphaned after the mysterious disappearance of her father and the death of her mother. She is grudgingly maintained by Nan Grant, keeper of the boardinghouse where her mother died. Nan is cruel, however, and after Gerty is thrown out, she is saved by Trueman
Flint, the eponymous Lamplighter. He cares for her like a daughter and introduces her to a community of friends, including the blind Emily Graham, who becomes her guardian after Trueman dies. She lives in the Graham household, and in a typically mid-nineteenth-century twist of events is reunited with her lost father, marries her childhood friend, Willie Sullivan, and helps Emily reunite with and marry her erstwhile step-brother.

Following Cindy Weinstein’s *Family, Kinship and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2004), many have argued that *The Lamplighter* creates an expansive vision of the family based upon affection (rather than consanguinity or economic stability) to address the emotional and practical upheavals of antebellum life. Weinstein writes that the novel “understands sympathy… as a rational, humane response to the needs of others, what I call ‘judicious sympathy.’ … Gerty’s biologically unattached status thus permits her to decide rationally what her relations with and responsibilities toward others should be,” so that “the novel can begin to lay the groundwork for an affective rather than an economic foundation upon which the family can be redefined” (*Family* 12).

Weinstein considers adoption the most salient key term of the new “affective … foundation” for the family - and this reading is compelling, particularly in its exploration of how adoption law began to consider the “best interest of the child” when deciding whether a child could be legally adopted or not. As Weinstein argues, this idea invested the family with affective contractual obligations, asserting that more than consanguinity was needed to demarcate a true family. What these readings miss, however, is that these adoption laws partake of the rhetoric of master/servant law earlier in the century. While for contemporary readers the phrase “like family” conjures images of adoption, I propose that Cummins’s contemporaries would have identified this phrase most familiarly with the master-servant relationship. Yet, while Cummins
refers to Gerty using the tropes of servitude, she leaves unclear exactly where Gerty fits within the families she resides with. Recognizing this additional register to the terms of being “like family,” we can see how Cummins’s novel critiques not only the distribution of sympathy, but – through its relation to the servant problem – the material effects of that distribution. In this, Cummins pushes back against what I have termed the culture of servitude, which seeks to limit awareness of the material effects of class. Acknowledging these material effects, Cummins goes further, urging readers to respect the role of human interaction in creating structures of inequality too often assigned to the workings of Providence.

Authors often used a family’s fluctuating fortunes to illustrate ideal servitude. Antebellum writers were committed to the idea that servants should share in the fortunes of the family in which they serve - that they should feel their successes and failures as deeply as the family and in the most exemplary cases should feel so united to the family that they would follow the family into poverty. Stories multiplied of servants who refused to accept wages or look for new employers, and who struggled along with the family until it could get back on its feet. Blurring the boundaries between kin and non-kin, such stories nevertheless fail to actually erase the distinction drawn between those who have no choice but to remain in the family, and those whose choice to remain may be cited as extraordinary loyalty. It is precisely because the servants are not family that their steadfastness is remarkable.

But in the case of children brought into families, the nebulous line between kin and non-kin could have a more troubling aspect. Legal history shows that the distinction between servitude and adoption was not always clear. An article in the April, 1832 edition of The American Jurist titled “Master and Servant - Infant's Contract for Service” reports that while, historically, children were unable to contractually bind themselves, recent decisions concluded,
“as the contract was for the benefit of the infant, he should not be permitted to avoid it before the expiration of the term, or if he did, he should be subject to like forfeiture of the wages earned, as persons of age would be” (322-3). The legal opinions here contained construe the issue as a matter of whether an “infant” (meaning any child in their minority) could sue for partial wages (which is disallowed under master-servant law) on the premise that their original contract was void from the beginning. As we have seen, American master-servant law was revolutionary for allowing servants to leave at all; previously, especially under English Common Law, servants could be forcibly returned to their masters if they left before the contracted period was completed. American law broke with this legal tradition, allowing Americans under contract to leave, but not to recover any partial wages for the time served, so to speak. If a servant contracted to work for the year, but left after three months, they were free to do so (physically), but were not legally entitled to any of the wages earned during those three months because they had not completed the entire contracted year.

At stake in the question of an “Infant’s Contract for Service” is whether a contract for service made with a minor was legal to begin with, and therefore rendered the minor ineligible for partial wages. In the cases the article considers, therefore, the question of whether the contract was in the child’s “best interest” decides the question of whether the child could be denied partial wages for having failed to fulfill their contracted term. If the child’s contract was originally in their best interests, then that child has forfeited the right to sue for partial wages, and must expect full payment only after having fulfilled the contracted term.

At the time of publication (1832), rulings continued to conflict on this question. But the article records two decisions that seem indicative of a growing trend: that “‘[if] an infant within age [made] a covenant to serve in an office of husbandry, he shall be bound by his covenant, if it
be that he has a reasonable discretion.’ But he shall not be bound if he be under the age of twelve years ...the reason there stated is that he is not arrived at the years of discretion” (324); and that “a parent at common law has no right to bind his child as an apprentice without his assent. But it seemed admitted that an infant might by deed bind himself an apprentice” (326). The first ruling creates a clear distinction between the will of the parents and the will of the child, constructing the child as a legal entity separate from the parents in a way similar to the adoption laws Weinstein considers. Collectively, these laws establish that legal minors have a will before the law; that their will is divisible from the will of their parents; and that in the limited circumstances of whether the contract is in the child’s best interest or not, the will of the child should be treated as forming a legally binding contract.

This respect for a minor’s best interest, however, helped to tie minors to their places of service – if the contract was “for the benefit of the infant,” he or she should be legally compelled to stay through the force of wage forfeiture. Recognizing the unsteady line between taking in children as servants, or as adoptees, we can see the dark ambiguities about the status and value of children that enabled the abuses of the system that did indeed take place. In her history of American service, Faye Dudden writes, “one sort of helper occupied a particularly ambiguous position between servant and nonservant. This was the homeless child, the orphan with no relatives to take her in. Early in the nineteenth century the disposition of orphans still followed patterns established by the Elizabethan poor laws. Orphaned children were commonly bound out at about age ten or twelve to serve until they were eighteen” (20). This common pattern continued, and, in some ways, began to be commercialized by orphan and foundling homes. Ostensibly, this was a way of providing for the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of the child. Those who took in orphans were charged with treating their spiritual welfare earnestly -
but this did not, exactly, mean that they were to be treated as anything other than servants. Dudden reports that “in the 1830s the managers of the Boston Female Asylum began to complain that families selfishly wanted only the servant and lost sight of the child.” However, while these managers were concerned about the practice of placing orphaned girls where they would not be cared for as children, “in the same decade the managers of the Salem Female Charitable Society began to bind more girls to strangers and to collect cash wages for their work” (22).

One might, therefore, conclude that Cummins leaves uncertain whether Gerty is taken in as an adopted daughter or a servant because nineteenth-century law and culture offer no means for drawing the distinction. I propose, however, that Cummins plays with the blurred line to highlight the uncertainty of all legally conferred statuses, privileging instead the statuses ascertained by one’s behavior and relations to others. By foregrounding ethical identities over legally-conferring identities, Cummins demonstrates the ways that human interactions – even the smallest of interactions, say, between a mistress and her servants – can have global impacts.

The opening lines of The Lamplighter demonstrate the interaction of the Providential and the human in the creation of inequality and want. The narrator reports, “It was growing dark in the city. Out in the open country it would be light for half an hour or more; but within the close streets where my story leads me it was already dusk” (1). The sun will set, the text admits, but modern urban life causes it to set unnaturally. The human forces that created the “close streets” of Boston have prematurely denied the city’s inhabitants the light and warmth of the sun.

Cummins uses the metaphor of light throughout the text to signify the warmth and communalism of “family,” broadly conceived. We are then introduced to Gerty, who, like the streets of Boston, has been prematurely divorced from the warming influence of family through the death of her mother. Loneliness and deprivation are facts of human life, but (like the falling of the night) they
are exacerbated by human design. Gerty’s suffering, for example, is extreme because it is the result not merely of circumstance, but of deliberate wickedness on the part of Nan Grant.

We therefore open with a scene that admits to the inevitable cycles of life and death, while highlighting both the individual (Nan Grant) and the collective (the city) responsibility for rendering those inevitable cycles even more bleak than they need be. Into the scenes of Gerty’s deprivation steps the lamplighter, Trueman Flint, and the metaphor of light continues to ironize the comfort of the urban family. Flint is the only bright spot in Gerty’s wretchedness, and ultimately saves her from starvation. But the path he sets her down will also be fraught with complexity and heartache. This begins when Trueman delivers Gerty a kitten to cheer her up. Gerty, despite her eventual affection for the pet, initially doesn’t want a kitten, and is chagrined to think how she will care for it once it’s received. Instead, she hopes, “Would it be something to eat? O, if it were only some shoes! But he wouldn’t think of that. Perhaps he did not notice but she had some” (6). The urban landscape, which allows True to see Gerty only in small doses, does not afford him the opportunity to notice that she is always hungry and always without shoes. Stripped of all family and friends that might actually care for her, Gerty exists just upon the edge of starvation and exposure, wishing to have the needs of her body met. That Gerty receives a kitten, rather than food or shoes, only serves to worsen her bodily situation. Now she must sneak her own food to the kitten; she is punished once it is found; and the kitten’s horrible death loses her what little shelter she had, and sends her into a fit of illness from which she only barely recovers.

The sentimental bonds represented by the kitten and its giver, Trueman, save Gerty; but they also wound her and render her vulnerable to their demands. True responds to his miscalculation (in offering Gerty a kitten rather than food) by compensatorily offering her a new
home, setting in motion both the succor Gerty will receive at his hands, and the pain and care she will experience as he declines and dies. Life without bonds is hungry and cold, but life with those bonds is similarly fraught with bodily peril, as the text will show in the numerous characters (Gerty included) who suffer under the strain of caring for others. Mrs. Sullivan, Gerty, and Mrs. Miller all suffer ill health from being caregivers.

The dual nature of connections with others is again signaled by images of light when Gerty and Willie Sullivan view the Clinton family (then unknown to them) while accompanying Trueman on his nightly lamplighting rounds:

It was now quite dark, so that persons in a light room could not see anyone out of doors; but Willie and Gerty had so much the better chance to look in ... There was an air of comfort combined with all this elegance, which made it still more fascinating to the child of poverty and want. A table was bountifully spread for tea; the cloth of snow-white damask, the shining plate, above all, the home-like hissing of the tea-kettle, had a most inviting look. A gentleman in gay slippers was in an easy-chair by the fire; a lady in a gay cap was superintending a servant-girl's arrangements at the tea-table, and the children of the household, smiling and happy, were crowded together on a window-seat, looking out, as we have said. (45)

Standing on the street, Gerty and Willie are without the light’s compass, a clear metaphor for their position outside the comfort and security it represents. At a historical period when light was also warmth, a well-lit room is a symbol of bodily comfort. During this period, light was also associated with bodily safety, as Mark J. Bouman has shown in his study of the advent of urban gas lights. The physical and emotional comforts of this scene is ironized by the text, however, since readers know that it is ephemeral. Like the light, the security it symbolizes has effects upon
the body, but is itself intangible – something to be felt, but not held. The Clinton family here present a microcosmic vision of all that Gerty lacks – luxury and comfort, and a sense of belonging within a clearly defined family. But the text presents this picture only to unmake it, for the novel does not let any of the securities Gerty witnesses last.

Richard Briggs Stott argues that the fear of ephemeral security was common to the time period. “Many were unpersuaded that steady work guided by foresight, calculation, and self-control would be rewarded; life was too unpredictable. It was almost impossible to save enough to be safe” (70). Cummins couples this economic insecurity with insecurity of the body. In this scene Belle Clinton still has two siblings and a mother. Readers know that each of these family members is soon to die, and that four children have died already. No matter how well-lit the room appears - and it appears astonishingly light, with everything described as “shining,” “inviting,” and “gay” - the security the light symbolizes is ultimately false. By having lived in the light of such a beautiful scene, the text seems to suggest the Clintons are made vulnerable to the loss of all those comforts.

Furthermore, the light both enables and impedes the characters’ vision. By being within the light’s compass, the Graham family is rendered publically visible, and in this way vulnerable to promiscuous observation. They can be clearly seen, but cannot themselves see Gerty and Willie until they are illuminated by their own light from Trueman’s approaching torch. When this happens, the narrator states, “The little curly-haired girl saw them, and pointed them out to the notice of the other two. Though Gerty could not know what they were saying, she did not like the idea of being stared at and talked about ...The next instant the servant-girl came and drew down the window-shades” (46). Gerty instinctively recoils from being seen, and from being caught looking; and once the family inside knows that they, too, are being seen (and being seen
to look), the servant draws the shade. To be seen through the barrier of a cold window pane is uncomfortable for each, and in this way the connection that the light affords is not exactly the pleasant sympathy we might expect. Cummins’s text therefore revises a classic metaphor of sympathy: vision. In contrast to Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where to see is also to feel, in *The Lamplighter*, to see is not to feel. To see is a step upon forming a truly sympathetic connection, but to feel, one must get much closer to the object of observation. Sympathy operates not from afar, but from the intimate connections between persons, and these intimate connections combine in unpredictable ways to have global consequences.

In this scene, the “servant-girl’s arrangements at the tea-table” presage the importance of servitude as a conceptual category for this schematic of sympathetic vision and feeling. She, too, symbolizes the comfort and elegance of the parlor as she takes Mrs. Clinton’s directions for preparing tea. Like the light, she makes possible the comfort she represents by preparing the family’s refreshments so that Mrs. Clinton can play the role of presiding Mistress; and she facilitates the family’s security by drawing down the shade. Symbol and instrument of security and comfort, she too is nevertheless beyond the family’s ultimate control. Like the light, this unnamed servant cannot be wholly contained by the family’s technologies of servitude, because despite its best efforts she remains an autonomous individual. Ensconced within the warm family scene, she does not, exactly, partake of the comfort she creates. She is certainly warmer than Gerty and Willie upon the street, but she remains a feature of the family’s comfort, rather than a

65 Unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe, who famously ends *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by urging readers to “feel right,” Cummins makes seeing and feeling the starting point for her narrative. 66 Much work has been done on the limits of sympathy. Saidiya Hartman has articulated the difficulty of achieving sympathetic connection without simultaneously objectifying the object of sympathy. Likewise, Laura Wexler’s work highlights “the expansive, imperial project of sentimentalism,” that made it an “externalized aggression that was sadistic … in flavor” (“Tender Violence” 14).
member of the family, itself. This servant is in some ways the converse of the light – she is near, but not sympathized with. In many ways she is felt, but not seen.

To live so close with those whom one doesn’t accurately see, however, is dangerous. Readers will later learn that Belle Clinton’s poor character is ascribed to the fact that, “At an early age deprived of her mother, and left for some years almost wholly to the care of servants, she soon learned to appreciate at more than their true value the outward attractions she possessed; and her aunt, under whose tutelage she had been since she left school, was little calculated to counteract in her this undue self-admiration” (188). Just as Flint miscalculated Gerty’s needs and gave her a kitten that precipitated her homelessness, so does Mr. Clinton miscalculate his daughter’s needs and leave her in the care of those unsuited to raising her properly. The Clinton family’s servants don’t teach Belle to value the inner things in life, but also, in the structure of the sentence, we learn that they didn’t respond to the inner values she might possess. There was no true sympathetic connection between Belle and her servant caretakers.

Cummins therefore offers the Clinton family as a test-case of the fears populating contemporaneous periodicals. By the mysterious hand of Providence they are unaccountably and disproportionately affected by death, until only Belle and her father remain. Belle has been permanently scarred by these traumas, and with the influence of her aunt, is insensible to the examples set by better characters throughout the text. Cummins illustrates these traumas via the family’s relationship to their servants. They are first comfortable in their elegance and mastery; then ruined by a lack of sympathetic connection with those servants; and finally exhibit their despicable nature via their treatment of the servants in the Graham household. This would have been unsurprising to nineteenth-century readers, who were accustomed to reading of the
dramatic effect a family’s relationship to its servants could have. Necessary to a family’s genteel comfort (as seen through the window), writers worried about how servants would affect the malleable children under their charge (like Belle), and the almost cataclysmic consequences a poor servant-mistress (like Belle’s aunt) could have on an entire household’s comfort.

We can see, then, that the literature of servitude was also focused upon just what and who the family was meant to include, and the rights that should be afforded to each. Periodical authors asked, did the mother’s stewardship of the family’s moral welfare include the stewardship of the extra-familial member who cleaned their floors, or prepared their meals? Was proselytizing to servants an imposition upon their religious liberties, or an obligation with eternal, soteriological consequences for the entire family? Weren’t middle class mothers with a number of children owed the help of servants so they wouldn’t “break down” under the physical strain? Similarly, if middle class households did not hire young women as servants, what would happen to those many young women whose paternal homes could not afford to support them? By playing with the ambiguities of family, Cummins addresses the anxieties of the servant problem.

The Line Between Dependents

_The Lamplighter_ participates in this discussion in an unexpected way. It plays with the similarity between being legally adopted, or legally contracted to serve, persistently refusing to delineate whether Gerty is “like family” in the servile or the adoptive sense. The phrases with which Gerty is described: “like family,” “like a daughter,” “like an equal” register in the contemporaneous discourses of taking in minors as adoptive children, or as servants. 67 By

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67 Lang summarizes Gerty’s various statuses: “Claimed as a 'daughter' by the bachelor Flint, the penurious Mrs. Sullivan, and the affluent Mr. Graham alike, Gerty acts the part to all of them but belongs to none...she moves between city and country, parlor and tenement, not untouched ... but impervious to the slights both of those who think her too lowborn to merit their regard and those who disdain her as an 'upstart.'“ (Lang 26).
highlighting this fluidity, the text counterintuitively suggests that the distinction is in many ways immaterial. The variety of families in the text demonstrate that whether a young woman like Gerty is expected to labor in the house depends upon her economic status, not her familial status. Servants are always already also daughters.

Given this, Cummins questions the tendency to treat others as no more than bodies to rely upon. Gerty describes the need Trueman, Mrs. Sullivan, and Emily have and had for her in terms of the body: they lean upon her “youthful arm” and she “guide[s]” their “uncertain steps.” This both profoundly is and is not a metaphor. Throughout the novel, Gerty literally uses her body as the “prop and stay” of those around her, filling in for the functions they are unable to perform as they break down. In her heightened emotional state after learning (as she believes) that the love of her life loves another, Gerty is shattered to think that she may continue to be valued only for her healthy body’s ability to compensate for unhealthy bodies. Consider Gerty’s thoughts when she imagines that Willie Sullivan has forsaken her in favor of Belle Clinton:

That Willie was faithless to his first love she could not now feel a shadow of doubt; and with this conviction she realized that the prop and stay of her life had fallen. Uncle True and Mrs. Sullivan were both her benefactors, and Emily was still a dear and steadfast friend; but all of these had been more or less dependent upon Gertrude, and, although she could ever repose in the assurance of their love, two had long before they passed away come to lean wholly upon her youthful arm, and the other, the last one left, not only trusted to her to guide her uncertain steps, but those steps were evidently now tending downwards to the grave. (312)

Gertrude contrasts the love of Uncle True, Mrs. Sullivan, and Emily to the love she thought she possessed from Willie primarily in terms of dependence/independence. She feels that the
dependence her three pseudo-parents had upon her somehow mitigates the value of their love and friendship. Gerty, who as a child had been astonished to discover “that happiness - perhaps the highest earth affords - of feeling that she had been instrumental in giving joy to another” (27-8), and the satisfaction of “HELPING anybody” (8), seems to have reached a new level of emotional sophistication, and desires to be loved regardless of her body’s use value.

But surely the bells are ringing and the whistles whistling that, as Willie’s wife, she would still be valued for her body’s usefulness. Her ability to bear children and care for them, her ability to perform the labor necessary to maintain her husband’s home and prepare his food, and her ability to still have the energy to shepherd the whole family into eternal happiness by guiding their spiritual welfare all require a healthy body. So why does Cummins depict Gerty drawing this distinction?

One ultimately concludes that Gerty is mistaken in drawing this distinction, just as she is mistaken in believing that Willie has thrown her over at all. The conversation she witnessed, and which she believed signified Willie’s devotion to Belle Clinton, was in fact his attempt to get the selfish girl to appreciate the critical state of her father’s failing health and hurry back to attend him. Even the “natural” ties of the nuclear family are in many ways predicated upon being the prop and stay of the other’s body. The bodily dependence upon which servitude is founded is but an extension of the bodily dependence upon which the nuclear family is founded. Whether Gerty is the Graham’s dependent because she is Emily’s servant, or because she is Emily’s adoptive daughter, does not change the fact that Emily depends upon her body. She believes that her relationship with Willie would be something other than bodily dependence, but Cummins’s text suggests otherwise. The affective family of choice includes bodies depending upon one another, but it crucially also includes the affections that make those dependencies bearable.
Cummins everywhere signals that it is simply unhelpful to imagine a world where things don’t go wrong, and everyone is happy. Recognizing the potential for disaster is crucial to survival, and she never suggests that all poor children can be “saved” like Gertrude. In speaking of Gerty’s improvement, she writes, “in errands of charity and mercy Gertrude was either her attendant or her messenger; and all the dependents of the family, from the cook to the little boy who called at the door for the fragments of broken bread, agreed in loving and praising the child … and all were in the invariable habit of addressing her as Miss Gertrude” (108). In the beginning of this passage, Gerty is distinguished from Emily by being a clearly subordinate partner in their charitable acts. Gerty is then distinguished from “the dependents of the family,” who include servants and the neighborhood’s destitute, and yet the narrator mentions this as a matter of note. It is not taken for granted that Gerty would be called “Miss,” and she certainly isn’t called “Miss Flint” as would be most proper for a lady of the household (granted, Gerty’s patronym is a matter of some controversy - she’s not even sure that she has one). Still, by calling her “Miss Gertrude,” the dependents of the family afford her respect in a manner that simultaneously overlooks and highlights her liminal social position.

But this attention singles Gerty out. Take, for example, the unspoken distinction drawn between Gertrude and Mrs. Ellis. It is never clarified whether “Mrs. Ellis” was married, or whether she has merely been given the title “Mrs.” in consideration of her position as housekeeper. Regardless, one can assume that she was previously either mistress of her own home, or served a similar role in the home of a family member, given that she is considered qualified to take on the position of housekeeper. We can then also assume that Mrs. Ellis, much
like Gerty, has lost most of the family since she is obliged to work. Why, then, is Gertrude met with a benevolence that will lift her out of servitude, while Mrs. Ellis is not? For that matter, why aren’t the Graham’s other servants, Katy and Bridget, or the destitute boy who begs at the door taken in and educated like Gertrude? Why is Gertrude prepared for independence, while others are kept dependents?

The fact that Gerty is a child and Mrs. Ellis a grown woman when they find themselves friendless cannot alone explain why she receives such special treatment (since other children do not receive the same) but it can help us clarify some of the complexities of her station. Elizabeth Barnes extends Amy Schrager Lang’s analysis of Gerty’s relationship to her kitten to explore the many nuances the image of a kitten carried in Victorian America, and its relationship to the image of the treasured child. She writes, “While a Victorian middle-class ethos ostensibly placed the ‘priceless’ child and pet outside of a market economy, that economy is repeatedly reintroduced through the notion of an animal’s, including a human animal’s, disposability - the hard fact that there can be too many of even a good thing” (307). By drawing the link between the kitten and Gertrude, herself, Barnes reminds us that Gerty’s salvation simultaneously signifies the destruction of others like her. Speaking of a popular engraving in which a child must choose one kitten from an entire litter, Barnes writes, “the single kitten that the daughter holds signifies not only a living presence but its shadow absence: that is, in choosing one, the daughter is also ‘choosing’ the death of the other kittens. Priceless and disposable come together in this domestic tableau of reproductive control” (310). In picking Gerty from the litter, so to

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68 Mrs. Ellis is said to visit “cousins” later in the text (253), but one can assume that these cousins are not able to have her resile with them full time in perpetuity.
speak, the Graham family has also chosen not to save many other children in similarly dire circumstances.

These dark overtones continue in Barnes’s reading of the mass-produced figurine of Samuel that Gerty receives from Trueman. Through the image of this figurine, the kittens, and their relation to Gerty, Barnes argues that *The Lamplighter* suggests, “As property, or material objects, children and animals may very well get 'broken.' But if they do, the novel ominously implies, they will simply be succeeded by more like themselves” (318). Ultimately, Barnes concludes, “Undergirding the fantasy of the Anglo child's priceless singularity, we find, is another fantasy altogether: the fantasy of reproduction as a non-biological operation where children, like figurines, can be broken and replaced” (318). By choosing Gertrude from the mass of orphaned children, the family acquires her as a replacement daughter for the broken Emily, or, perhaps, as a prosthesis by which to repair the broken Emily. Either reading renders daughters replaceable, since either Emily or Gerty are made submersible into the person of the other. The text thereby unflinchingly faces the limitations of the body and its sympathies, but proposes a best-case plan for dealing with those unavoidable facts. Emily cannot save them all, but having the ability to save one, she must judiciously choose how best to do so.

While one might simply attribute this selection process to the often-inexplicable workings of Providence, Lydia Fisher relates *The Lamplighter* to contemporaneous scientific discourses of cultivation to offer an alternative interpretation. “The literature of the day … is full of women whose selection and cultivation participates in popular and scientific discourses of domestication.” Such “domestication narratives’ - are sites at which domesticity and science intersect in the cultural imagination, encouraging Americans to see the national population as an endangered crop that requires informed care to flourish” (50). Gerty, Fisher argues, is a highly
cultivatable seedling because of the vibrant wildness exhibited in her uninhibited childhood. By taming the inherent strength of her nature, Victorian American society improves its stock, so to speak. The text does take for granted that choices must be made when attempting to address the suffering of others. Sympathy cannot alleviate all the inexplicable vicissitudes of life, but it can funnel the response to those events into the best possible channel. This will involve facing the inscrutable workings of Providence with a commitment to one’s neighbors.

The text’s numerous characters remind readers that the work of sympathy belongs to the entire community. Cummins writes that Willie Sullivan is one of a select group of adventurers “who is actuated, not by the love of gold, the love of change, the love of adventure, but by the love he bears his mother, - the earnest longing of his heart to save her from a life of toil and poverty” (107-8). Willie does eventually secure his mother a comfortable income, but not before her body has been irreparably damaged by caring for her ailing father. Mrs. Sullivan’s poor health is attributed to her refusal to hire a domestic servant. Only when “she was convinced of her own incompetency to perform any active labor” would she accede to Gerty’s suggestion of “Jane Miller as a girl remarkably well suited to their wants, and it was agreed that she should be applied for on the following morning” (163). The Lamplighter is unusual among contemporaneous texts for giving Jane’s side of this story:

Jane, who willingly consented to come and help Miss Gertrude. She did not, she said, exactly like the idea of living out, but could n't refuse a young lady who had been so good to them in times past. Gertrude had feared that, with Nan Grant sick in the house, Mrs. Miller would not be able to give up her eldest daughter; but Mary, a second girl, having returned home unexpectedly, one of them could be very conveniently spared. Under Gertrude's tuition, Jane, who was neat and capable, was able, after a few days, to relieve
Mrs. Sullivan of nearly all her household duties, and so far provide for many of her personal wants as to leave Gertrude at liberty to pay frequent visits to the sick room of Nan, whose fever, having reached its height, rendered her claim for aid at the present the most imperative. (165)

Jane’s ability to attend to Mrs. Sullivan hinges upon the unexpected return of her sister, Mary. Why Mary was away, and why she returns is left unexplored by the text; however given the remainder of the passage, one can assume that Mary had been “very conveniently spared” by the family, and had probably left to make her own living. Why, then, has she returned? And what would have happened had her family not been met with Mrs. Sullivan’s need? By combining these two events (Mary’s need to leave her place and Mrs. Sullivan’s need for a servant) Cummins models the ways that an expansive community might work as an organic whole to take care of as many members as possible.

But this expansive family cannot always take care of everyone. Like Jane and Mary, another servant haunts Cummins’s text as reminder that not everyone can be warmed by the light of the family fireside. Katy, the Graham’s first chambermaid, is dismissed by the third Mrs. Graham (nee Clinton), and replaced with Bridget. Readers are never told what happens to Katy, but she is mirrored by the the Miller’s daughter, Mary. Readers don’t know whether Katy had a family to return to, whether she found a new place, or whether she starved in the streets like Gerty was threatened with in the novel’s opening. Her expulsion from the Graham family is the result of the new Mrs. Graham’s devaluing the bonds between the household and its servants. As the Graham’s cook, Mrs. Prime, explains, “our Katy” (which is both an Irish colloquialism, and a signifier of possession) refused to obey Mrs. Graham’s instructions to give her and her nieces preference over Emily and, by extension, Gerty.
Mrs. Graham misunderstands the value of a network of sympathetic dependencies, and instead values her financial ability to hire help. Having the money with which to pay others to do her work for her, she views them not “like family,” but like employees, with an obligation running only one way, and dismisses Katy without thought. Crucially, however, Katy’s bad fortune is the direct result of Mr. Graham’s decision to marry a woman ill-suited to treating her servants well. Far from the acts of an inscrutable Providence, Katy’s fate is immanently foreseeable and avoidable. Mr. Graham’s choice to create an affective bond with the insufferable Widow Clinton throws many members of his extended household into harm’s way, reminding readers just how judiciously their sympathy should be shared.

**The Servant Problem: Securing the Family’s Borders**

The new Mrs. Graham’s treatment of her servants would have been a familiar trope to Cummins’s readers, and have served as a short-hand key to her character. Her imperious management wholesale disrupts the happiness of the Graham household, and here Cummins is both drawing upon and revising the literature of the servant problem. Articles regularly claimed both that a poor mistress would destroy a home’s harmony, and that bringing a servant into the home was perilous because they were usually strangers. Cummins combines these tactics, implicitly criticizing Mr. Graham for so quickly choosing his new wife, therefore bringing in a relative stranger as a new mistress. One should be wary of all those brought into the bosom of the family (even the extended affective family) the text warns, not just of the lower classes.

*The Lamplighter* participates in the great servant question overtly in its discussion of actual servants in the text – but also in its discussion of who should and should not be treated “like family.” As the Introduction to this dissertation shows, literature of the servant problem questioned whether having servants was or wasn’t a good thing; what masters and mistresses
owed to their servants (and vice versa); and how the relationship might be managed to avoid discord, anxiety and dissatisfaction among all parties. The offered answer, according to Barbara Ryan’s study, was to treat servants “like family,” thereby creating bonds of affection that would gloss over the essentially contractual nature of the relationship. Cummins’s text wholeheartedly agrees, with the caveat that the idea of family presented in many periodicals actually (if unintentionally) results in tension between homemakers and their servants. While servants are to be treated “like family,” authors actually spend thousands of words demarcating the precise borders between those servants and the family.

In 1834 the *Episcopal Recorder* printed excerpts from *Anderson’s Book for Parents*, in which homemakers are exhorted to know the principles and characteristics servants exhibit when out of sight. Using contagion rhetoric, the author asserts that a servant is liable to infect a family by their behavior, and so pains must be taken to hire only domestics who can be trusted, even when unsupervised (“Servants and Children”). This is typical of articles explaining that mistresses should not be too familiar, nor too aloof; too accommodating, nor too strict. A servant’s vices should not be allowed to infect the children, nor should a servant’s desires be given too-solicitous consideration. This penchant for proclaimed unity, yet demonstrable division, demonstrates, I argue, the servant’s uncanny position within the household. Beneath the trappings of middle-class domesticity, the servant in the house represents the frailty of the home. Not all homes are secure if some have to send their daughters out, strangers and servants into other families.

These authors are keen to attribute the differences between the mistress and the maid to the workings of Providence. In a familiar gesture, the above article says that Providence has placed everyone in their respective positions. This is simultaneously a comfort and an anxiety,
since the ways of Providence are inscrutable. While working toward their family’s comfort via their management of servants, mistresses perpetually confront the specter of the family’s failure. While trying to clearly demarcate the lines between themselves, their family, and their servants, mistresses unavoidably face the uncanny image of themselves and their children.

*The Uncanny Servant*

An artless, but fascinating little piece from the *New York Mirror* in 1834 highlights some of the ways this uncanny relation between families and their servants was expressed in the popular imagination. Set in Switzerland, “The Dead Alive” tells the story of an orphaned girl, Caroline, taken in by “Peter Gortz; who had the reputation of being a very pious, but rather austere and thrifty man.” Gortz takes in Caroline “to wait on him, and afterward taught her to write and read, boasting her fidelity, and indulging her, as if she had been his daughter. He was her only friend.” The story makes heavy use of typical gothic elements: a foreign setting, Catholicism, vaulted subterranean chambers and flickering lighting; but its initial description of Caroline’s orphan-servant-daughter composite identity points to the gothic nature of her status in any geographic locale.

This nineteenth-century commodification of orphaned children is but the managerial systematization of the practices described in “The Dead Alive.” Gortz takes Caroline explicitly for her services, which he will only have to remunerate with room and board (the same obligations he would have to her were she naturally his daughter). His decision to teach her to read and write, and “to indulge her, as if she had been his daughter” is revealed to be a step in his process of crafting her into an ideal wife. Had she been taken in explicitly as a servant without the patina of an adopted daughter, Gortz would have been compelled to pay her wages. However, by manipulating familial categories, Gortz is able to have an unpaid servant without the tinge of
slavery, and a child-wife without the tinge of incest. Her servitude renders the whole acceptable - without being considered his servant, too, she would be too child-like to become a wife; and without being a servant, too, social mores would have precluded him from keeping a young, unrelated woman alone with him in his home.

Lest we imagine that this scenario is the perversion of an individual, the author of our story recruits the entire community in its production. They allow Caroline to be taken in as a child, and encourage her to continue in that position. When Gortz proposes that she slip from being his child into being his wife (i.e. into becoming sexually available to him), she refuses him and runs. However, a neighbor “seized and questioned her … but, as she only trembled, blushed and wept, he forcibly led her back to her master, who looked pleased at her return, and, on what she had said being repeated to him, merely laughed out, ‘I was too strict this morning, perhaps; silly wench, don’t quarrel with thy second father.’” Caroline’s native modesty contributes to her continued servitude under a master who plays upon the dual authorities of father and husband to maximize his power. She escapes again, but is captured and returned once more, having been framed for stealing from Gortz. When she returns, she meets the “execrations of [the town’s] assembled inhabitants, who had never before heard of such a way as hers for requiting an offer of marriage from a superior.” As a profoundly hierarchical culture, this gothic town imagines that Caroline should feel grateful for any offer, particularly one from the master-class. They refuse to listen to her side of the story, and she is hanged for the theft she did not commit.

The hanging goes awry, Caroline is secreted away and married happily by the end of the story. As with the best Gothic fictions, the exotic setting and extraordinary events allow the author to intimately explore the underside of an issue while distancing it from their readership’s lived experiences. Upon his deathbed, Gortz confesses that, “believing Caroline thought herself
entirely dependent, and in his power, her rejection of his suit, and threats of departure had stung him to vindictive madness.” That she was “entirely dependent, and in his power,” is unquestioned by the text - but Caroline is remarkable for refusing to inhabit the mindset of her social position. Her master and his neighbors are most disturbed by her refusal to identify with the legalities of her powerless place. This communal disturbance is inflicted directly upon her body - she is forcibly returned to her master, and he sets her up to be executed with the town’s consent. Her body, however, similarly refuses to obey the law’s interpolation of her, and does not die. Instead, she slips into a near-death stupor, awakening only when in the sympathetic hands of a young anatomist given her body for dissection.

She awakes as soon as her body forces a sympathetic recognition from the anatomist. Uncovering her face, he finds that “For the first time was he aware of her identity with one he had seen walk the world in maiden pride; oft had he felt inclined to ask the young thing’s name. He knew it now … a heavy sigh, which seemed to bear upon its breath the word - ‘Mercy!’ recalled him to the side of Caroline.” Her natural pride, via her body, reclaims for her the identity she deserved all along: she marries the anatomist and they live happily and comfortably. Despite this happy ending, her initial position as bound servant-daughter-wife highlights the slippery boundaries between the three ostensibly exclusive categories, suggesting that one’s natural bearing will not, necessarily, secure one’s place.

Advice literature toyed with these slippery boundaries in order to counsel humility and duty to the mistress-class. While doing so, this literature often relies upon a generalized, convenient notion of Providence to soothe readers that their current status is likely to continue. Almost exclusively written to daughters or their mothers (the reader is almost never interpolated as a servant), this literature points out that many women’s mothers and grandmothers had spent
some time in service. For example, “Brother Jonathan’s Wife's Advice: To Her Daughter, on the day of her marriage” advises: “Toil, care and trouble are the companions of frail human nature. Old connexions will be dissolved by distance, time and death. New ones will be formed. Everything pertaining to this life is on the change.” Despite this belief in the universality of change, this author simultaneously argues that “Woman was never made merely to see and be seen; but to fill an important space in the great chain of nature, planned and formed by the Almighty Parent of the Universe.” The notion of “change” does not extend to “the great chain of nature.” This chain, which the author implies delineates position or role within society, places the woman in charge of keeping the home a place of sanctuary. The subsequent advice for managing domestic servants suggests that they are part of this role - as ordained by “the Almighty Parent of the Universe” as wifehood.

By contrast, though not directly rejecting Providence, per se, “Servant Girls” uses intergenerational change in status to argue that the difference between masters and servants is circumstantial. The author writes:

There is a certain class who look with contempt upon females that work in the kitchen; as if they were made of better blood, and wore, more indelibly stamped upon their brows, the impress of the great Jehovah. But why they should manifest this disposition is unaccountable; the work which servant girls perform is certainly honorable, and some of them are most worthy and excellent - would do honor to their sex, and be ornaments in any society. Circumstances have placed them in the kitchen instead of the parlor, and as long as they behave with propriety they should command our love and respect.

Like Gertrude, the servants that “command our love and respect” do so by virtue of behaving with virtue. Their behavior, not their status, should guide the treatment they receive. This is the
more obvious to the author, since most Americans, they argue, are descended from servants and other members of the servile classes. “In nine cases out of ten we can trace [Americans’] fathers or mothers - perhaps both - to very humble origin.” Speaking of a girl who treated her servants haughtily, they write:

> We smiled … for we remembered distinctly the time when this proud girl’s mother was glad to work in the kitchen for support. Yes, that very girl’s mother was once a kitchen girl. Her father was a poor man; he saw his future wife performing the menial service in a wealthy family; he admired her industrious habits; he married her, and finally became wealthy...Those females whom they despise, may become the mothers of as distinguished men as ever lived.

Everything is change, this author concludes, in accordance with the author of “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice,” and this change includes status within a single lifetime. Curious here is how the young girl could be ignorant of her mother’s former position. Implicit, then, is the reticence associated with social change - the fiction of the longevity of wealth hinders the proper operation of society.

**Cummins’s Intervention**

**Gerty’s Uncertain Status**

Gertrude’s relation to the servant problem becomes apparent when we realize that her exact legal status is never clarified. Trueman, though treating her like a daughter, does not adopt her. Mrs. Sullivan’s domestic education of Gerty renders things no clearer. She teaches Gerty to take care of Trueman’s home as best she can as a small child unaccustomed to housework: “You could sweep the room up every day; you could make the beds, after a fashion, with a little help in turning them; you could set the table, toast the bread, and wash the dishes. Perhaps you would
not do these things in the best manner at first; but you would keep improving, and by and by get to be quite a nice little housekeeper” (27). Contemporaneous advice manuals encouraged both mothers and mistresses to educate the young women under their care - whether they were daughters or servants - to be good housekeepers so that they could eventually be good mistresses. Women who kept servants were advised that by training their servants in the domestic arts they would be playing their part in creating healthy, happy, domesticating homes for the poorer men their servants would likely marry.

In a notice for the, “Female Domestics Friend Society” the preamble of this newly formed society’s constitution states:

whereas, a large and important class of females in our cities are domestics, whose character and well-being not only affects themselves, but exert an important influence on the order, comfort and happiness of the families in which they reside: as moreover, it is from this class that future wives and mothers are to a great extent furnished, together with all the influences for good or evil to a coming generation, which these relationships secure; and as it is from this class also, as melancholy experience testifies, that the ranks of prostitution are largely supplied; Therefore, it is expedient that a Society of Ladies be formed, having for its object the care of all females seeking domestic employment, providing for them suitable temporary accommodations, aiding them with advice, encouraging them in well-doing, and in every suitable and practicable manner, promoting their temporal welfare and moral advancement. (“Third Annual Report”)

Similar claims abound in contemporaneous discussions of servants throughout the antebellum era. This society’s constitution is unusual in that it leaves ambiguous who will marry “this class” of “future wives and mothers.” Other authors made it clear that servants would furnish wives for
the laboring poor. Their “influences for good or evil to a coming generation” are therefore a form of social control of the poor. Through training servant women to middle class standards, societies such as this one hoped to influence the poor as a class, because they would create positive home influences for their husbands and children. Training servants was also considered part of the fight against the vice of prostitution. This and other notices and articles indicate that servants were presumed to be friendless - either because they were truly alone; or because they had no suitable friends capable of providing the kind of “advice” and “encouraging” that the “Ladies” of the society are able to afford. Conveniently, the Ladies advise and encourage in their own best interest, since a domestic’s welfare “not only affects themselves,” but also “the order, comfort and happiness of the families in which they reside.”

In which vein is Gerty being trained? She learns from Mrs. Sullivan, who is very much like a mother to her, but this hardly clarifies the point at all. The confusion continues as Cummins writes, “from morning till night, the faithful little nurse and housekeeper labors untiringly in the service of her first, her best friend” (88). In describing Gerty as either a nurse - a servant; or a housekeeper – used most often (though not exclusively) in the American context to refer to the mistress of the house, Cummins again refuses to delineate which position Gerty occupies. Similarly, calling Trueman Gerty’s “Friend” clarifies nothing, since this term was used to describe both kin and non-kin relationships. One must ultimately conclude that the difference between the two positions - a difference so crucial to the servant problem and to America’s culture of servitude as whole - is not of much consequence here. Gerty’s responsibilities would not change whether she is like Trueman’s daughter, or like Trueman’s servant. She would still be required to make his bed, and sweep his floors, and prepare his food, as Mrs. Sullivan describes.
Gerty most accurately resembles those daughters whose futures as either mistresses or servants are uncertain. By this, Cummins takes the gothic undercurrent of servant problem literature, and makes it the foreground of her text. The line between daughters and servants is ever-shifting, and always blurred. Whereas the servant problem is terrified by this ambiguity, Cummins presents it as a fact to be actively addressed, rather than a shadowy possibility that haunts unacknowledged corners. As he lays dying, Trueman hopes that Gerty will have a less onerous future: “She's but a slender child, and I never could bear the thought of her bein' driv to hard work for a livin'; she don't seem made for it, somehow. I hoped, when she grew up, to see her a schoolmistress, like Miss Browne, or somethin' in that line” (91). The “hard work” for a woman in this time period often consisted of the household “drudgery” women sought to avoid by hiring domestic servants. Laundering, scouring, hauling water and coal, climbing stairs - all were daily requirements readily admitted by contemporaneous advice literature to be taxing. Trueman is certain that she will, at least temporarily, be obliged to earn her own living; but he hopes that she can do so in a more genteel fashion - not for her reputation, but for her bodily health. Being “a slender child,” Trueman worries that Gerty is not “made for” the hard work and would succumb to it. We don’t know what would have happened to Gerty if she had not been taken in by the Graham family. What we do know, is that even if Trueman had not died when he did, Gerty would eventually have been required to earn a living for herself, and possibly her aging almost-father. In this she represents the many women driven to seek employment, the most common of which was domestic service.69

Because she has been trained in the domestic arts, and because she has been afforded the opportunity to go to school, Gerty is fit to serve as a companion to Emily Graham. Before

69 See Introduction, Table 1.2.
sending her to the Grahams, Trueman explains to Gerty that he “expects you'll be as good as can be, and do just what Miss Emily says; and, by and by, may be, when you're bigger and older, you'll be able to do somethin' for her. She's blind, you know, and you must be eyes for her; and she's not over strong, and you must lend a helpin' hand to her weakness, just as you do to mine; and, if you're good and patient, God will make your heart light at last, while you're only tryin' to make other folks happy” (94-5). Initially, it seems that Emily will be taking Gerty into her home as a ward, but perhaps only because she will eventually be big enough to do something for her. When Gerty is able, Trueman hopes that she will become a surrogate body for Emily, taking the place of her eyes, and steadying her hand in her weakness.

Trueman’s admonitions are honored by Gertrude to a remarkable degree. Our narrator tells us that, “To pour out her thoughts to Emily was like whispering to her own heart, and the response to those thoughts was as sure and certain” (265). Similarly, when Gertrude is upset, “To the careless eye, Emily was the more troubled of the two; for Emily could not be deceived, and reflected back, in her whole demeanor, the better-concealed sufferings of Gertrude” (312). Gerty and Emily’s relationship is not just one of feeling, but one of body. Their shared metaphorical heart is the clear cause of Emily’s surrogate outward sufferings. The pain of one is reflected in the body of the other.

In fact, Gerty’s body proves remarkably inhabitable. Upon first discovering what she believes to be Willie’s treachory, Cummins writes, “She could not, however, have spoken or moved for her life … But Mr. Phillips acted, spoke and moved for her, and she was spared an exposure from which her delicate and sensitive spirit would have shrunk indeed” (306). Mr. Phillips, nee Phillip Amory, knows himself to be Gerty’s father, and is invested in her emotional well-being. Again, we see that a connection of sentiment is characterized as also a connection of
body, so that Phillips is able to step in as Gerty’s physical surrogate and prosthetically play her part convincingly enough to avoid the others around them (who do not share their sympathies) witnessing the physical manifestation of her feelings.

The text shows that taking care of others - sharing sympathies with them - is a matter of body. Gertrude is proven extraordinary in the text when she jeopardizes the welfare of her body for the body of the profoundly unsympathetic Belle Clinton by disguising Belle as herself so that Phillips will save her from a burning boat. Gerty goes down with the ship, but is miraculously saved in a way that seems again like someone has taken over her body while she helplessly depends upon them. This form of bodily substitution, which Cummins figures as both metaphorical and not (Phillips literally props Gerty up; Gerty literally serves as Emily’s eyes; Gerty literally replaces her body with Belle’s) is common in the literature of servitude. However, here, Cummins allows Gerty’s character to slip back and forth between the roles of mistress and servant. At times she substitutes for others’ bodies, and at times they substitute for hers. The sympathy truly runs both ways so that need, rather than social status, determines who is the head and who the hands at any given moment.

Gerty’s vacillating position is most directly addressed when she refuses to abide by Mr. Graham’s wishes and accompany him to Europe. Instead, she plans to live with Mrs. Sullivan while teaching school, so that she can help her take care of Mr. Cooper. Mr. Graham responds:

She prefers to make a slave of herself in Mrs. W.’s school, and a still greater slave in Mrs. Sullivan's family, instead of staying with us, where she has always been treated like a lady, and, more than that, like one of my own family! ... “I can't say that I see how their claim compares with mine. Haven't I given you the best of educations, and spared no expense either for your improvement or your happiness?” ... “Father,’ said Emily, “I
thought the object, in giving Gertrude a good education, was to make her independent of all the world, and not simply dependent upon us.” “Emily,” said Mr. Graham, “I tell you it is a matter of feeling.” (140)

Mr. Graham precisely misunderstands matters of feelings. He has plenty of emotion on this point, but none of them is sympathy for Gerty and her difficult position, her loyalty to the Sullivans, or her desire for an independent income. He believes he has treated her “like a lady” and “one of my own family,” but yet again, Cummins allows this language to vacillate between the adoptive and servile registers, since to be treated “like a lady” is quite different from being a lady whose treatment need not be commented upon.

_The Rational Response: Behavior Should Determine Treatment_

Gerty is regularly called both a member of the family and someone without family. This discrepancy is capitalized upon by the dislikeable characters of the book, the new Mrs. Graham and her nieces, Kitty and Isabel. Initially, Kitty questions Gertrude’s status in response to feeling jealous that the young Mr. Bruce seems to prefer Gertrude to her: “'I want to know,' [Kitty] said, 'if Miss Flint has been in the habit of receiving company here, and being treated like an equal?' 'Of course she has,' answered Fanny [Bruce], with spirit; 'why shouldn't she? She's the most perfect lady I ever saw, and mother says she has beautiful manners, and I must take pattern by her” (194). Kitty’s statement seeks to undermine Gertrude’s appropriateness as a potential mate for Bruce by challenging her status in the home as “an equal.” The text leaves implicit what the alternatives to “an equal” might be, but given Gertrude’s live-in status, it is safe to assume that the most plausible of these alternatives would be a servant.

In this regard, Fanny Bruce’s rejoinder seems to miss the point. Gertrude’s behavior is not in question; her status is. Behaving like “the most perfect lady” does not entitle one to the
title of a lady, and indeed Gertrude is never offered this moniker. Kitty soon begins to benefit from Gertrude and Emily’s influence, and becomes friends with them both. However, her continued respect and friendship for Gerty is an indicator of her improving character precisely because Gertrude could be treated as an inferior. By choosing not to treat Gertrude as an inferior, Kitty shows good judgment, but the fact remains that Gerty is in a position to be treated however someone might choose. Even the Grahams draw a tacit distinction around Gerty’s place within the home. Kitty asks Gerty for help putting together an outfit for a party. Gerty replies, “Kitty; I never went to a fashionable party in my life,” to which Kitty responds, “That doesn't make any difference. I'm sure, if you did go, you'd look better than any of us; and I’m not afraid to trust to your opinion, for I never in my life saw you wear anything that didn't look genteel; - even your gingham morning-gown has a sort of stylish air” (228). If Gertrude is like a member of the family, why doesn’t she join them at their fashionable parties? Again, Kitty demonstrates her improvement by looking to someone decidedly beneath fashionable society for advice, highlighting the discrepancy between Gerty’s value and her position.

The Graham family did not frequent fashionable parties in the text until the new Mrs. Graham is installed. Throughout, the third Mrs. Graham and her niece, Belle Clinton, serve to demonstrate the follies of fashionable society, which cannot respect true character and value. Isabel’s obnoxious opinions receive the most attention from the text as she serves as a potential rival to Gertrude for Willie Sullivan’s affections. When Mr. Graham suggests that Emily and Gertrude would accompany the family on a tour of Europe, Isabel is petulant. “‘He speaks of Gertrude,’ said Isabel sneeringly, 'as if she were one of the family. I’m sure I don't see any very great prospect of pleasure in travelling all through Europe with a blind woman and her disagreeable appendages; I can't think what Mr. Graham wants to take them for”’ (243).
choosing the ugly term “appendage” to refer to Gerty’s tacit servitude, Belle puts an ugly spin on what the text is invested in construing as a beautiful relationship of dependency between Emily and Gertrude. The text is scornful of Belle’s interpretation, however it is most scornful of her interpretation of Gerty as disagreeable, rather than as an appendage. Belle’s mistake is in thinking Gerty unworthy of her company because she is an appendage. This renders her opinion suspect, because the text has shown Gerty behaving genteelly and patiently to Belle at all times. It does not, therefore, challenge Belle’s assigning Gerty this status, but rather challenges Belle’s choice of terms.

Behavior should determine behavior, Cummins’s text argues, because this is the only rational way to respond to the fluctuations of status that accompany modern life. Isenberg attributes the religious overtones of “sentiment and sympathy” to these fluctuations:

The need for sentiment and sympathy came from the real need to deal with death. A clearer understanding of demographic reality leads us to consider how the combination of religious concerns and a fairly static medical knowledge created a generalized emotional crisis. Mobility meant that rural Americans were not as closed to the outside as they had been in the previous century. If they could not stop the spread of disease among a roving, more commercial population, they could find solace in the only permanence that their society offered, and that was found in local churches where salvation was sought and the possibility of heavenly relief from suffering was easily anticipated. (186)

Gerty’s judicious sympathy responds to the “real need to deal with death” and infirmity by proposing character as a discernible trait. One’s character is known, simply, by one’s behavior. All other markers of value are sure to fail in the world of the text.
This is shown through characters like Mrs. Ellis, who is clearly positioned as a beloved and faithful servant, but whose behavior suggests otherwise. Readers are prone to dislike Mrs. Ellis because she treats Gertrude poorly. Her petty tricks and petulance only increase when Gerty is installed in the Graham household, culminating in her destruction of Gertrude’s only remaining private property. Emily’s response to Gertrude’s distress is straight from advice literature on how to manage servants. She says, “I have no doubt, Gertrude, that you had some reason to feel provoked... You know Mrs. Ellis has been here a number of years; she has had everything her own way, and is not used to young people. She felt, when you came, that it was bringing new care and trouble upon her … She is a very faithful woman, very kind and attentive to me, and very important to my father” (99). Emily models the ideal mistress’s behavior by sympathizing with Mrs. Ellis’s position while acknowledging that she may have been in the wrong. To forebear in the face of these wrongs is a mark of the condescension and kindness advice literature is keen to promote. While Mrs. Ellis’s behavior is abysmal, Emily’s loyalty demonstrates her ennobling patience.

Rather than scold Mrs. Ellis, Emily slowly operates upon her sympathies to bring her around to properly appreciate Gertrude. When Mrs. Ellis objects to Gerty's being sent to “a very expensive school for a child like her” Emily replies “[Father] thinks, as I do, that if we undertake to fit her to instruct others, she must be thoroughly taught herself. I talked with him about it the first night after we came into town for the season, and he agreed with me that we had better put her out to learn a trade at once, than half-educate, make a fine lady of her, and so unfit her for anything” (100-1). Emily’s response patiently reasons with Mrs. Ellis and attempts to appeal to her sympathies to make her understand why it would be wrong to offer Gerty anything other than a first-class education. But Emily’s reasons do less to clarify Gerty’s status than to complicate it
still further. Gerty’s future seems entirely in their hands - whether she will be properly educated, sent to vocational training, or made a half-useful “fine lady,” are issues entirely up to Emily and her father. Implicit in them all, however, is the fact that Gerty will, eventually, be thrust from the family and left to fend for herself. Her desire for independence has been expressed by this point in the text, however it is clear that to become independent she must first be entirely dependent upon her benefactors. Luckily, Emily recognizes what will enable Gerty to become truly independent, and steers the family’s benevolence in that direction.

The irony of Emily’s having this conversation with Mrs. Ellis should be apparent. We learn about Mrs. Ellis’s history shortly after this exchange:

Mrs. Ellis … had long had her own way in the management of all household matters at Mr. Graham's and had consequently become rather tyrannical...Then, too, Gertrude had been reared, as Mrs. Ellis expressed it, among the lower classes; and the housekeeper, who was not in reality very hard-hearted, and quite approved of all public and private charities, had a slight prejudice in favor of high birth. Indeed, though now depressed in her circumstances, she prided herself on being of a good family, and considered it an insult to her dignity to expect that she should feel an interest in providing for the wants of one so inferior to her in point of station. (101)

Mrs. Ellis’s response to the family’s treatment of Gerty deserves our attention for the ways it elucidates the complexities of servitude as a lived experience and as a relationship to others. While it’s easy to dismiss Mrs. Ellis’s petulance as the result of having a “rival in Miss Graham's affections” (101), the text offers us a much fuller explanation. She, herself, had fallen on hard times and found herself “Depressed in her circumstances.” Her lineage of “good family” is given as grounds for her approval of “private and public charities,” but also as grounds for the
“dignity” that feels slighted at being asked to serve “one so inferior to her in point of station.” Though she presently works as a housekeeper, Mrs. Ellis does not consider her station equal to Gertrude’s, even though Gertrude’s servitude is technically of a higher order. Her “prejudice in favor of high birth” extends not only to those who are still of high birth, but to those who, like herself, have fallen on hard times. Birth, according to Mrs. Ellis, determines station, not present occupation. Mrs. Ellis needs to believe in this in order to maintain the dignity she once had. She, like Gerty, is the underside of the literature of the servant problem: the woman who has devolved into servitude from a higher place.

The proliferation of women needing work is both foregrounded and obscured by texts discussing the servant problem. One of the things that makes these discussions feel overwrought to contemporary readers is the religious devotion to the home as the font of all goodness, happiness, and stability. Within these homages to the home, however, the servant woman is an uncanny double of the master and mistress’s family, gothically signifying the fact that homes fail. The Lamplighter engages this uncanny, shedding light on its subterannean anxieties to suggest that whether one is a daughter or a servant is ultimately a moot point because servants are always already also daughters. Nestled within antebellum homes are the remnants of other antebellum homes unable to keep themselves together. Servants are, almost by definition, those women who cannot stay in their paternal, fraternal, or marital homes.

Mrs. Ellis is just one of the many ways Cummins signals that relying too exclusively upon the consanguinous family is irrational in the world of The Lamplighter because families fail. Cummins’s text intervenes in this anxious discourse, suggesting that the way to alleviate the

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70 As a companion to Emily, Gertrude’s servitude (if she is, indeed, a servant) would place her above Mrs. Ellis, the housekeeper, in the servant’s hierarchy.
anxiety of the failed family is to expand the boundaries of the family. However, the sympathy that produces family feeling must be treated as a finite resource, because it is embodied and therefore subject to the body’s limitations.

**Conclusion: Sympathy the Answer, In Spite of its Dangers**

But the text offers no utopian promises for a life without suffering or death. The world of *The Lamplighter* is dangerous, and even sympathy has its perils. Katy, for example, chose to stand by her affective attachment to Emily and to Gerty, and suffered the potentially disastrous consequences. Miscalculations in this line are treated as tragedy in the text. Indeed, it shows that sympathetic connections can be both a boon and a curse. Lang, for example, explains that Gerty must be domesticated into sentimental culture, beginning with her affection for the kitten Trueman Flint brings her.

Sympathies are therefore dangerous because they make one vulnerable in heart and in body, but the only solution the text seems to offer is additional sympathetic connections. The Sullivan family is a prime example. Mr. Cooper, Mrs. Sullivan’s father, is brought low by “Domestic trials, and the unkindness and fickleness of fortune” (20). Specifically, Mr. Cooper was hurt by miscalculating the character of his son, and of his daughter, Sarah’s, husband. Mrs. Sullivan reports to Willie that:

You know he thought everything of Uncle Richard, and there was no end to the trouble he had with him; and there was Aunt Sarah's husband - he seemed to be such a fine fellow when Sally married him, but he cheated father dreadfully at last, so that he had to mortgage his house in High-street, and finally give it up entirely. He's dead now, and I don't want to say anything against him; but didn't he prove what we expected and it broke Sally's heart, I think. (38)
By placing too much weight on Uncle Richard’s status as his son, and not enough weight upon his demonstrated behavior, Mr. Cooper miscalculates and suffers the consequences of repeated bouts of “trouble.” But even more terrifyingly, the family’s miscalculation in Sally’s husband suggests that sometimes these mistakes are unavoidable. The family thought they had chosen judiciously, but were wrong. Aunt Sally dies of her broken heart, Mr. Cooper’s old age is diminished, Mrs. Sullivan ultimately breaks down under the strain of caring for him, and Gerty almost breaks down under the strain of caring for them both in their decline.

Yet in spite of this extraordinary ripple effect, the text does not suggest that the answer is to cut off sympathetic connections - to, as Mr. Cooper does, withdraw “from intercourse with the world at large” and, “become severe towards its follies, and unforgiving towards its crimes” (20). This is, in part, demonstrated by the benefits that come from judiciously chosen sympathies. Gerty is almost broken by caring for Mrs. Sullivan and her father; but first her relationship with them introduces her to Willie, her future husband, and to Emily, her future benefactor. Similarly, Willie’s commitment to caring for his mother and grandfather causes him to accept a posting in India at great personal risk. However, this posting allows him to enter Mr. Graham’s trusted inner-circle, and puts him in a position to save Philip Amory’s life, which then allows Amory to be formally reunited with his daughter, help his new son-in-law in business prospects, and provide the newlyweds with a home of their own. Philip Amory, himself, is first injured by having his sympathetic connection to Emily sundered by Mr. Graham and Mrs. Ellis. This leads him to board the ship for South America where he will meet Gerty’s mother, seem to die of Malaria, and seem to lose his wife and child to the same disease. However, the wandering that this chain of events produces ultimately leads him to encounter Willie, and begin the chain of events described above.
Cummins’s text takes as given that extraordinary turns of events hinge upon the confluence of very simple interpersonal relations. The foolish characters, like Belle Clinton, fail to see how someone like Gertrude could possibly benefit their lives, only to have those same people save their lives. This matters, the text argues, not only for the emotional, but for the physical health of those in the world, because the two are so intimately related. The novel encourages readers to look beyond traditional family roles for the connections that may mitigate the embodied perils of life. It also urges readers to consider how even the smallest interaction may have a ripple effect that has long-term consequences.

Speaking of several novels, including *The Lamplighter*, Claire Chantell writes, “the heroines' training occupies these texts centrally ... the expertise required to cultivate exemplary women resides in many rather than one and in interaction with the world, not retreat from it” (131). Cummins’s text is hopeful, and yet, deeply ambivalent. Erica Bauermeister writes that *The Lamplighter* revises the submissiveness promoted in *The Wide Wide World* by allowing Gerty self-assertion in her confrontation with Mr. Graham. Submission remains in *The Lamplighter*, Bauermeister concludes, but it is submission to the will of Providence, rather than a patriarchal structure (23). But what about the other characters who seem to have little self-assertion? How can we square Gerty’s rise to love and hearth and home when characters like Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Prime are never allowed to graduate from their servitude into a new independence?

While Mrs. Ellis is afforded a fuller characterization, Mrs. Prime is seen as the more generous and good-hearted foil to Mrs. Ellis’s dragon-guarding-the-door persona. She, like the stereotypical cook, has more reign to grumble because of her specialized skill set. When Gerty and Emily move to a boarding house rather than accompany the rest of the family to Europe, Cummins writes that, “Mrs. Prime” was “established as cook in Mrs. Warren's household, where
all the morning she grumbled at the increase of duty she was here called upon to perform, and all
the evening blessed her stars that she was still under the same roof with her dear young ladies”
(253). Prime’s grumbling at now having to cook for an entire household of boarders, rather than
for a single (if increasingly large) family is the more excusable because she eventually
remembers her affection for “her dear young ladies.”

The idea that Mrs. Prime values staying with the family above her own comfort is
furthered by the end of the text. When Emily marries Amory and repairs to her new farm, “Mrs.
Prime pleaded hard for the cook's situation at the farm; but Emily kindly expostulated with her,
saying, 'We cannot all leave my father, Mrs. Prime. Who would see to his hot toast, and the fire
in the library?' and the good old woman saw the matter in the right light, and submitted” (420-1).
Emily refers to Mrs. Prime as part of the “we” she considers responsible for her father’s comfort
and sustenance - yet by this inclusion, she asserts her authority, to which Mrs. Prime must
submit. Emily’s view on the matter is “the right light” by which Mrs. Prime must view the
situation, or else she must leave her situation altogether. She is free to go and seek employment
elsewhere, of course - but her ability to do so is severely curtailed by myriad factors that
populate the city outside the circles of judiciously disposed sympathy. Her submission is not to
Providence, but to Emily Graham. Ever pragmatic, Cummins offers no romantic vision of a
society without want, disappointment, and death. Particularly in servant characters like Mrs.
Prime, Katy, and Mary Miller, she acknowledges that not all can be picked from the litter and
lifted from a life of toil. One can, however, choose to respect the far-reaching embodied
consequences of even the smallest sympathetic interactions, and do the best one can to make that
life of toil bearable by being filled with affection.
And yet, Cummins’s reliance upon the feelings and affections of her characters, rather than the law, seems insufficient in the abolitionist moment of the 1850s, when authors like Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe were passionately arguing that only the law could truly be relied upon to alter human behavior. As Lang writes, “The fictional home, in which inequalities are erased and class struggle averted, in which the circle of ‘friends’ includes millions and millions, blacks and whites, in which homosociality enables cross-class sociability, is designed to answer the demands of social justice and the fears of social conflict alike.” *The Lamplighter* is profoundly optimistic about the ability to create sympathetic connections across class lines. Though pragmatic, Cummins nevertheless participates in “The illusion that homes – in the better sense – would make the homeless just like them and thus obviate class antagonism required the particular compound of obliviousness and arrogance characteristic of a middle-class that believed their way of living was not simply theirs, but right” (128-9). As the draft rebellions with which the next chapter is concerned show, modification of more than sympathies was necessary to combat the systematized exploitations of class, and these often could not be addressed without first acknowledging that class antagonism was intrinsic to class stratification.

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Chapter Five: America’s Culture of Servitude at War: The Servant Problem, The Soldier Problem, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s House and Home Papers

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s House and Home Papers is a profoundly strange text. Comprised of a series of columns written for The Atlantic over a twelve-month period, the content of House and Home Papers seems unremarkable at first: every month a gentlemanly narrator expounds upon the principles and practicalities of domesticity, regularly using his family as reference and example. But quickly the critic’s questions begin to emerge: Why would Harriet Beecher Stowe, one of the most famous women on either side of the Atlantic, choose a male narrative persona to discuss domesticity? And why would she make this narrative persona the by-line of each column, adopting the pseudonym, “Christopher Crowfield”? Perhaps most importantly, why would she do all of this in the middle of the Civil War? Stowe began writing in 1863, published the sketches from January to December of 1864, and republished them in a bound collection in early 1865. Many critics have felt that Stowe dealt with the war’s violence by turning away from it, but a closer examination reveals that House and Home Papers is deeply invested in the issues of the war.

Although Christopher Crowfield barely mentions the ongoing conflict in his didactic discussions of interior decorating, child rearing, and servant managing, House and Home Papers (HHP) is supersaturated by two themes undeniably pertinent to the war: the systematic production of unifying sentiment, and bodily labor. Furthermore, I will show that Stowe’s HHP responds directly to the Union’s recruitment and discipline struggles via the homologous discourse of domestic labor recruitment and discipline, particularly in its discussion of household servants. Stowe’s recommendation is the systematization of household management, which will
foster the production of a sentiment that disciplines a collective. Civil War correspondence reveals that Stowe’s suggestions were very much in line with what the Provost-Marshall-General’s Bureau and the U.S. Sanitary Commission ultimately effected to combat things like desertion and disease. In both *HHIP* and the Civil War archive, however, one sees that this is predicated upon a collective individuality, in which the individual can be neither reduced to, nor separated from the whole. This unifying technique blurs the boundaries of the body, and suppresses the material effects of class in the interest of appropriating labor. In *John Brown’s Body* Franny Nudelman argues that Civil War discourse abstracts the individual body so as to foster a collectivity that perpetuates subordination to the state and its demand for more bodies (17). By extending her challenge to unmask the abstractions of power, Stowe’s text may be read as operating in a fashion similar to the discourse Nudelman explores.

This collective individuality, I will argue, stems, in part, from the theories of class harmony and class cooperation with which nineteenth-century scholars are well-acquainted. The rebellious factors in Stowe’s text and the Civil War archive—be they troublesome servants, or draft dodgers—can be read as protesting this theory of class. As John Whiteclay Chambers writes, “draft resistance and evasion among such economic and cultural groups can perhaps be

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71 Whereas collective action is classically a positive force in the history of class and labor, I will be using “collectivity” and “collective” in line with Franny Nudelman’s concept of a collective approbation or sentiment, to which a population is disciplined to acquiesce.

72 Many scholars have addressed the theories of a *harmony of interests* after the Civil War. In addition to Amy Dru Stanley’s work, described below, see Nell Irvin Painter’s discussion of “the identity-of-interest,” in which “The social economy would function in an orderly and efficient manner, with each group playing its proper role, provided different classes realized that their interests were identical” (xl); vs. “democratizers” who argued that, “a society in which the privileged wielded enormous power to further their own interests could not at the same time function as a democracy in which all were created equal … society naturally entailed conflict” (xliii). For more, see the Introduction, specifically, pp. xxxviii-xliii.
better understood not simply as personal avoidance of military service but also as a challenge by less affluent, more parochial segments of society to the activist national policies that Republicans were employing to establish their particular interests and vision of America” (55).

To find the seeds of emerging class resistance in a historical event like the New York City Draft Riots is hardly surprising. However, by contextualizing Stowe’s work among this and similar wartime events, it becomes surprisingly clear that narratives of servant rebellion - though isolated and ensconced within the domestic space - are likewise evidence of an emergent class resistance. By addressing military matters via domestic help, Stowe demonstrates that nineteenth-century discussions of servitude are a high-powered lens upon the articulations of power. Because the relationship between master/mistress and servant takes place in the home and directly involves a manageable number of parties, it seems to be the distillation of power relations - an instance of difference and power operating in their pure forms. Recognizing the homologies between Stowe’s *HHP* and Civil War discourse, therefore, not only expands our understanding of Stowe’s text. It furthermore encourages us to reconsider the significance of servants as a nineteenth-century trope, and to begin to theorize how the day-to-day practice of domestic servitude could inure a culture to extraordinary practices such as conscription.

The Soldier Problem and the Servant Problem

Scholars are deeply familiar with canonical criticism on authors like Stowe, in which the concept of “separate spheres” is imploded, and critics demonstrate the national and global implications of the domestic sphere.73 Stowe is typical of the literature this criticism discusses,

73 See, for example, Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*; The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America, ed., Shirley Samuels; Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*; and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S.*
and of contemporaneous domestic sketches: readers witness a family struggle with day-to-day problems and are educated by the resolutions. The publication context of Stowe’s *HHP*, however, is atypical, and should encourage us to interrogate it more deeply. Doing so, one finds some intriguing parallels. Like the Crowfields and their genteel neighbors, the Union Army struggled to maintain morale and discipline in the face of the overwhelming struggles of feeding, housing, and caring for its members. In July and August of 1862, the U.S. Sanitary Commission dispatched official reports to the Executive Branch decrying unsanitary camp conditions (United States, *Official Records* 2:236, 297). The Sanitary Commission urged President Lincoln to adopt more systematic methods of recruitment and medical examination so that a more robust soldiering population would promote healthy camp life.

The Commission reports that, “the frequent spectacle of immature youth and men of diseased or enfeebled constitutions returning to their homes shattered and broken down after a month of camp life, destructive to themselves and useless to the country, has depressed the military spirit and confidence of the people” (*OR* 2:236). The unsystematic examination of troops has resulted in the enlistment of men whose bodies are not prepared for the rigors of “camp life,” and their suffering has given pause to those who might otherwise consider enlisting. The proffered solution, which they believe to be “the only efficient security immediately available against a great aggravation of this evil, and consequent danger of disaster, [is] the

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*Culture.* I am deeply indebted to this work, and following the model of later critics, build upon it by attending carefully to the aesthetics and contradictions of the text. See, for example, the essays in *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*, eds. Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby.

exercise of the Executive power to command men for the instant re-enforcement of the reduced and jaded regiments in the field” (OR 2: 297-8).

Therefore, while domestic sketches, like Stowe’s, debated the servant problem, the Army faced an analogous series of issues - what we might call the soldier problem: how to get well-suited bodies to serve, and to do so with the proper feeling so that their example might inspire (rather than deter) further enlistment. The Sanitary Commission’s report responds to the Federal Government’s struggle to keep its armies full of the right sort of men after the initial call of 1861, and after men began dying in unprecedented numbers - more often from disease or camp accident than from enemy bullets. According to the Official Records, Provost-Marshall-General James B. Fry reported in March, 1866 that enlisted men were roughly twice as likely to have died from “disease or accident” than to have been killed in action (United States, Official Records 5: 600). The report demonstrates that this was a complex matter encompassing issues of individual bodily fitness, collective cleanliness, and the systems meant to ensure them.

These issues are wrapped in the need to produce a national sentiment conducive to enlistment. The Commission writes that, “the comparatively slow progress of volunteering is due, when there is in no other respect evidence of want of patriotic spirit among the people … to a widespread want of confidence in the intention of the Government so to use the whole strength of the nation as to obtain the certainty of immediate and complete success.” They argue that the people desire a strong hand, writing, “men will not volunteer for a lingering war... When you order, they will obey; but at present there unquestionably is a general indisposition to volunteer upon your mere invitation” (OR 2: 298). They ask if President Lincoln has the stomach to wield

what they perceive to be the full power of the Executive and compel men into Union lines so that
the rebellion might be more quickly overwhelmed.

The solution to the ills of unsystematic examinations, they argue, is the rigorous enforcement of conscription. Stowe’s treatise on cleanliness, order, and the production of sentiment via stern authority, therefore, is a commentary upon the exact things killing Federal troops, and the perceived remedy to them. Lincoln takes up this challenge, but the decision is met with spectacular resistance. The largest riot occurred in New York City, where for three days the largely Irish crowd controlled the streets, and were not contained until Union Army regulars fresh from Gettysburg were dispatched. With the outbreak of war in 1861, many Irish immigrants living in the North had joined the ranks of the Union Army. Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, however, the Union cause lost favor with many Irish immigrants, who claimed that Lincoln had changed the impetus of the war from the preservation of the union to the emancipation of the slave. This goes some way toward explaining why over the course of these three days the violence of the mob was increasingly aimed at the African Americans of New York and their property. But Iver Bernstein and Adrian Cook have argued that the riots originally broke out in fairly straightforward protest against the enforcement of the draft.

To combat this rebellious streak, the Army systematically disciplined public opinion,

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76 For a complete history of the New York City Draft Riots, see Iver Bernstein, The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War, specifically, the Introduction.


beginning in individual homes. Throughout 1863, as Stowe was composing *HHP*, the Provost-Marshal-General’s office sent agents door to door inquiring for any draft-eligible men and taking down their information. Fry, reports that this was a difficult process due to “the large floating population of the country, and the disposition and right of our people to go from place to place without let or hindrance.” More sensationally, “opposition [was] encountered in almost every house, if not to the act itself, at least to its application to the particular persons whose names were sought for enrollment” (*OR* 5: 618) Opposition at the household level created serious difficulties for the war effort. To reform the home was, then, a matter of desperate national interest.

Within this archival context, Stowe’s discussion of household management takes on a martial hue, particularly given the time Crowfield spends discussing troublesome Irish servants. Stowe signals the affinity between embattled home and embattled state when her narrator expands the scope of his domestic principles to report that gentlemen soldiers, though delicately bred, are better able to withstand the rigors of camp life because their educations allow them to work efficiently and thoughtfully. The uncultivated soldier, on the other hand, labors blindly and ignorantly, even to the point of his own destruction. Crowfield connects the cultivated soldier and the cultivated female homemaker. Both, he argues, are “labor-saving institutions.” The seamless transition from men at war to women at home indicates the fluid interchange between principles of household economy and principles on a national scale (140).

Joan Hedrick rightly points out that *HHP*’s servant problems extend from Stowe’s personal experiences finding good help after losing her long-time servant, Anna (310-1). Moreover, the unruly Irish servants of Stowe’s text also resonate with the riotous Irish of the

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Draft Riots.\textsuperscript{80} \textit{HHP} appears in \textit{The Atlantic} throughout 1864, immediately after the draft agitations of 1863; and we know from her letters that she was writing her text throughout the summer and fall of 1863 (\textit{HBS}, 312). Furthermore, Stowe's son, wounded at Gettysburg, was delayed returning home by the New York City riots. Thus, Stowe had a deeply personal stake in the way that class rebellion could subvert the maintenance of the unified home and its concentric corollary, the nation.\textsuperscript{81}

Looking at these sources in tandem demonstrates that \textit{the soldier problem} has striking parallels to \textit{the servant problem}. According to nineteenth-century periodicals and domestic treatises, the domestic home front had for years been struggling to get well-suited bodies into position to perform necessary labors. Many writers, including Stowe, construed this issue as a matter of sentiment - both of convincing laborers (typically young women) to want to be domestic servants and once employed, to be obedient and loyal toward their employers. In \textit{Love, Wages, Slavery} Barbara Ryan proposes viewing the “servant problem” as “evidence of privilege imperiled rather than clear or mere demographic truth” and describes the phenomena as a widespread “sense of grievance against attendants who, being free to go, all too often went”\textsuperscript{(5)}.  

\textsuperscript{80} Following the worst draft agitations in 1863, the \textit{Official Records} show widespread belief that all Irish were violent resisters. See, for example, Frek. [sic] Townsend, Actg. Asst. PMG to James B Fry; Albany, 16 Jul., 1863: “The Irish as a class are involved in this opposition, and form, as they always do, the sub-structure of the mob.” United States War Department, \textit{The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies}, comp. Robert N. Scott, 3:516; hereafter cited parenthetically as \textit{OR} 3. Furthermore, Joshua Fiero, Jr. reported to Fry after the New York City riots that “This resistance was mostly made by the Irish women” (\textit{OR} 3, 490), indicating that Stowe’s rebellious Irish women were not considered distinct from their male counterparts.

\textsuperscript{81} “In the meantime, on July 13, in response to the draft that had been imposed to bolster the volunteer army, riots broke out in many cities of the North. The mails were disrupted for a week and the Stowes heard nothing from Fred. Under the impression that her son was on his way home, Harriet feared that he had been ‘torn limb from limb’ by the ‘wild beasts’ who were destroying property and lynching blacks in the streets of New York” (\textit{HBS}, 307).
Like Ryan, I argue that the literature of servitude is a highly focused lens upon the articulations of class.

By situating *HHP* within its Civil War context, we can see that the day-to-day practice of domestic servitude helped construct a worldview legitimating military conscription and its attendant class-based inequalities. When Lincoln conceded to the Sanitary Commission and others’ urging, and in March, 1863 instituted the first Federal Draft in American history,\(^{82}\) the decision was justified by an ideology of class harmony and cooperation deeply enmeshed with the ideology undergirding nineteenth-century America’s culture of servitude.\(^{83}\)

Post-bellum protests against liberal ideologies of class harmony are well documented. Particularly, according to Amy Dru Stanley, workers protested disembodied theories of labor that allowed economists to claim labor as an alienable commodity (90-2). As Stanley shows, many texts rationalize the appropriation of labor via sentimental claims for a *harmony of interests* between class groups. In *The Conundrum of Class*, Martin J. Burke quotes William Dolby’s 1842 description of “harmonious American class relations”: “The classification of society,’ he suggested, could be compared to the ‘component parts’ of the engine of a steam vessel, with the ‘progress’ of the whole dependent on the ‘mutual relation’ of each part” (118). Like many in the 19th-century, Dolby’s theory acknowledges class difference, but denies class conflict by

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82 The Federal Draft of 1863 was distinct from the Militia Draft of 1862 (and previous militia drafts) in that it called for the raising not of local and state militias, but of “the national forces,” a concept new in U.S. Military history. Provost-Marshel-General James B. Fry describes the distinction as follows: “[The Draft of 1863] was the first law enacted by Congress by which the Government of the United States appealed directly to the Nation to create large armies without the intervention of the authorities of the several States” (*OR* 5, 611).

83 A culture of servitude is defined as one in which servitude is deemed a necessity. See Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, *Cultures of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India*. My own use adds that servitude is deemed both necessary and *right*, and that the master/servant relationship is a foundational trope in many negotiations of power.
highlighting class cooperation. By choosing a mechanistic, thermodynamic metaphor, Dolby implies that the articulations of class are fixed because demanded by natural law.

Dolby’s choice of words elucidates the coercive power latent within theories of a harmony of interest. By theorizing class as both “natural” and cooperative, liberals like Dolby claimed to have access to the natural laws upon which America’s class system was supposedly patterned. This allowed them to characterize class dissatisfaction as a product of ignorance. Furthermore, challenges to the “natural” organization of classes (such as challenges to the relation between capitalist and producer) threatened to upend the entire society within which those relations played a necessary role.

Situated within this framework, one can see that, even in the absence of the archival and biographical connections traced above, Stowe’s text and its quotidian anxieties are, by nineteenth-century standards, implicitly related to the larger political discourses of their time. No part - be it the family, their servants, or tradesmen - was too small to be pertinent to the whole. Stowe’s text, in fact, takes this principle as its principal subject. Despite the seemingly mundane material of each sketch, each article builds upon and reinforces the primary theme of domestic (and national) unity. Like parts of a machine themselves, Stowe’s Atlantic articles combine to form a whole that results in an incredibly complex treatise upon the interrelatedness of all things, from matters of the dishpan to matters of the millennium.

84 Burke writes that “antebellum liberals” had “[b]y the late 1840s...and through the rest of the century… naturalized and domesticated the social and economic divisions generated by the growth of American capitalism...A ‘classless’ society in terms of this lexicon did not mean one exempt from ‘natural’ differences, but one without an intergenerational perpetuation of unnatural distinctions.” This theory was one of “social classes without social conflict.” Burke, The Conundrum of Class, 124.
Suppressing the Material Consequences of Class

The complexities of Stowe’s treatise are immediately signaled through *HHP*’s narrative persona, Christopher Crowfield. Advertisements for the January, 1864 issue of the *Atlantic* announced that “Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe” would be commencing “a series of capital sketches,” and opposite the title page of the 1865 edition of *HHP* is a listing of “Mrs. Stowe’s Writings.” Given the public knowledge of her authorship, Stowe’s decision to make the column’s full title “House and Home Papers by Christopher Crowfield” is a puzzling matter we cannot begin to address until we accurately categorize “Christopher Crowfield” as a narrative conceit, or *titular pseudonym*. Within the pages of *The Atlantic* for 1864 there are other examples of this titular conceit. For example, “Wet Weather Work: by A Farmer,” authored by Donald G. Mitchell; or “William Makepeace Thackeray: By One Who Knew Him” authored by Bayard Taylor. Stowe uses a male narrative persona as a framing device – a common literary technique - and yet her decision to use a persona of the opposite gender begs the question of why she would choose to garb herself (however transparently) in the guise of a man.

Most scholars, if they consider *HHP* at all, are content to accept Joan Hedrick’s explanation that, “If there were rhetorical advantages to be gained in 1864 by her choice of a male persona to speak on domestic topics, it is hard to discern them. Rather, speaking in a male voice was the price of admission to the *Atlantic* club” (*HSB*, 314).\(^{85}\) If one pauses on that byline, however, an alternative interpretation emerges. Stowe’s narrator and his family are the Crowfields: the bleak remnants of bloody battle. Christopher Crowfield’s surname invites readers to

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\(^{85}\) A notable exception is Caroline Chamberlin Hellman’s contention that “Stowe's use of a pseudonymous male narrator contributes to her dual strategy of widening the domestic sphere, while establishing male support for the woman-centered household.” Caroline Chamberlin Hellman, *Domesticity and Design in American Women’s Lives and Literature: Stowe, Alcott, Cather, and Wharton Writing Home*, 20.
imagine the scene post-battle, when fields of the Civil War dead and wounded remain, fodder for
the crows. It is a violent, startling image quite at odds with scholarly consensus and with Stowe’s
1863 pitch to her publisher, James Fields, that *HHP* would be “a sort of spicy sprightly writing”
that does not “run in a rut cut thro [sic] our hearts & red with our blood,” but is instead “a little
gentle household merriment and talk of common things” (qtd. in *HSB*, 312).

Furthermore, when we consider “Christopher Crowfield” alongside other titular
pseudonyms within the *Atlantic*, the nuances of Stowe’s framing device continue to emerge. We
see that a generic classification such as “A Farmer,” or “One Who Knew Him” was often used in
this place. Stowe, alternatively, has chosen the proper name of an individual, and yet his last
name invokes the image of the undifferentiated casualties of war. “Christopher Crowfield” is a
name at once specific and generic; individual and collective; intimate and incomprehensible. Our
narrator is the linguistic distillation of an expansive, unifying *individuality*. He is both the
bewildering Crowfield of war, and, simply, Christopher. Yet even “Christopher” is an old
English name meaning “Christ-bearer,” which further gestures toward the balancing and uniting
of the near and the elusive, for Stowe’s Protestantism posited that Christ was both wholly human
and wholly divine, and that His individual suffering redeemed all individuals. This makes our
narrator the “bearer” of an embodied, yet ungraspable paradox.

That is to say that a close examination of our narrator’s name suggests that Stowe’s
epistolary claims for her sketches’ simplicity may have been more marketing pitch than honest
assessment.\(^86\) In the name, “Christopher Crowfield,” Stowe combines the depersonalizing

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\(^86\) Stowe’s letters are noteworthy for their inaccuracies (she often misremembers dates, for
example), but also for their literariness. Speaking specifically of her letters on religious matters
during the 1840’s, her brother, Charles, noted that “She is not in her letter pouring forth feeling
merely because she feels it but planning by the combination of such and such feelings … to
violence of war with a specific persona that meanwhile recalls the eternally redemptive power of suffering. This combination refuses any space between the individual and the collective, or the personal and the abstracted, and this unifying trend continues beyond the byline of each article. *HHP*, taken collectively, is a philosophical treatise upon the necessity of this cosmic/quotidian balancing act. Stowe offers this philosophy to her readers at a time when the incomprehensible death tolls of the war were threatening to efface the individuals whose deaths comprised each tally, and at a time when this incomprehensibility was shaking Northern commitment to the war.  

This theory of collective individuality certainly has ennobling, powerful qualities for communal unity; but it also has some problematic side effects. Specifically, this theory of individuality blurs the boundaries between individuals, thereby blurring the sovereignty of each. Crucial to Stowe’s philosophy of the principled, practical home is a system of domestic service whereby the mistress of the house appropriates the labors of her servants. By appropriating this labor and managing it effectively, the mistress is construed not as having given up a responsibility to another, but as having fulfilled a responsibility *via* another. This same appropriation mechanism - what we might think of as a type of bodily outsourcing - is evident in many facets of military conscription and recruitment. Most transparently, the process of military substitution (whereby a drafted man could hire another individual to serve in his place) mirrors

produce a given effect” (qtd. In Hedrick, 153). Stowe was well versed in the power of the carefully crafted letter.

87 See Meagher, Nudelman, and Bernstein for extended discussions of intra-Union conflict during the war.
the process of domestic substitution. The conscripted man is not construed as having avoided his duty, but as having fulfilled it via the body of the substitute.

The privilege to appropriate another’s body is rationalized by appeals to the value of the harmonious whole. Stowe struggles to assert that what is good for one is for the good of all, but almost inadvertently registers the operations of dominance inherent in philosophies of transcendent systems. Stowe’s text and official Union correspondence both show that this was masked by the deliberate production of sentiment through and for the very system occasioning the inequality. In his final report, Fry writes that one of the Provost-Marshal-General Bureau’s greatest successes was in streamlining its bureaucratic processes so effectively as to demonstrate that military conscription was in everyone’s “best interest,” despite the fact that it at first appeared to many as “an injustice” (5:603). Similarly, Stowe’s text is primarily concerned with the production of “home” feeling, which depends upon, and helps ensure, the proper systematic operation of the household, and through each home, the nation at large; and through the nation, the cosmic system. As I will show, this facet of the philosophy undergirds the legitimation of the inequalities inherent in mid-nineteenth century culture of servitude and many aspects of military servitude.

By concentrically relating the home and the nation to the Divine, this discourse mystifies a particular vision of the home and the nation as causes before which all else must be subordinated, even to the extent of using, compelling, and expending human bodies when necessary. The imperiled state needs soldiers, and the comfortable home needs laborers. The theory of the individual body justifying its expenditure in the interests of the middle class home

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88 Drafted men were not alone in providing substitutes. There also existed a system of “representative” substitution, through which anyone (drafted or not, male or female) could provide the Army with a man to serve in their name.
is the same theory that justifies its expenditure in the interests of the embattled state. Both
discipline a nation to a philosophy of subordination before a greater cause, and both argue that
the cause is best served by the expenditure of certain bodies. Certain bodies are to be used in
order to preserve bodies that matter more. An analysis of this facet of Stowe’s philosophy can
serve to decenter the claims used to argue the necessity of servitude and war. The use of bodies
in the service of other, more worthy bodies is, as Stowe’s text shows, the foundational principle
of servitude - and given Stowe’s parallels with the discourse of preserving governmental
authority, this reveals that servitude is a foundational principle of the state.

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Scholars have explored the ways that occasions for grief and loss, by severing a human
connection, highlight the interconnectedness of humanity. Mary Louise Kete’s Sentimental
Collaborations argues that nineteenth-century people developed systems of sentimental gift
exchange (which included objects and affections) in order to willfully strengthen interpersonal
ties all too easily broken by the exigencies of life. This process, which she calls “sentimental
collaboration,” created a new kind of collaborative self that could withstand the dangers of
that injury and loss highlight human interconnectedness and the vulnerabilities it entails.89 She
explores the fundamental vulnerability of embodiedness: “The body implies mortality,
vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch,
and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as
well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle

89 Though written in response to the attacks on September 11th, 2001, Butler’s theory of the
vulnerability of embodiedness is not, at its core, era-specific.
Butler calls this exploitation of embodiedness the very definition of violence: “violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another” (26-7).

What Butler describes as the “primary tie” is particularly significant to the military’s discipline and recruitment struggles in the face of America’s more-mobile population. Problems arose, for example, when trying to ensure that the body presenting itself for medical examination actually belonged to the person named. Boards of Examination found that John Doe could only be certified to be John Doe if someone else (who was also known to the Board of Examination) could verify his identity. The Provost-Marshal-General’s office relied upon individuals’ personal knowledge to combat any number of frauds made possible by the sheer scale of military recruitment and conscription. For instance, Circular No. 86 of the Provost-Marshal-General’s office advised local bureaus to be wary since, “in many cases able-bodied men, presented for examination as substitutes and passed by the Board, fail to reach the general rendezvous, but are replaced before their arrival there by others, answering to the same name, feeble in constitution or otherwise disqualified for the military service.” They are reminded that it is crucial that “the substitutes delivered at general rendezvous are the identical men who were examined and passed as such by the Board” (OR 3, 826). Whether or not someone is “answering to the same name” does not certify his identity. Identity can only be confirmed by collaborative recollection.

This theme is again reprised in the appointment of enrollment officers. Fry’s final report claims that “the selection of suitable persons to compose the boards of enrollment was a matter of difficulty and embarrassment” because there were too many individuals without anyone else to recommend them, or recommenders who could not be trusted to have accurate knowledge of the appointee’s desires (OR 5, 613). The boards in Washington therefore struggled to make
appointments in districts where they had no personal knowledge of the population. Tellingly, the phrase, “men who are known to be,” is littered throughout the Official Records of the war whenever correspondents discuss the matter of how to find the best man for the job.

Together, these details highlight the ways in which mid-nineteenth-century identity was a communal property. One was known by being known. In this sense, one’s identity resided not solely in the individual body, but in pieces among the members of one’s community. As Butler explains, a theory of collective individuality, like the one I’ve traced so far, is not necessarily exploitative. However, we can begin to see how this particular form of nineteenth-century collectivity is exploitative in Butler’s argument that not all forms of vulnerability are given equal weight in the public sphere. She writes that, “The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths” (Butler xx-xxi). The nature of human embodiedness can, she argues, be used by those in the public sphere to obscure the deleterious effects of power against certain lives. In this case, those in the public sphere (Stowe the author, and Government authorities) obscure the effects of war upon the lower classes by obscuring the different material consequences of the war for the different classes.

This process of selectively marking lives and counting deaths is evident in Stowe, where the collective body is always presented as the middle-class body. In the 1865 New Year’s address, Crowfield urges women to channel their grief back into productivity by helping other women harmed by the war.90 He argues that “the average of lone women will be largely

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90 Though published after the original run of 1864, the New Year’s address is collected with the remainder of House and Home Papers later in 1865.
increased” and they will require employment. Furthermore, he challenges, “Will any one sit pining away in inert grief, when two streets off are the midnight dance-houses, where girls of twelve, thirteen, and fourteen are being lured into the way of swift destruction? How many of these are daughters of soldiers who have given their hearts’ blood for us and our liberties!” (“The Chimney Corner” 113). Crowfield acknowledges that the war destroys certain women’s bodies (the girls lured into prostitution) in contradiction to the argument that women are safe and indebted because the bodies of soldiers have been given “for us and our liberties!” Who is constituted by that “us” and “our”? Not the soldiers’ own orphaned daughters, but the genteel women worthy enough to reclaim them. Patricia Hill writes, “As a constitutive element of the culture of gentility, the bourgeois family is construed in the Crowfield sketches as the natural form of human society in a way that disguises the class-specific features of Stowe’s vision.”(“The Chimney Corner” 113). Stowe concludes that the expenditure of bodies has been in the service of a certain home, a certain set of liberties. Through those orphaned daughters and the “lone women” (whose employment will almost certainly include domestic service) Stowe’s address acknowledges that wartime loss is experienced differently across class, but simultaneously excludes that class from the national “we.”

This class bias is again seen in the Civil War archive. Leading up to the enforcement of the draft, Lincoln used a rhetoric of voluntarism to downplay the coerciveness of military conscription. On August 4th, 1862, President Lincoln wrote a reply to Agenor-Etienne de Gasparin, the French statesman and author:

Our great army … has dwindled rapidly, bringing the necessity for a new call, earlier than was anticipated … Be not alarmed if you shall learn that we shall have resorted to a draft for part of this. I seems strange, even to me, but it is true, that the
government is now pressed to this course by a popular demand. Thousands who wish not to personally enter the service are nevertheless anxious to pay and send substitutes. Provided they can have assurance that unwilling persons similarly situated will be compelled to do like wise [sic]. (Lincoln 348).

By referring to the “thousands” who were “anxious to pay and send substitutes,” Lincoln construes the draft as a voluntary matter. The draft provides a mechanism for one set of freely willing men to pay other freely willing men an additional fee for their military services. This angle obscures the fact that a military draft also enlists hundreds of thousands of men who play no part in this voluntary schematic. These “thousands” pressure Lincoln for a state-sponsored system by which to outsource their responsibility to the Union onto the body of another man. This brings up the curious fact that, during the Civil War, people could be quite frank about not wanting to serve in the military without thereby being considered disloyal to the Union. One could fulfill one’s duty to the war without using one’s own body so long as one was willing to find another body via which to fulfill that duty.

The correspondence surrounding enrollment and conscription argues that it would be best if principals (the men actually drafted) served rather than the substitutes (who were often destitute, immigrants, or a combination of both), but simultaneously takes as a given that, with the mechanism and power by which to either avoid entirely, or compel another to risk life and limb in their place, most men were likely to do so. After the first draft of March, 1863, Fry reports that two-thirds of the men drafted were “rejected as physically or mentally unfit” under the clauses of the second section of the Enrollment Act.91 Of the remaining one-third, “One-

91 This section included exemptions for everything from being the only living parent or sibling to children under twelve years of age, to having aged and infirm parents. Generally speaking, this section was designed to ensure that those who were the sole support of those who could not otherwise provide for themselves were not taken from their families. Able-bodied women over
seventh of it is held to personal service, two-sevenths furnish substitutes, and four-sevenths pay commutation money” (OR 3, 1176). Whole cities, townships, and counties banded together to pay the commutation fee for their citizens selected in the Draft. Regarding this, Eugene C. Murdock wrote in 1967, “What seems most surprising about this mad resolve to buy everyone's exemption is that so few people recognized it for the absurd, cowardly policy it was, and one which gave no thought to the pressing demand for troops.”

Murdock’s hawkishness aside, he does point to an interesting blind spot in the policy. The presence of the commutation clause, whereby a man could pay $300 in lieu of serving, seems counterproductive to the Government’s goal of getting men into the lines of battle. In theory, the commutation money was to be used to purchase substitutes for the men who chose to pay it. In practice, the piles of money generated by the clause were most often used as bounties (akin to signing bonuses) for men who voluntarily enlisted. In either case, it merely passed the buck down the line, supposing that somewhere someone would be found willing to enter the army for the right price. Ultimately, from the top-down, Americans accepted that men would avoid serving in the military if they could, and believed that this was a privilege owed to anyone who could afford it. Disloyalty was characterized not as unwillingness to personally serve, but as unwillingness to encourage or compel others to serve. Fry’s final report claims, “the firmness

the age of twelve were not considered dependent upon the labor of their fathers, brothers, or sons.

92 Regarding the extraordinary number of exemptions, Fry writes in frustration, “In short, after our year's work we will have exempted the Nation from military duty for three years, instead of requiring the performance of it to put down this rebellion” (OR 3, 1176).


94 See the reports of the Treasury Department (OR 5).
and energy of [district Provost-Marshal] enforced the law and convinced the seditious that resistance was futile” when they were harassed by “the annoyance of evil-disposed persons hostile to the Government, who were ever ready and willing to embarrass its operations by stimulating resistance to the draft or discouraging enlistments” (OR 5, 602-3). Collectively, then, the middle and upper classes established a governmentally-certified resistance to personally serving in the war, by promoting the systems of conscription and substitution.

Yet the military found that the lower-classes could also make use of collaboration. The record shows that the government’s ability to counteract resistance was muted by the collective action of resisters. Men who simply refused to give their proper name, age, or address, could only be prosecuted as draft resisters if others would certify that they had given false information. Whole communities resisted the draft by simply refusing to give legitimate information to enrollment officers (OR 5, 619). In the case of substitutes, it was less crucial whether or not either man who answered to “John Doe” actually was John Doe. However, the military found that when it was crucial to match bodies with names, such as when it attempted to enroll all men eligible for the draft, it faced a quandary. The Provost-Marshall-General’s office attempted to combat this problem by publically publishing a list of those enrolled so that it might be checked and corrected by the public at large.95 Fry reports, however, that “the people generally at that time did not seem to appreciate their interests in perfecting the lists, and gave but little aid in the work, perhaps in the hope and belief that every call was the last which would be necessary”

95 Fry’s final report and recommendations for future drafts solidified this policy: “Board of Enrollment of each district should have printed lists of the names and residences of all persons enrolled in each sub-district prepared and exposed to public view in at least five places...public notice should be given by advertisement upon the list of names and in the newspapers, inviting corrections, &c., and that the boards of enrollment should use all diligence in collecting the necessary information and making the requisite notes to perfect the enrollment lists” (Official Records 5:619).
While Fry’s assessment of people’s motivations might be accurate, one could also surmise that “the people generally” believed that “their interests” were best served by the faults with the list.

The persistent facts of embodiedness, therefore, threatened to upset attempts to obscure the war’s class-differentiated material effects. And yet, it is only because people have individual bodies—because they have material needs—that the rhetoric which dismisses the body can function. This violent exploitation of others can only succeed because the bodies it dismisses need sustenance and shelter. The archive of conscription is haunted by the anonymous male who exists just beyond anyone’s ability to directly name him. Throughout the correspondence on conscription there is never a doubt expressed that somewhere in the nation lurks a fount of bodies willing to serve as surrogate substitutes for other bodies. This supposition takes for granted that: men must eat, but not all men can find ways to do so; therefore, there will be surplus men desperate enough to serve as substitutes.

This archive demonstrates the ways in which the inescapable fact of embodiedness had to be controlled via the public sphere so that it could be exploited in particular ways. But the very collective individuality that promoted the suppression of war’s effects upon the classed body simultaneously offered that classed body an avenue to resist those efforts. Butler explains that “When we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class… At the same time, essential to so many political movements is the claim of bodily integrity and self-determination. It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense our own and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies” (PL, 25). The challenge for those hoping to alleviate class suffering, then, was to construct a collective identity that did not impinge upon the individual’s self-determination. This was accomplished, I argue, by divorcing collective
individuality from theories of class harmony and cooperation. Class harmony and cooperation were necessary to collective action, of course, but within limits. Rather than Stowe’s transcendent vision of Christopher Crowfield, who boundlessly encompasses everything from the diaper to the divine, the collective action practiced in resistance to the draft conceived of limits to its own vision.

Fulfilling One’s Duty via Another, or, Appropriating Labor with the Proper Sentiment

In the domestic servants’ case, their isolation within the master and mistress’s home enables the more easy negation of their collective dissatisfaction. Yet, the prevalence of “servant problem” narratives in nineteenth-century periodicals suggests that resistance was widespread, regardless of the resisters’ inability to organize. On the other hand, one of the things that scared officials most about resistance to the draft was exactly that it was formally organized, and therefore less easy to dismiss. By discussing the class dissatisfaction and rebellion of the war via the servant, Stowe is able to construe the problem and its solution as matters of individual education and ignorance, and to keep with the liberal tradition of admitting to class stratification without admitting to class strife. To do so, Stowe ensconces her discussion of class dissatisfaction firmly within her discussion of systematic and sentimental domestic management. By doing this, she evidences how this type of collective individuality masks the effects of class upon the body.

A key theme of *HHP* is the division between men and women occasioned by increasing standards of middle class gentility adopted over the 1850s and 60s. As Hedrick writes, “Stowe perceived that the new parlor of the 1850’s and 60’s was an uncongenial place for bachelors and boys, and in her *HHP* she repeatedly warns that if they are not made to feel at home, they will
run away (HSB, 313). Stowe goes to great lengths to argue that the pristine parlor, full of expensive and delicate items, requires such vigilant policing and housekeeping that the men and children of the family cannot feel at home and comfortable within it. Without the comforts of the parlor, men in particular are prone to find other places to feel at liberty.

Stowe argues that a house that never manages to become a home for men and boys threatens to lose its influence over them. Lest we suppose this a small matter, “The word home,” Stowe writes, “has in it the elements of love, rest, permanency, and liberty; but besides these it has in it the idea of an education by which all that is purest within us is developed into nobler forms, fit for a higher life” (56). Without a home, one risks never developing the better parts of human nature, and thereby losing access to “a higher life.” Home, then, is nothing less than an eternal matter.

Keeping the family together requires that the practicalities of the house never overwhelm the home feeling, which ensures that all family members feel welcome and secure. Stowe’s text is keen to draw a distinction between the practicalities of housekeeping and the principles of homemaking, yet she is simultaneously keen to assert that both are united under the aegis of the mistress. Despite this unity, Stowe’s text categorizes these as higher and lower functions of the whole. By construing home making as something more worthy and valuable than mere housekeeping, Stowe creates a hierarchy that justifies the position of the mistress. While the servant’s hand might wield the rag, the mistress ensures that she does so properly and with the proper sentiment and is therefore ultimately credited with the maintenance of the home. To construct home making as a noble activity politically privileges the intellectual activity of organizing the housekeeping over the physical labor of actually doing the housekeeping.

The intricacies of this construction are clarified by taking a closer look at the bourgeois
parlor, where Stowe locates most of her discussion. In *The Refinement of America* Richard Bushman argues that over time the nineteenth-century parlor became the quintessentially genteel space, and that its presence served as an (often misleading) signifier of the family’s genteel leisure. He writes, “In all genteel houses … The work of the house, whether done by servants or the mistress of the establishment, moved to the rear and the back, out of sight of visitors. Only genteel occupations like sewing, reading, or visiting went on in the parlor and sitting rooms.”

With “the work of the house” hidden from view, the parlor served as the family’s public front. “Domestic refinement was in this sense a facade that gave to the family an appearance of ease, as if they were truly ladies and gentlemen who had no need to work, while the creation and maintenance of the house was known by all to be the result of intense labor” (Bushman 262-3). Bushman’s account has become canonical, but it leaves implicit that the parlor could only be a place of leisure at certain times. One’s presence in the parlor was not alone enough to establish one’s characterization as either genteel, or unrefined. Refinement was determined by the interplay of domestic geography and occupation, so that sweeping the parlor floor was as unrefined as peeling potatoes in the kitchen. The genteel housewife, therefore had a dual identity composed of genteel and ungenteel performances, and each part was mutually exclusive temporally and spatially. In wealthier homes, the ungenteel, laboring side of the housewife’s identity was displaced entirely onto the figure of the domestic servant.

Stowe’s text is eager to promote this system of labor displacement, in spite of the system’s acknowledged downsides. The May column concludes with a supposed letter from a reader, who writes, “tell us how we, who must do and desire to do our own work, can show forth in our homes a homely, yet genial hospitality, and entertain our guests …Won't you do this, Mr. Crowfield?” (HHP 123). The reader begs to know how the gentility necessary for a proper home
can be achieved by those who cannot, or do not want to separate the genteel and ungenteel facets of their identities. Crowfield’s response is offered in the June sketch, titled “The Lady Who Does Her Own Work.” Here, Crowfield writes about that dying breed: the woman who may be classified as a lady and know how to do all the household work typically expected of servants.

Stowe makes no bones about the fact that labor—tasking, stressful, and wearying labor—is required to maintain the genteel parlor. However, her text fully exemplifies the widespread contention that nineteenth-century standards required the separation of the genteel and the ungenteel portions of the home. The “Lady Who Does Her Own Work,” inwardly wonders “is it altogether genteel to live as we do?” She worries because she has not separated her ungenteel duties onto the body of another. Gentility requires labor, yes, but it may also require that that labor be performed by someone else. And yet, those labors are still considered part of the mistress’s work. Stowe writes that in homes without outside help, “there are no servants except the ladies of the household” (HHP, 132, 131). There will be servants in a household whether they are persons employed from outside the family or not. The woman of the house inhabits that position by default, so that when she separates that part of her identity onto the body of another, she conceives of the servant as a surrogate for herself.

This is a difficult schematic to maintain, and Crowfield admits that avoiding it entirely (by not hiring servants) seems the better choice. In light of this, Mr. Crowfield’s response is curious, since he ultimately accepts that most ladies are unwilling or unable to live without servants. Nevertheless, it remains critical for a woman to be capable of performing all household tasks, even if she intends not to. There follows an extended discussion of the principles of managing domestic servants, specifically, the Irish ones. Systematic servant management is crucial to making the servant feel in a way appropriate to their situation. In the best homes,
according to Stowe’s text, the concentric circles of systematization begin with the mistress’s oversight of all the household tasks and narrow down to the method by which each task is completed. This systematization produces clarity and calm within the household, which helps the servant to feel that they are working toward a worthy goal and, crucially, that they are working for a worthy mistress. By effectively employing the concentric rings of systematization, the mistress proves that she deserves her role within the system because, tautologically, the system operates effectively.

To accomplish all this, Stowe’s narrator repeatedly counsels his readers to prove their authority. One key tactic is to demonstrate that she could do the servant’s job—could do it better, in fact—should she so choose. Choosing not to do the servant’s labor is, therefore, coded as a matter of privilege, rather than necessity. The mistress employs servants because she can—not because she cannot do without them. This coding transforms the relationship between the two so that it appears to be the mistress who has done a service by offering employment, rather than the servant who has done a service by performing labors the mistress cannot accomplish on her own. By creating the fiction of self-helpfulness and choice, this counsel construes the mistress-class as fulfilling their class responsibility by providing employment and education for the lower orders.

The servant classes, therefore, are encouraged to learn not just their tasks, but their place within the collective. This is presented as the natural way to promote domestic harmony, not as the disciplining of a servile labor force. Because the relationship between servant and mistress presents itself in a quotidian aspect, the complex relations of power that are daily constructed and reconstructed through that relationship are masked as themselves quotidian. Lori Merish has argued that Stowe’s sentimentalization of consumerism in *HHP* “[d]epoliticiz[ed] family and property relations by making them extensions of essentially ‘human,’ emotional needs,” and
“naturalized middle-class patterns of private ownership and helped establish consumerist domesticity as an instrument of cultural hegemony.” (“Sentimental Consumption” 3-4). As a complement to Merish’s text, I would add that Stowe further naturalizes the labor relations accompanying the rise in middle-class consumerism: that between mistress and servant. By presenting this politicized relationship as a natural hierarchy of talents, Stowe contributes to her justification of the mistress’s appropriation of the servant’s bodily labor.

Stowe’s rhetoric of the servant-mistress hierarchy reveals how deeply middle-class identity was imbricated in the class-biased collective individuality it promotes. She writes that “[the mistress] comprehends all, she balances and arranges all; all different tastes and temperaments find in her their rest, and she can unite at one hearthstone the most discordant elements” (HHP, 77). The mistress is expansive – she takes in and transforms others. With her servants, she makes them into her own image – either an accurate image of herself, or an image of her ideal self. A woman unable to reproduce others in her own (ideal) image is, in fact, no mistress at all. Crowfield writes that a woman incapable of making her own bread, for example, is in a pitiable state and “wishes she were as untrammeled and independent” as women who do their own housework. He explains that, “with her helpless habits, her utter ignorance of the simplest facts ... she is completely the victim and slave of the person she pretends to rule” (HHP, 136).

The antidote for the imperiled mistress is, of course, self-helpfulness: the ability to dismiss servants at a moment’s notice because one is fully capable of doing the servant’s work.

96 This relationship closely resembles Joseph Roach’s theories of surrogacy whereby someone is expected to inhabit the vacancy left by another, and is evaluated by the idealized memory of that other. See Joseph Roach, J Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), 3-4, 36.
oneself. With this ability, Crowfield writes, a woman “would feel herself mistress in her own house … She who can at once put her own trained hand to the machine in any spot where a hand is needed never comes to be the slave of a coarse, vulgar Irish-woman.” This recommendation comes with the caveat that some women erroneously expect “that any servant ever will do as well for them as they will do for themselves, and that an untrained, undisciplined human being ever can do house-work, or any other work, with the neatness and perfection that a person of trained intelligence can” (HHP, 138, 140). Crowfield’s language here is slippery. He paints “any servant” with the broad brush of “an untrained, undisciplined human being,” and acknowledges that the superior person is “of trained intelligence” (emphasis added). The training, and not some innate quality, is given as reason for the mistress’s superiority; yet people are defaulted into either category by their present occupations. Stowe’s narrator presumes that someone with a trained mind would not long stay a servant, thereby implying that those who do find themselves long-term servants are incapable of being more.

In this, Stowe resembles the “intellectual community of professors, politicians, editors, and journalists” who “from the 1830s through the 1850s” argue that “classes were constantly being made and remade by the continual choices of free individuals in the marketplace” and that “the presence of occupational classes and the premises of individualism were quite compatible.”97 While people are not born to occupations (as in the pernicious class structures of the “old world”), circumstance and natural aptitude combine to make some better suited than others for certain occupations. Take, for example, the Crowfields’ discussion of their daughter, Marianne’s, trouble with her new cook’s bread making. Mr. and Mrs. Crowfield advise learning to make bread herself: “it will take [one month] to give you a thorough knowledge of all the

possibilities in the case; but after that you will never need to make any more, - you will be able to command good bread by the aid of all sorts of servants; you will, in other words, be a thoroughly prepared teacher.” Marianne, by learning to make good bread, will have solidified her privilege not to have to make bread anymore. Stowe argues throughout *HHP* that, “the first business of a housekeeper in America is that of a teacher. She can have a good tea only by having practical knowledge, and tact in imparting it … some clearness in giving directions, and all comes right” (*HHP*, 200-1, 199).

The individual characteristics of the servants in this schematic are null and void. A well-educated mistress negates the personhood of her servants by carefully instructing them to do things the way she would like them – to do them as she would ideally do them herself. The best servant, then, is the one whose distinction from the mistress is a matter of body, only. Their work should be indistinguishable, and by this, the work done by the servant becomes a point of pride for the mistress who has taught her to do it well. The work done by the servant becomes work done by the mistress in all but body.

This schematic is predicated upon a class privilege transparent in Christopher Crowfield’s assertion that “a well-trained mind, accustomed to reflect, analyze, and generalize, has an advantage over uncultured minds even of double experience … After a very brief period of attention and experiment, you will not only know more than [your cook] does, but you will convince her that you do, which is quite as much to the purpose” (201-2). It is presumed that even a young, inexperienced mistress like Marianne Crowfield will soon surpass a cook of many years’ experience and be able to “convince her” to adopt new methods because her mind is superior. The individuality of the servant is the more easily negated because of the mistress’s superiorly educated mind. This further suggests that the mistress should confidently expel a
rebellious or disrespectful servant because she is an interchangeable, easily reproducible cog. Within the implication that a servant can be easily reproduced and replaced is the implication that some minds are not so easily replaced, and that the bodies housing them are therefore best preserved for higher functions. The hierarchy of value established by the distinction between home- and house-keeping justifies and is tautologically justified by the implication that the mistress is more valuable than the servant. Stowe’s rhetoric of the mistress’s value constructs the individuals in question in a highly peculiar way. Take, for example, her challenge to early feminist complaints about women’s restricted sphere:

…we have heard much lately of the restricted sphere of woman. We have been told how many spirits among women are of a wider, stronger, more heroic mould than befits the mere routine of housekeeping. It may be true that there are many women far too great, too wise, too high, for mere housekeeping. But where is the woman in any way too great, or too high, or too wise, to spend herself in creating a home? What can any woman make diviner, higher, better? From such homes go forth all heroisms, all inspirations, all great deeds. Such mothers and such homes have made the heroes and martyrs, faithful unto death, who have given their precious lives to us during these three years of our agony!

(76-7)

The labor of “mere housekeeping” is different from the labor of “creating a home.” Rather than rote “routine,” the creation of a home is “a wider, stronger, more heroic” task accomplished by a superior, less easily found mind. She writes that “[the mistress] comprehends all, she balances and arranges all; all different tastes and temperaments find in her their rest, and she can unite at one hearthstone the most discordant elements” (77). The mistress is expansive –
she takes in and transforms others. With her servants, she makes them into her own image –
either an accurate image of herself, or an image of her ideal self.98

Within this guide to fulfill the role of mistress by being ready and willing to dismiss a
servant at any moment lies the problematic de-individuation of those deemed less functionally
valuable to the whole. Threats of dismissal suggest that, unlike the mistress or the master whose
place within the home cannot easily be fulfilled by another, the servant is easily replaced. By
being readily willing to lose the servant’s labor power, the home again recodes the arrangement
of power so that it seems as if a service has been done for the one who has served. The one who
has served is always reminded that they do so at the pleasure of their superiors, and that this
privilege may be revoked at any moment.99 Stowe’s self-helpful mistress is valued in part
because she is capable of doing her own work, but more so because she is capable of teaching
others the proper way to do it for her - a system of valuation resonant with the military’s
assessment of men willing to get other men to serve. Despite what critics have argued, Stowe’s
aim is not to eliminate domestic service entirely, but to develop a systematic theory by which it
can be more effectively managed.100

98 This relationship closely resembles Roach’s theories of surrogacy whereby someone is
expected to inhabit the vacancy left by another, and is evaluated by the idealized memory of that
other. See Roach pp. 3-4, and 36.

99 In parallel, military execution similarly reminds the individual soldier that their individual
efforts are highly dispensable. Military execution is, of course, a far more dramatic and
permanent form of dismissal than being let go from domestic service. Yet, when one considers
that the women living in domestic service were often single, young, and of foreign birth, the
damage to their ability to provide the necessities of life upon dismissal should not be
underestimated.

100 Gillian Brown’s influential Domestic Individualism argues that “The inefficiency of
inequality persists in systems that delegate work to others” and argues that Stowe’s ultimate goal
is to eliminate domestic service entirely. Brown Domestic Individualism, 54. See Merish,
If Stowe’s accounts are to be believed, the presence of unruly servants is a widespread evil. Whereas in England families can expect a large supply of well-trained servants, in America a family is “hard pressed to keep three Irish servants.” Stowe claims that “this want of servants is the one thing that must modify everything in American life” (62). Middle-class households must constantly modify their expectations without sacrificing their standards of gentility. The genteel mistress must fight to systematize her home so that sub-par service does not poorly reflect upon her ability to fulfill her home-making objectives.

Stowe freely admits that the ability to analyze and systematize stems from education as much as from natural aptitude, yet the implication remains that if the servant’s mind possessed the natural aptitude, they would not long remain in service. The servant rebellions we witness throughout Stowe’s text can be viewed as attempts by the servant to refuse this hierarchy: to insist that she knows how to do her task better than the mistress; to refuse to respect the mistress’s priorities (a timely tea service, spotless glassware, etc.) in favor of her own priorities (getting sufficient sleep, reserving labor-power for more onerous tasks, etc.); or to insist that the deference owed the mistress extends only so far as they, and not the mistress, deem appropriate. Servant rebellions were so frustrating to middle-class Americans, I argue, because, like faulty gears, they frustrated the operations of the entire harmonious class system. By stepping out of her obedient place, the misbehaving servant insists that her individuality overrides her place within the collective. She insists that she is, first and foremost, a self-determined human being with individual sets of priorities distinct from the mistress’s and her household’s.

Given Stowe’s claim that the home is the foundation of the war, the place from which “all heroisms, all inspirations, all great deeds” have emanated, we should not be surprised to find

18.2:135-52 for revisions of this thesis.
a similar rhetoric and ideology present in the discourse of military recruitment and conscription. This use of state power was, as Nudelman has articulated, merely the more overt manifestation of a state power that was already using men’s bodies to its purposes. But the draft and its enforcement made the coercive powers of the state manifest in a way that made many in the North uncomfortable.

And getting bodies into Union uniforms was insufficient. The enforcement of the Draft also required, as Bernstein has argued, the policing of sentiments and other matters as ephemeral as loyalty (7). As counterpart to the physical disciplining of deserters and draft dodgers emerged a discourse of rhetorical disciplining. This is evident in Lincoln’s “Opinion on the Draft” when he writes,

we already have, and have had in the service, as appears, substantially all that can be obtained upon this voluntary weighing of motives, and yet we must somehow obtain more or relinquish the original object of the contest, together with all the blood and treasure already expended in the effort to secure it … if you dispute the fact, and declare that men can still be had voluntarily in sufficient numbers prove the assertion by yourselves volunteering in such numbers, and I shall gladly give up the draft...their toil and blood have been given as much for you as for themselves. Shall it all be lost rather than you too will bear your part? (505-6)

Because we have expended so many bodies, we must have more bodies to expend, and to deny the righteousness of this is to deny the values for which so many men have already died. Critically, Lincoln speaks not to those who are attempting to avoid being impressed into military service themselves, but to those who object to others being so impressed. By presenting his readers’ “volunteering” as an alternative to their present course, Lincoln admits that he is
speaking to those who intend to stay at home by paying a substitute, if necessary. They will “bear [their] part” therefore by supporting, as a matter of principle, the use of others’ bodies to meet this practical necessity.

Like Stowe’s servants, draft rioters protest their place within a labor schematic that appropriates their labor while placing them at the bottom of a “natural” hierarchy. The rhetoric surrounding the practice of substitution is particularly relevant for revealing just how frank nineteenth-century culture could be about this labor scenario. Chambers quotes the New York Times: “Substitution … offered the only means of sparing the class of the community whose labors are of most value to the nation, and who, once lost, cannot readily be replaced; namely those who work with their brains - who do the planning and directing of the national industry” (61).”

Similarly, the U.S. Sanitary Commission’s 1862 call for conscription included the following rationale:

the employment of permanent substitutes being permitted, the laws of trade would be sufficient to select from each community those who possessed more valuable qualifications for military service ... What a citizen is disposed and able to pay for a substitute to take his place in a camp of militia as a general rule, indicates approximately the importance to the community of the function he is already performing in the industrial economy of society. The services of those who are influenced by cowardice, laziness, or disloyalty, to pay extravagantly, however valueless they may be to the community in which they live, must be still less desirable in a military point of view, while men who, from ardent patriotism and inclination for a military life, are induced to make unusual sacrifices rather than to procure substitutes, are of the highest military value. (OR 2, 299)

101 Chambers, To Raise an Army, 61.
These accounts blithely ascribe different values to the lives of people based upon their socioeconomic statuses. Crucially, they do not argue that the individuals who can afford substitutes are inherently more worthy - rather, they argue that their function in society is more valuable at the home front than upon the battlefield. More specifically, this logic assumes that the men who “work with their brains” “cannot readily be replaced,” implying that those who do not work with their brains are interchangeable, easily replaceable - their individuality is null and void, and their function within the collective so simple as to be easily accomplished by any number of replacements.

By calling resistance something like cowardice, disloyalty, or the product of vulgarity, authors like Stowe recode it as a personal characteristic rather than a political statement. And yet, both Stowe and the military fight resistance to their systems by appealing to the system itself. According to this logic, a properly operating system, run by a competent and fair head cannot help but produce the sentiment conducive to the operations of that system. This is particularly evident in “The Lady Who Does Her Own Work,” where Stowe’s self-helpful mistress is prized in part because she is capable of doing her own work, but more so because she is capable of teaching others the proper way to do it for her. Despite what critics have argued, Stowe’s aim is not to eliminate domestic service entirely, but to develop a systematic theory by which it can be more effectively managed.102

To combat this interruption, Fry reports that government officials were a “healthy influence” via “the great moral force exerted by them and their subordinates throughout the country in maintaining the national cause and aiding in the formation and dissemination of a

102 Gillian Brown argues that “The inefficiency of inequality persists in systems that delegate work to others” and argues that Stowe’s ultimate goal is to eliminate domestic service entirely (54). See Merish and Klein for revisions of this thesis.
proper public sentiment regarding the recruitment of the loyal Army and the prosecution of the struggle for the integrity of the Union” (OR 5:603). Fry’s bureaucracy, which Brevet Brigadier General James Oakes, the Assistant Provost-Marshal-General for Illinois, describes as characterized by “calm strength and quiet determination” (OR 5:836) found that though “It was not easy to convince the public mind at once of the justice and wisdom of conscription...Among the laboring classes especially it produced great uneasiness. Fortunately, the loyal political leaders and press early realized the urgency of conscription and by judicious agitation gradually reconciled the public to it” (OR 5:611). The installation of regional Provost-Marshal bureaus was part of the government’s plan to police loyalty, as Bernstein describes (7). Through the systematic delegation of enrollment, conscription, and enlistment, to regional offices under the umbrella of the Provost-Marshal-General’s office in Washington, the Government installed throughout the states a network of sentiment production designed to counteract resistance to the war in its many forms. By quelling resistance, the government’s agents proved that the government they served had the power to deserve to rule.

That the Government needed a more systematic method of raising its armies can hardly be contested. The first call for 75,000 militia for three months on April 15, 1861 was so ineffectually managed that many soldiers’ three-month terms expired before they could be mustered. In 1866, Fry wrote that this served to “demonstrate most strikingly the inefficiency of militia called into service for short periods” (OR 5:606). The lesson learned, on May 3, 1861, the Union called for forty regiments of volunteers for three years. This call was answered with enthusiasm - so much enthusiasm, in fact, that they had more volunteers than they could accept, and had to shut down enlistment offices while they processed the backlog. Without the systems
in place to handle the spirit of the people, the Government found itself in the embarrassing position of turning away willing soldiers in the midst of a war (OR 5:606).

With these details, we can begin to contextualize the U.S. Sanitary Commission’s claims that only a more systematic method of recruitment could reinfuse the nation with the confidence that the Government was willing (and capable) of properly mustering the nation’s forces. The correspondence between various Governors and the Executive Branch found in the Official Records of the Union forces from 1861 to early 1863 shows that, for roughly the first two years of the war, there was considerable wrangling over who had the greater authority: the executive of the state, or the Federal executive and their representatives.

The squabbling between the Governor of Massachusetts, John Andrew, and Major General Benjamin F. Butler is indicative of this conflict. Andrew wrote to then-Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, in December, 1861, complaining of General Butler’s commission, and arguing that his character would most likely preclude Andrew from approving of the men Butler appointed, or recruited. This strident letter followed three months’ confusion over competition for recruits. As early as October, 1861, Andrew began complaining that Butler’s recruiting efforts were sapping the manpower of Massachusetts, and impairing him from raising the militia numbers called for. He writes to BC Sargeant, Mayor of Lowell, MA, that Butler’s recruiting of Massachusetts men “is certainly without right and without authority, detrimental to the service, and tending to some break between himself [General Butler] and me, when we ought to work, each in our respective spheres, as the patient servants of a cause it is glory enough to serve in any manner, however humble” (OR 1:834). While it is clear from their correspondence with each other and others that Andrew and Butler shared a pre-existing personal animosity toward one another, Andrew’s complaint that an agent of the Federal Government had no “right” or
“authority” to recruit within his state demonstrates just how deeply the question of the authority of the Federal Government versus the authority of state Governments penetrated into the North.

In November, Butler would complain of the same competition for recruits as both men attempted to raise an Irish regiment. Butler writes to the Adjutant-General in Washington that he was informed by Governor Andrew, in substance, that the President of the United States had no right to recruit in Massachusetts men for the volunteer service of the United States without his leave. This doctrine of secession did not seem to me any more sound uttered by a Governor north of Mason and Dixon's line than if proclaimed by Governor Magoffin, south ...This now becomes a question of the utmost moment to the United States. Will you recruit your own men under your own authority, or will you allow the authority to be wrested from you by the States? (OR 1:654-5)

Butler puts a fine point upon the problem inherent in Governor Andrew’s territorialism. By asserting his own right to recruitment, the Governor limits the right of the Federal Government to recruit troops as Union Volunteers, rather than state militia. This, and other questions of authority, continued to besiege the offices of The Cabinet, particularly the Secretary of War. Governors write numerous epistles asking for the authority to raise regiments, to muster regiments, to clothe regiments, etc. The correspondence reveals that it was profoundly unclear just who was in charge of whom and where their authority ended.

In November, 1862, President Lincoln wrote the Attorney General in response to the Governor of Missouri’s question whether the troops being enlisted and drafted within his state were “State troops” or “United States troops.” Lincoln responds that this is “either an immaterial or a mischievous question ... there seems to be pertinacity about it,” and confirms that all troops raised by the individual states are, ultimately, under the authority of the Commander-in-Chief.
Part of this confusion stems from the formal differences between militia companies and companies of regular troops. Militias were designed to be short-term, to elect their own officers, and, crucially, to confine their activities to their home state or territory. They served to protect their localities from invasion or rebellion. Yet, as Lincoln’s response and General Butler’s spin upon Governor Andrew’s words indicate, such potentially “mischievous” questions truly encompassed the constitutional powers of the Executive Branch.

It was clear that there needed to be a clarification, centralization, and systematization of authority, particularly in regards to the raising of armed forces. The U.S. Sanitary Commission was not alone in calling for conscription to affect this. There were strong objections to Conscription, however. In August, 1862, Governor Andrew writes, “drafting is mechanical. The impulse of patriotism is vital and dynamic... Our people want nothing to spur them but assurance from Washington that the enemy shall be conquered and right vindicated at all hazards by all means … Give them the grand inspiration of duty to country, human nature, and God, and the people are heroic, invincible, and always ready” (OR 2:327). Like the Sanitary Commission, Governor Andrew blames the people’s slow voluntarism upon Washington’s perceived unwillingness, or inability to effectively prosecute the war “at all hazards by all means.” Regardless of one’s opinion upon conscription, there seems to have been a generalized lack of confidence in the Executive’s ability to do what was necessary to win the war.

President Lincoln chose to reassert his authority via the Enrollment Act of 1863 and its call for raising the “national forces” via conscription. One of the most important features of the act, contemporaries would retrospectively write and historians will agree, was that it demonstrated that the President truly did have the authority to command any man in the nation to serve at arms; and, perhaps more importantly, that he was willing to use that authority and to
strictly enforce it. Furthermore, conscription was seen to send a message to the enemy at the South, and to counteract morale-boosting Southern impressions of Northern failings. Paraphrasing a letter from Grant to Seward, John Bach McMaster writes, “Prompt action in filling quotas [of the draft] would have more effect on the enemy than a victory over them. They professed to believe, and made their men believe, there was such a party in the North in favor of recognizing Southern independence that the draft could not be enforced. Let them be undeceived” (454). The demoralizing effect of the draft upon the Southern armies stems not only from the greater number of troops that they must face, but also from the fact that the draft was enforceable by Northern authorities. This signaled, according to Grant, that the people of the North were, at the very least, behind the war in such numbers that the dissenting majority could still be controlled and contained. Conscription showed that the Federal Government’s authority was intact.

Twentieth-century historian John Whiteclay Chambers even argues that “Symbolically, the conscription act was important as powerful evidence of the national government's determination and ability to prevent disunion. Indeed, this was probably the single most important reason for its adoption” (50). While it may initially seem counter-intuitive that the “single most important reason” for the adoption of a draft would be symbolic, rather than the literal repopulating of the armed forces, one should recall that only one-third of the men drafted were unexempt, and that only three-sevenths of that one-third actually produced a soldier (either the principal, or a substitute). The draft, frankly, did not produce many men. And yet, following the war in August, 1865, Oakes could report that

The organization of the bureau ... contributed to an incalculable extent toward the final overthrow and destruction of the rebellion. Its aid was essential and invaluable not only
on account of the vast accessions to the army secured through its direct agency, but also, indirectly, through the significant revelation which it afforded to our enemies, at home and abroad, of the ability of the government to summon to the national defence the whole military strength of the country, and that, too, by the stern ordeal of the draft. (OR 5:828)

Statistics disagree with General Oakes that the draft produced “vast accessions to the army,” but as we have seen, numerous others agreed that its proof of the government’s ability to demand that its people submit to “the stern ordeal of the draft” was an indirect signifier of its power. The draft was important to a significant degree as a performance and demonstration of power. By exerting its authority, the Executive proved that it deserved to have it. The people, according to this interpretation, wanted and respected a display of force.

The ability to hire and keep domestic servants is also construed as a display of power reaffirming that one deserves to wield that power. Stowe’s text admits that this practice of using domestic servants as surrogates for the Mistress’s hands is mostly a matter of convenience. She writes, “Human nature is above all things—lazy. Every one confesses in the abstract that exertion … is the best thing for us all; but practically … nobody does much more than circumstances drive him to do” (130). In other words – if one can get someone else to do the work typically apportioned to domestic servants, one is likely to do so. The day-to-day battle against dust and dirt and dishes and diapers overwhelms the abstract notion that the work should be done by the ladies of the household. Yet, Stowe also acknowledges that the woman of the house may have a hard time keeping the feeling of the home if she alone bears all the stresses of the household labor. For a variety of reasons, then, Stowe’s rationale behind the use of domestic service boils down to the fact that the mistress would rather not perform the labors of the home, and having the power to compel another to do them for her, she exerts that power.
It is unsurprising that conscription was profoundly unpopular when it was enacted. The Provost-Marshal-General’s office found that it had a lot of persuading to do - and some of it had to be done by force. They met resistance at the enrollment stage, the drafting stage, the examination stage, and the mustering stage. Conscripted men and substitutes were known for deserting at the first opportunity. As the drafts continued, however, Fry reports that the public began to see the utility of the draft and came around to supporting it. He attributes this mostly to the effective operations of the governmental bureaucracy. At the war’s conclusion Fry reported to Secretary of War, E. M. Stanton, “the extension of the [Provost-Marshal-General’s] Bureau over the country brought together the Government and the people by closer ties, nurtured that mutual confidence and reliance through which the civil war was conducted to a successful termination, and developed a consciousness of national strength which will promote future peace and prosperity” (*OR* 5:601).

Each month in *The Atlantic*, Stowe’s text creates a network of readership that, like the Provost-Marshal’s bureaus, extends her reach throughout the nation at war, and encourages individual homes to collectively accept and fulfill their role in the prosecution of the war. Stowe’s plan of domestic subordination is of a piece with the nationalistic movement to imagine a nation that one willingly surrendered to, even at the cost of one’s own life, but particularly at the cost of another’s life.

The logic that allows the labor of the servant to slip into the mistress’s labor-ledger column allows the laboring of those at the battlefield to slip into the sacrifice-ledger column of those at home. We have seen this in the culture and rhetoric surrounding military substitution, but it is also evident in the culture of mourning which texts like Stowe’s encouraged the cause. Nudelman calls this strain of Civil War discourse “a wartime nationalism that relied on
individual self-sacrifice and took the escalation of violence to be a source of collective identity rather than a threat to the state's integrity” (17). Because all have suffered, all have been united in what Stowe calls the “bitter baptism” of the war (221).

This logic, which blurs the boundaries of individuals, legitimizes the expenditure of bodies necessitated by the war by making the sacrifices of the dead a piece of common property. Alice Fahs has shown how literally this was taken during in her analysis of Civil War literature. She uncovers a trend that “Every bullet killed or wounded twice – often literally imagined.” In these stories, women would die or fall ill when their male counterpart (son, husband, or lover) was wounded or killed on the battlefield. In fact, Fahs finds that much Civil War literature argues for the greater wounding received by women at home, whose psychic pain and suffering extends well past the physical suffering of the soldier. She finds that “wounds and their accompanying suffering provided a direct connection to the higher meanings of the war” (135-6). To access these “higher meanings,” women and others not physically in the field of battle employed a theory of collective individuality that both relied upon and deliberately blurred the boundaries of the body.

Yet, by disciplining the servant to subordinate herself to the service of the home, Stowe disciplines the mistress class to act their part of “teacher.” By enforcing the submission of her servants, the mistress is simultaneously subordinating herself to the philosophy of the genteel home which demands the hierarchy she is charged with maintaining. This is evident in Stowe’s most moving piece of the war, which appeared on January 1st, 1865, after the conclusion of House and Home Papers, but under the same narrative conceit and from the setting of the Crowfield family. In this New Year’s address, Stowe speaks to those whose homes have been disrupted by the suffering of the war:
O fathers, mothers, wives, sisters, haunted by a name that has ceased to be spoken on earth, — you, for whom there is no more news from the camp, no more reading of lists, no more tracing of maps, no more letters, but only a blank, dead silence! … your offering to this great cause has been made, and been taken; you have thrown into it all your living, even all that you had, and from henceforth your house is left unto you desolate! O ye watchers of the cross, ye waiters by the sepulchre, what can be said to you? (“The Chimney Corner” 113)

In this expression of grief it is the fact that the body is immutable that occasions all the sorrow. The “fathers, mothers, wives, sisters” are “haunted by a name” that has ceased to have a living bodily referent. Their relationship to the war has been transformed into a “blank, dead silence” because it has lost its bodily connection via the soldier who has died. So it is precisely because bodies are not immutable that those remaining feel their position utterly changed. It is because the living body structures our day-to-day relations with each other and the nation that the death of that body occasions such a revolution in those relations. Stowe’s text never slips into arguing that the death of the body is a wholly abstractable event.\textsuperscript{103}

It is, however, an event that can be \textit{transcended}. This form of abstraction allows the boundary of the body to be blurred in a manner that facilitates the identification with that bodily suffering and in a manner than ennobles that body’s \textit{willingly given} destruction. The death of the body associated with the “name that has ceased to be spoken” transcends the actual cessation of bodily life and becomes “your offering to this great cause… all your living, even all that you had.” One individual’s death becomes the offering and giving of all that are aggrieved by that

\textsuperscript{103} Stowe’s work in abolition may be partially to account for this, since the negation of the slave body was something abolitionist writers were at pains to avoid (in spite of such apotheoses as Uncle Tom). See Sanchez-Eppler.
death in a manner that abstracts but never negates the bodily distinction between the two; in a manner that allows those at home to claim for themselves a wound granting them access to the “higher meanings of the war.” They have given “all that [they] had” by this “offering to this great cause” in the form of a loved one’s body.

But even in this expression of grief and sympathy, Stowe’s disciplining function exerts itself. The war death is to be respected more than any other death, and those whose loved ones have died in the war are admonished to remember that this death was more meaningful than any others. “O widow! O mother! blessed among bereaved women! there remains to you a treasure that belongs not to those who have lost in any other wise,—the power to say, ‘He died for his country’” (Stowe “The Chimney Corner” 113). This at once urges those who have not lost someone in the war to recognize that those who have suffered a different kind of loss – one that is greater than any other. And this encourages those who have suffered that greater loss to recognize the benefit this grants them. Their individual grief is to be the collective cause. In the image of the grieving woman, grief is taken as both a rallying cry and an obligation (have their brave sons died for nothing?) that by its coercive sympathy leaves little space for resistance to the cause that has occasioned the deaths for which they grieve. But in addition, by becoming the remaining body upon which the death of the battlefield counterpart has resonance, the body at home takes on martial significance.

**Conclusion**

As the servant laboring in the kitchen remains out of sight of the mistress and family, the bodily expenditure necessitated by war remains out of sight of the Crowfield family. Stowe’s text acknowledges the battlefield in its title, but it remains offstage for most of the text. As Nudelman has shown, overt expressions of loyalty enforcement, such as the military execution,
and execution photos demonstrate that casualties of war are not collective experiences of pain, but collectively enforced and sanctioned inflictions of pain. By keeping the focus small, yet fused to the larger picture, *HHP* aids the obscuring of the individual suffering collectively demanded by a society at war. And yet, Stowe’s text is haunted by the absences it obscures. In the first few articles, Christopher Crowfield admits that he has three sons: Arthur, Tom, and Charley. One would presume that the fate of these ostensibly war-eligible sons would be a matter of concern for the family, but they are never mentioned again. Their absence is an uncertainty mirroring the uncertainty felt by all those whose loved ones were serving – but also by the Northern community who, through most of 1864 (and certainly 1863, when most of the text was written) could feel no certainty of victory.

The only young man to make any consistent appearance is Marianne Crowfield’s fiancé, later husband, Bob Stephens. Readers are left wondering after the Crowfield sons, and wondering why Bob Stephens is not at the front. At the very least readers wonder why Stowe’s text never addresses these questions. Has Bob Stephens paid a substitute? Is he working for the war in some alternative capacity? The text never so much as gestures toward answers to these questions, and one might instinctively suppose that Stowe’s contemporaries were left wondering just why this young man got to stay at home when so many others had been ripped from it.

But the rhetoric of conscription suggest otherwise. Stephens is a lawyer, and he appears most often to be educated by Mr. and Mrs. Crowfield on the proper way to help his new wife establish their new home. By the logic of transcendent systems, which I have here traced, it is apparent from these details that Stephens is too valuable to waste upon the battlefield. When combined with the domestic principles outlined in the rest of Stowe’s text, this reminds readers that on a day-to-day basis bodies are used in the service of other bodies. Military service and
conscription, then, are but extensions of these day-to-day practices. The class privilege of domestic service is cloaked as a practical exigency that must be overcome in the battle for a cause (the genteel home) so valuable it benefits the entire nation, including those who produce, but cannot participate in, the gentility of the house.

Stowe uses this domestic, quotidian philosophy to soothe the anxieties occasioned by war, and to discipline the response to those anxieties into a channel productive to the Union. Critics should no longer say that Stowe kept herself “occupied, writing three hours every morning, but almost never about the war. She wrote instead, house and home papers, a series of newspaper articles on homemaking … Designed to brighten the gloomy days of wartime” (MacFarland 166). Scholars have acknowledged the politics of consumerism present within the text, but have yet to explore the politics inherent in a philosophy of collective individuality that rationalizes the appropriation of bodily labor under the aegis of class harmony.  

Stowe and war officials participate in a similar political rhetoric when they address their similar needs for bodily laborers. By separating their objectives into a hierarchy of “mere” practicality and expansive leadership, they justify their hierarchy of people into mere instruments of practicality and ennobling leaders. A nation to a philosophy of subordination before a greater cause, and both argue that the cause is best served by the expenditure of certain bodies, which are more easily replaceable than other bodies. In her desire to make the inconceivable violence of the war understandable via the day-to-day matters of the home, Stowe renders legible the violence inherent in the day-to-day practices of the home. Our genteel Christopher and the wartime crowfields through which he navigates us are, after all, one.

104 For an analysis of Stowe’s consumerism, see Merish, ch. 3; for an analysis of Stowe’s free labor philosophies predicated upon class privilege, see Klein.
Chapter Six: Epilogue

By concluding his novel with Natty’s figurative death upon the Major’s tombstone, James Fenimore Cooper confirms that the Leather-stocking’s place is to be an absence - a memory - something useful, but never seen, nor heard. Following this, we can immediately recognize these conditions as those of the ideal servant. Cooper draws upon the familiar tropes of servitude to present his reader a harmonious society based upon communal, consensual, hierarchical association. Layered amongst this harmony, however, is the persistently unsettling nature of that final tombstone: for Natty’s body is not resting beneath it.

His body has been rendered figuratively moot by his servitude - yet Natty, the absence, remains trapped within it. Following the success of The Pioneers, Cooper returned to the Leather-stocking in his prime with the Last of the Mohicans. In his next publication, The Prairie, however, Cooper returns to Natty as an old man, following his trek westward. Ten years after the conclusion of The Pioneers, Bumppo haunts the plains; unable to hunt, he has become a trapper. This novel, which centers upon the brutal murder of a settler’s son, feels ominous and desperate. Well into his 80’s (a fact the text reiterates incessantly), Bumppo, who is never called by his proper name, seems to have lived beyond all reasonable expectation. He meets the full-grown grandson of his Last of the Mohicans co-actors, who is astonished to find that someone older than his grandfather is still alive. Natty continuously asks this man to repeat the stories his grandfather told about their adventures during the French and Indian wars. He asks “did he tell you about…?” over and over again, as if he’s desperate to know whether the stories of his life have changed in his absence. Having expected to fade into obscurity, with only the tombstone to remind future generations that he had existed at all, Natty is overwhelmed to find that someone will remember him for himself, and is finally able to die.
Yet culturally, he again persists beyond all reasonable expectation. Ironically, Cooper finds that his creation, which so cannily suppressed the material effects of class upon the body, overtakes even himself. In an 1871 piece for Harper’s titled “The Haunted Lake,” Constance Fenimore writes of the monument erected to Cooper’s memory, which does not mark his actual burying place, and features a likeness of the Leather-stocking, rather than Cooper, himself. Fenimore opines that Natty’s ghost will continue to haunt the region Cooper made famous: “Dear old Natty, faithful, kindly wraith, the memory of thy character and deeds will haunt the valley long after the very names of its real men and women are forgotten.” And indeed, signs marking the “Leatherstocking Region” along I-90 East, and images of Daniel Day Lewis’s cinematic turn as the Leather-stocking are arguably the twenty-first century’s most popular and prominent reminders of Cooper’s work.

The “mob” of the reading public took back the power of interpretation. The figure of the Leather-stocking overwhelms even the memory of his creator. So, too, did working-class Americans eventually take back control of their interpolation into the structures of American power. Those who resisted America’s culture of servitude altered not just the structures of American society, but the very conceptual categories by which the organization of society could be productively imagined and persuasively argued. In the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, appeals to the duties owed between a servant and a master hold no persuasive power. This, I argue, is astonishing, given that the master/servant relationship has been integral to myriad societies for virtually all of recorded human history. Like Hegel in his master/slave dialectic, countless philosophers, theologians, and ordinary persons used the master-servant paradigm to render intelligible an enormous variety of ideas. Today, such rhetorical stances
would be non-starters. Americans no longer believe that masters and servants are either necessary or right social identities.

But that is not to say that the complexities adhering in America’s culture of servitude have been resolved. E. Paul Durrenberger’s *The Anthropological Study of Class and Consciousness* reports:

By 2005 ... the United States appeared less class bound than ever because religion, race, and possessions were not sure guides to a person's place in the social hierarchy. But statistics showed stark class contrasts, class had become a clear predictor of lifespan, health, residential location, choice of marriage partners, and of who got into universities, much less 'good' ones . . . As class divisions were becoming greater and more apparent to those who were looking, class became more invisible to most Americans. The stronger the phenomenon, the more we have denied it. (7)

The material effects of class continue to affect the lived experience, even the *lifespan* of Americans, and yet we continue to narratively elide them. No longer satisfied with the tropes of servitude and Providence, we have adopted the tropes of opportunity, access, and benefits. In many ways, though the terms of the conversation have changed, its basic premises have not.

Regarding debates over class during the long-nineteenth century, Martin Burke writes, “What Americans disagreed about was the suitability of certain classifications, the implicit and explicit analyses that these terms entailed, and the consequences of classification. The societal contrasts made by many Americans from the 1780s through the 1880s - and beyond - were between 'artificial' schemes of classification and 'natural' ones” (x). In many ways, contemporary discussions of access to education, employment, and benefits evidence a similar desire – not to eliminate class stratification, but to eliminate *unnatural* class stratification.
While the language of “natural” and “unnatural” has begun to creep back into the conversation along with new advances in evolutionary neuroscience (and its sometimes troublesome tendency toward social Darwinism), most conversations take for granted the post-structuralist intellectual innovation that there are no “Natural” or “unnatural” forms of society.\(^{105}\) The argument that there is a divine pattern to which we should conform has lost much of its rhetorical heft. However, in a new vocabulary, the argument that class stratification can be organized *righteously* continues to imply that such stratification is both necessary and right.

In many ways, the material effects of class have moved further and further from the circles of many Americans’ sympathetic vision. Laurie Ousley argues that, “when women debated class relations in America, they often did so by examining how class worked within the home, which meant a particular examination of the relationship between the housekeeper and the domestic servant” (133). Much of the work that this labor relationship conducted has been moved outside the home – even outside the nation – so that when contemporary Americans debate class relations they often have fewer and fewer personal experiences upon which to draw. Industrialization, globalization, and outsourcing have moved the bodies of laborers not just beyond the easy compass of vision, but beyond the *possible* compass of vision. Despite campaigns for ethical consumerism, it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for most Americans to have any idea of the material conditions that have contributed to sustaining their day-to-day lives.

Like Cooper’s *Pioneers*, many Americans continue to struggle against the narrative claiming that laborers operate in a free market on equal footing with capitalists and government. In their magisterial anthology on the history of free and unfree labor in America, Douglas Hay

\(^{105}\) See, for example, Melissa Hogenboom’s discussion of the so-called “warrior gene,” which may be associated with violent behavior.
and Paul Craven argue that, “first, it is important to recognize that the dichotomous bright line between freedom and coercion, found in American constitutional jurisprudence and enshrined in a long sociological literature, misleads about the realities of both slavery and employment” (Hay and Craven 28). Every time that a politician, editor, or layperson uses the tropes of “supply and demand,” or “market forces” to render intelligible the operations of global capitalism, this “dichotomous bright line” is redrawn, eliding the forms of unfreedom continuing to constrict the worker’s attempts to negotiate the terms of their body’s use.

We need not offer a wholesale rejection of the division of labor in order to offer a wholesale revision of the premises by which this division unequally affects material lives. Writing of a surrogate mother sued for refusing to give up her child after it was born, Durrenberger contends that this working-class woman was among the “people who are accustomed to being the employees of others renting out their bodies as surrogates to do things for their betters, whether it be making steel or babies” (11). Just as antebellum mistresses construed servants as surrogates for their hands, and laid claim to the labors those servants had performed, those in power continue to construe workers as surrogates, and to lay claim to the profits and products of their labors. By continuously diminishing the value of the hands that actually perform the labors that sustain daily life and comfort in favor of those who use their money and power to give those hands a place and purpose for their labor, we continue to elide bodily consequences and perpetuate the foundations of servitude under different names.

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