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PATTERNS OF SURVIVAL:
FOUR AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE PROLETARIAN NOVEL

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Joan Wood Samuelson, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1982

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Adviser
Department of English
For my son, Paul,
who has lived with a doctoral candidate-
mother--and never once complained about the late
meals, delayed promises, and lost time spent together.

And for Michael,
who has gone ahead
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INTRODUCTION

"Consciousness is power. To create a new understanding of our literature is to make possible a new effect of that literature on us. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that literature reflects."

The American novel has always lent itself to authorial comment of social and cultural interest; since the 1880's, and with the rise of socialism, it has frequently concentrated on the proletariat's experience of reality, as differentiated from that of more politically and economically privileged classes. Some novelists who have written exposes of the plight of the impoverished can rightly be called propagandists, their works having more historical than literary consequence. Others, such as Theodore Dreiser, John Steinbeck, Frank Norris, and Sinclair Lewis, created works which have aesthetic merit as well as historical importance. These novelists were able to produce literature with characters so fully developed and delineated that the reader could empathize with them.
and their condition. The language of such novels is impressive in its care, precision, and evocative power; the scenes are immediate and realistic; the ideas, themes, and images are the stuff of common experience, dreams, and hopes. Such writers blended the artistry of perspective, character, action, and language so that the reader is pleased and satisfied with the literary effectiveness of the work, while at the same time stirred by the message—the reminder that there exists a class of people who have not always had advantages, but do have universal human needs, feelings, and desires that are often thwarted by the social circumstances in which they find themselves.

We have long known and respected our male writers of the proletarian novel; but their fame has overshadowed the fact that many women writers—most of them unknown to the general public until only the last decade—have also given us novels that concentrate on men, women, and children who are struggling to survive in a shadowy world of financial, physical, and emotional deprivation, people who are representatives of a reality their creators would like to see altered. Some of these rediscovered women writers and their works include Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron Mills" (1861), Charlotte Teller's The Cage (1907), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps'
The Silent Partner (1871), Amanda Douglas' Hope Mills (1880), Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers (1925), Elizabeth Madox Roberts' The Time of Man (1926), Mary H. Vorse's Strike! (1930), Clara Weatherwax' Marching! Marching! (1935), and Josephine Herbst's trilogy about the Trexler family (1930's).

Many of these women writers wrote out of sheer moral passion; others were socialist reformers intent solely on revolution; still others were craftswomen who knew how to write well about their subjects, to convey them in a way both aesthetically satisfying and sociologically invigorating. But all of these women had something to say about the inequities of classism—the disenfranchisement of the working class by the upper classes. They wrote protest literature that "roots out the essentials about the human condition rather than perpetuating false ideologies" concerning the oppressed.

They were, however, women writing about a subject that disturbed many people. Although the critics often praised their novels, the reading public—struggling with its own problems during the Depression, World War II, and the McCarthy Era—was generally unreceptive to either the ideas of these women or their dark subjects. Along with the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements of our own
generation has come a renewed concern for underprivileged minorities and for the talents of women artists. Fortunately, some of those women writers, whose works languished in obscurity for decades, are now gaining recognition: their novels are being republished; their ideas are finding a new audience; and their works are being acclaimed as lost masterpieces.

Among these rediscovered American works by women are Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* (1923), Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929), Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (1932-1937; published, 1974), and Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954), the last a descendent of the proletarian novel of the 1920's and 1930's. I have chosen these novels for their artistic value, sociological importance, and feminist perspective. They differ from most of their contemporaries' works in that they are well-crafted novels, focussed on women, with either an explicit or an implicit feminist tone. In their apprehension of the feminine soul surviving in anguish, strength, and hope, they anticipate novels by contemporary artists such as Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, and Marge Piercy. Finally, and most importantly; they write about the oppression of women and the poor as a historical reality. Sheila Rowbotham
comments that "oppression is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical experience." These women writers authenticate the experience of oppression and make it both an aesthetic and a political contribution to American literature.

All four writers lived some aspect of the lives they portray. Smedley and Olsen were born into the working-class experience; Arnow and Kelley adopted it. All chose the condition of impoverished and dispossessed people as their subjects. Olsen, perhaps, best articulates the artistic purpose they share: "to speak for all those millions like us whose lives are such that they can never come to writing, to give form to that experience which has never, or rarely, been part of literature." These women writers deliberately wrote novels about the working class—not to sentimentalize, but to reveal the effects of blight and poverty on the human spirit, which they see as the consequence of classist/sexist structures and barriers.

"The members of our profession," writes Lillian Robinson, "have chosen to ignore the class origins of literary categories and standards. This is something that women, in particular, cannot afford to do." I doubt that critics have "chosen" to ignore class in fiction; however, it does seem clear that there is an
important literary subject here which is only just beginning to reveal its possibilities for exploring and redefining literary traditions and standards. Thus, the critical impetus of my study is feminist-socialist. I will explain how I see socialism and feminism working together in these novels to define the politics of classism and sexism (e.g., in both cases, the oppressed characters suffer from external power structures); then I will explore how the four novels to which I have limited this study disclose ways of surviving classism and sexism in a patriarchal world.

The novels I have chosen share specific thematic and imagistic patterns. They all center on rural women who are either in marriage or in flight from marriage, frequently imaged by the authors as enslavement or bondage to men and children. They all are closely connected to the land and to nature, which is emblematic of hopes, wishes, and dreams frequently dashed in the cyclical process of birth, life, and death at subsistence level. They all disclose the inequities of industrialism and war, promulgated by the affluent classes and experienced, usually with devastating effects, by the poor. They all investigate the compulsion to adopt or
conform to other people's expectations in the midst of class, gender, and ethnic prejudice. Furthermore, they all offer heroines who rise, spiritually at least, above their condition and command our respect. These women, though victimized by circumstances not of their making, are not, finally, themselves victims: they are survivors.

In Kelley's *Weeds*, the heroine is Judith Pippinger, whose gender and lively spirit are juxtaposed with the oppressive climate of cultural bias and the exigencies of tenant farming. The joyful, artistic Judith (she sketches devilishly accurate caricatures of her neighbors) grows up in Kentucky, marries Jerry Blackford, who is drawn to her because of her "mannish" ways, toils with him in the unyielding tobacco fields, bears one child after another in a two-room shack, and constantly questions both her social status and her lot as a woman. Her youthful vitality finally becomes despair as she resigns herself to her fate as a poor farm wife and mother. Through sheer moral will, Judith Pippinger will continue to endure; but Kelley emphasizes the resultant loss of individual talent and female identity.

Where Kelley's novel ends in melancholy despair, Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* vehemently rejects capitalist-patriarchy and demands the rights of women to control
our own bodies and achieve full political and economic equality with men. Smedley's Marie Rogers, a child of northern Missouri (like Smedley herself; this is the most patently autobiographical of the four novels), is angrier than Judith and more willing to walk away from the "enslavement" of marriage and love, which Smedley regards as the submergence of the woman's identity under the man's. As Marie progresses through her flights toward freedom, she discovers that life for women is neither good nor bad, but is simply an experience the oppressed are forced to endure. This need to simply endure results from the hunger and poverty inflicted on the working class by the advantaged, which Marie finds both frightening and hateful. However, she sounds a positive note: women and the poor have the goal of freedom to work for. Unencumbered by possessions and power, they can afford to dream and create a new future for themselves.

Like Smedley, Olsen, too, is concerned about the dispossessed. Her novel, *Yonnondio*, written in the 1930's, then lost during her years of marriage, child care, and political activism until she rediscovered it and published it in 1974, takes its name from Whitman's lament for native American Indians, by extension, a
lament for all those who disappear from history. Olsen moves the Holbrook family from a Wyoming coal mining town (where the afternoon whistle means death) to a Nebraska farm, and finally to an industrial town's meat-packing plant. Through the eyes of young Mazie and the experiences of her mother, Anna, Olsen explores the lives of those who have lost their heritage and live in a world of horror. Consonant with Smedley's novel, this world is a nightmare reality, a world the oppressed can only try to endure in darkness, pain, and silent terror. In this world, where still there exists the universal longing for respite from fear and hunger, Mazie, like Judith and Marie, wonders why she has no place. It is difficult enough, Olsen says, to be part of the human wreckage of the impoverished class; but to also realize that one's sex places one at the bottom of even that wreckage is still more bitter.

Finally, Harriette Arnow's The Dollmaker is, I believe, the most evocative expression of the proletarian spirit. In Gertie Nevels is a complex, yet uncomplicated, heroine who is big and "ugly," earthy and sensitive, stoic and pained almost beyond endurance. In this novel are powerful revelations of the dichotomy between the
country and the city, between the simplicity of rural Kentucky life and the needless complexity of industrialized Detroit, with its social pressures and technology that kill the body and spirit of the migrants. Arnow also exposes the burden of war and factory life on the poor, the hunger and poverty they suffer while the rich get richer, the constant pressure to conform to mediocrity while one's aspirations for something more than tenement life in a smog-choked environment are insidiously crushed. Once again the heroine sacrifices her talents, heritage, and dreams—but Arnow suggests the sacrifice is ultimately a triumph because it leads to greater compassion for the sufferings of others and provides for her family's survival. Survival is the operative word for all these novels. Each heroine, though she loses people she loves and experiences cruel set-backs, does, in fact, survive. There is a personal power in each woman, which, while it is forced to adapt to public and political powers, does finally endure.

In this dissertation, I propose to study how these interconnected patterns of survival are resonant in the working-class novel and have literary and cultural significance for the feminist-socialist critic. At the same
time, I will explore the possibilities of a feminine aesthetic in the realm of working-class ideology, examining what these writers and their fictional heroines communicate to us about women's experience of reality. Further, I think it is important to discuss the autobiographical influence on their novels of the writers' own experiences of reality as working-class women. Finally, I hope to contribute to the ongoing work of rediscovering "lost" or neglected women writers so that we can, as Annette Kolodney points out, "re-think the assumptions about the 'accepted canon' of 'major authors.'"

The most important goal of my study is to look again at literature--Adrienne Rich's concept of "re-vision"--from the perspective of women's experience of reality in a patriarchal world. In doing so, I maintain that the feminist-socialist critic is not a "disinterested" critic, but is an engaged critic who evaluates the authenticity of women's experiences as reflected in literature. She sees literary criticism both as a political and an aesthetic act which searches for the "truths and probabilities about the female experience that form a criterion against which to judge the authenticity of a literary statement about women." The truths and probabilities that I will be
examining in the four novels of this study are the effects of capitalist-patriarchy on women, namely the effects of marriage, institutionalized motherhood, the mother-daughter relationship, abortion, rape, property, war, industrialization, and orthodox religion. I hope that the result will be a renewed appreciation and enthusiasm for "lost" women writers and a clearer understanding of the female perspective in literature.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


7 Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978, by Adrienne Rich (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), pp. 33-49. Rich defines "re-vision" as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." This act is, for women, "more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (p. 35).
"... 'the poor,' the 'working classes,' ... are not down-trodden, envious, and exhausted; they are humorous and vigorous and thoroughly independent. Thus, if it were possible to meet them not as sympathizers ... but casually and congenially as fellow beings with the same ends and wishes ... a great liberation would follow."

I. "The Path to the Grave Straight and Plain":

Edith Summers Kelley's Weeds

The republication of Edith Summers Kelley's Weeds resulted from a serendipitous discovery made by Matthew J. Bruccoli in 1968. Convinced he had "stumbled on a superb forgotten novel," he was instrumental in getting it reprinted in 1972. Later he helped bring out Kelley's only other published novel, The Devil's Hand (1974), and researched her life, providing critics and students with the autobiographical elements behind Kelley's works. Because of Bruccoli's efforts, new generations of readers and critics are becoming familiar with the author and her two published novels.

Kelley was born in Ontario Canada in 1884. After graduating in 1903 from the University of Toronto, with honors in language studies, she moved to New York, where she worked for the Standard Dictionary and wrote popular fiction. From 1906 to 1907 she lived at Upton Sinclair's Helicon Hall—an experiment in communal living for artists—and
was Sinclair's secretary. He described Kelley as a "shrewdly observant young person whose gentle voice and unassuming ways gave us no idea of her . . . talent. . . ." She met Sinclair Lewis at Helicon and was for a short time his fiancée. Apparently she was the model for Jesse in Lewis' More Miles, and she saw herself as Leora in Arrowsmith. After Kelley and Lewis separated, they maintained a friendly correspondence. Lewis urged Harcourt Brace to publish Weeds and continued to praise the novel throughout his life. Kelley married Lewis' friend, poet Alan Updegraff, in 1908. She had two children and worked as a night school teacher to support the family. After this marriage ended in divorce, she met C. Fred Kelley, a sculptor with whom she lived for fifty years until her death in 1956.

Fred Kelley had been raised on a farm, and together the couple made their living in farming. From 1914 to 1916 they worked a tobacco farm in Kentucky; the experiences of those two years lend authenticity to the setting and themes of Weeds. From 1916 to 1920 the Kelleys ran a boarding house in New Jersey, where their son, Patrick, was born. In 1920 they moved to the Imperial Valley in
Southern California (the setting of *The Devil's Hand*). Here Kelley wrote *Weeds* as they struggled to make a living on a chicken ranch while Fred supplemented their income by working in a meat-packing plant and running a still. During the Depression they suffered particularly hard times along with other farmers, and Edith was forced to work as a maid. However, contrary to the reports of some of her biographers, she did not die in obscurity as a maid. By 1945 the Kelleys had sold their land, invested their money, and lived fairly well in Los Gatos until Edith's death.

Her son, Patrick, preserved all of her manuscripts (she also wrote stories, poems, plays, essays, and a short novel, "The Heart of April") and has cooperated in recent publications. Kelley regarded *Weeds* as her best work, and did not feel that *The Devil's Hand* was as satisfactory an achievement. In both novels she evinces her talent for controlled tone and attention to detail, writing sociological novels of character rather than protest novels, *per se*. Although she was interested in extremist positions, she did not embrace any of them, preferring, instead, to write realistic / naturalistic novels concerned with the lives of the working class poor, but without
indulging in polemic or propaganda.

Weeds was favorably reviewed by Kelley's contemporaries. Joseph Wood Krutch admired the novel for its ability to capture "the gradual dissipation of the glamour of youth, love, and life, and the gradual coming on of the light of common day." He further commented that "Weeds does not owe its distinction to its very successful presentation of the peculiarities of an odd people, but to its presentation in an unfamiliar aspect of a general truth." Despite favorable reviews such as Krutch's, Kelley's novel failed, and she had to repay her advance to the publishers. The novel was lost for fifty years until Bruccoli recognized its value: "By any test it is first-rate: perfectly controlled, accurately observed, and carefully written. In its own genre—the realistic / naturalistic novel of farm life—it is a quiet masterpiece."

Like other rediscovered novels by women, Weeds is slowly earning positive critical attention. Coppelia Kahn appreciates its depiction of the complex view of nature and the struggle of a free-spirited woman against her fate. Charlotte Goodman concentrates on Kelley's interest in "writing realistic
fiction about ordinary working class people," the biological and emotional struggle of a sensitive female protagonist suffering the inequities of patriarchy: "the issue which is central to both Kelley's novels is the fate of a sensitive woman whose spirit rebels against the strictures imposed by biological, social, and economic factors." Sylvia Jenkins Cook refers to Weeds, along with Elizabeth Madox Roberts' The Time of Man (1926), as "two of the finest novels of poor whites in the 1920's." Cook is one of the few critics of Weeds to appreciate its author's complex attitude of sympathy coupled with objectivity: she sees in Judith Pippinger "the poor white woman, denied tragic stature by her powerlessness to affect the course of her life but equally beyond sentimental pity by virtue of a naturalistic emphasis on her most alien and unattractive habits."

Kelley, though empathetic toward her heroine and the working class poor of Scott County, Kentucky, does not romanticize her characters. Unlike Smedley and Olsen, she maintains an ironic distance from her characters, preferring to describe the conditions under which they live and which affect their lives
with an unstintingly authentic eye for their un-attractive habits as well as their simple virtues. Kelley clearly wants to separate herself from the rash of novels in the twenties which idealized poor farmers. Her characters are just as mean, just as petty, and just as disappointing as any other class of people, especially, she interjects, the upper class. Observing the sexual intrigues and jealousies of the young Kentucky couples in Weeds, she writes:

There is an idea existing in many minds that country folk are mostly simple, natural, and spontaneous, living in the light of day and carrying their hearts on their sleeves. There is no more misleading fallacy. No decadent court riddled with lust of power, greed, vice, and intrigue, and falling to pieces of its own rottenness, ever moved under a thicker atmosphere than that which brooded over the little shanty where these four fresh-cheeked young country people stood stripping tobacco.

In Weeds there is no overt voice of outraged protest, for this is not a novel which depends on anger to expose the inequities of sexism and classism. Instead, it is a novel of character, a sociological
examination of working-class conditions and the fate of poor women. Yet through her subtle depictions she effects a response at least as powerful as that achieved by more indignant authors of the genre. Hortense Calisher believes that "so far, women artists in general have done less out of outrage than might have been expected. Maybe wisely. Outrage over what one is, or is made to be, can be a dead end, in female writers leading to that hen-huffing of the feathers, suffragette in the worst sense—a desire to write 'like a man'. . . . But no important woman writer, I think, has really wanted to write 'like a man.' They had too much taste." Although many contemporary feminists would disagree with Calisher about the efficacy of anger in women's literature, her observations are relevant to a study of Kelley's narrative point of view and political stance.

Of particular interest is Kelley's conceptualization of "weeds"—a grim image that reifies her theme. The weeds of this novel are the tobacco crop the tenant farmers struggle to grow while battling nature, other weeds, and the fickle tobacco market. Kelley also identifies her characters as weeds, the
undesirable, unattractive rabble of society. In her descriptions of Kentucky backwoods people of the twenties, she is unflinchingly honest about the effects of ignorance, poverty, in-breeding, and jealousy.

The children have dull, blank, stupid faces and are possessed of little imagination or vitality. The girls, like their mothers, are "painfully thin, with pinched, angular features and peculiarly dead expressionless eyes." Their faces already wear "an old, patient, settled look, as though a black dress and a few gray hairs would make them sisters instead of daughters of the older women" (85).

Kelley describes the women as "stolid-faced, ungainly, flat-footed creatures, even the young ones wearing a heavy, settled expression, as though they realized in a dim way that life held nothing further in store for them" (179-180). The boys, because they are less restricted, appear slightly better off; they are "healthier and less angular than the girls and the look of premature age had not been stamped upon their features" (86). Nevertheless, Kelley maintains, boys and girls alike are destined to resemble their parents, the
"old folks" (though most are in their thirties and forties) who look like scarecrows with their "bent limbs, bowed shoulders, sunken chests, twisted contortions and jagged angularities." Kelley says they are "grotesque in their deformities, these men and women, who should have been in the full flower of their lives" (91).

In another section of Weeds, Kelley describes the passivity of the working class: "most of the people wore in their eyes and about their mouths that look of vague, mild blankness characteristic of country people in Kentucky" (172). This blankness is attributable to their ignorance and their total helplessness in the face of an unchanging pattern of socio-economic oppression. But Kelley does not use their victimization as an excuse to idealize them. She associates oppression with the worst impulses of human nature and links both oppressor and oppressed in perpetual and mutual degradation. As I will discuss in more detail later, she regards the upper classes as effete, shallow non-entities made fat and lazy by their excesses, while the working class slowly becomes lean, hungry, and often vicious. She sees the Kentucky poor as
petty, suspicious, and nosy, delighting in one another's foibles, unforgiving of social indiscretions. Having little to brighten their lives, they gossip about one another, judge one another, and steal from one another. Even when they flock to the sick bed or the coffin, they contemplate their own superiority to or possible gain from their neighbors' misfortunes.

Kelley introduces her heroine, Judith Pippinger, as a young girl who is superior to her neighbors: she is "a poppy among weeds" (88). Unlike her siblings and neighbors, Judith is quick, lithe, and bold—a contrast to the dull, scrawny, unimaginative backwoods children she grows up with. Wild and evasive, Judith is "like a naughty little goblin that springs up mockingly in your path and before you can reach for it has run up a tree or vanished into the thicket" (12). Her father, who loves and admires her, worries that she has "too much life, too much life for a gal!" (14). His concern is Kelley's own fear. Under capitalist patriarchy Judith is destined only for economic and sexual exploitation, and for a female "too much life" is a death sentence.
Goodman rightly points out that "the very qualities which set Judith apart from her counterparts are the qualities which will prevent her from accommodating herself to the only role that her society allows for its women: that of a wife and mother."

Kelley makes it clear that Judith's "energy that craved constant outlet" (15) predicts for her a grim fate, which is paralleled in nature. Judith is strongly connected to nature and grieves over the deaths she causes by trying to capture minnows, turtles, butterflies, grasshoppers, or caterpillars. Just as Judith traps them in an unnatural environment, she herself will later be trapped, which she anticipates: "It seemed to Judith at such times, as she would sit on the doorstep staring dismally into vacancy, that not only in relation to minnows, but to everything in life, she was foredoomed to failure—failure disastrous to herself but still more so to the objects she tried to befriend and benefit" (17-18). In her efforts to "befriend and benefit," she apprehends part of her nurturing instincts as a female, but misunderstands the greater power of nature and society. When she rescues a kitten from the Blackford
brothers, she experiences "a vague, but overwhelming sensation of its pitiful helplessness against all the great, cruel powers of nature, which seemed to be conspiring against it. . . . She did not know that she was precociously experiencing the feeling of many a young mother who . . . feels in one overwhelming rush all the tragedy of weakness in a world where the weak must acquire strength or perish" (20). It is this lesson she further learns when the kitten kills the minnows she has so admired; it becomes "unspeakable" in its cruelty, but eventually Judith learns to accept the design of nature, although she loses the "poignancy of distress at the sight of suffering and death among animals," which Kelley views as an important human impulse (21).

Judith learns to obey the commands of nature to "live, grow, and be happy, and obey my promptings" (22). Unlike the other children and the adults, Judith does not see nature as the great nemesis, but as a force within her that she is constantly trying to regain as the dictates of her fate drive her into increasingly smaller boxes. Paradoxically, however, nature is just as inimical to her as to the small
creatures she suffers over. For Kelley, as
Krutch pointed out, nature is a "grudging har­
ridan," not the "Mother Nature of the poets."
It is, as Kahn suggests, "the single irreducible
fact of human experience . . . though inexpli­
cable in itself, it is the only source of mean­
ing. . . ." Kelley views nature as both
bounty and pestilence for the poor. At times it
is a generous ally; other times it is a determined
adversary, and the tenant farmers spend their
lives trying to coax nature into benevolence. As
I will show later, Kelley also sees nature as a
paradoxical force for women. On the one hand it
represents freedom because it is spaciousness and
vitality as opposed to the confinement and re­
striction of houses; on the other hand, nature
means numberless pregnancies with resultant con­
finement, illness, and premature aging.

Along with her responsiveness to nature,
Judith possesses an artistic sensibility which is
the bane of her teacher's and neighbors' lives.
Like Certie Nevels in The Dollmaker, Judith is
a talented artist. She sketches pictures that are
"comic, satirical or derisive . . . with great vigor and clarity of vision . . ." (25). She scandalizes everyone with impish caricatures of her neighbors; because her pictures are "disrespectful" they are "universally condemned," and she is discouraged from continuing her drawing. As she matures, marries, and has the responsibilities of housework and children, Judith is less able to find the time to draw, and her talent atrophies. Like Arnow, Kelley points out that art has no place in the lives of most women, just as their spirits have no space in which to grow. The exigencies of domestic roles and the demands of nature act to prevent women from maintaining an individual identity and foster their eventual isolation and alienation even from themselves.

Judith, however, rebels against her role as a female. She hates housework and, like Mazie Holbrook in *Yonnondio*, resents the fact that her brother does not have to perform domestic chores. She senses the unfairness of assigned gender roles, especially when her brother seems to her not
"'much good fer nuthin' else'" but washing dishes (27). She resists the prescribed fate for her and her sisters: "The prim niceness of the twins, suitable enough to them in the world that they were making for themselves, was for her a deadening negation of life. To have to be correct and decent in her speech was the same as being forced to sit motionless on a straight-backed chair in the front room when she was consumed with a longing to run and jump and whoop and chase the dog and play 'hide and seek' around the barn" (57). Kelley approves of Judith's defiant spirit because, she implies, passivity and inhibition contribute to women's oppression. However, the cultural biases against women, Kelley warns, doom them to failure unless the climate of oppression is examined and understood for what it is. Thus, she creates a heroine who is a bold, assertive young girl intoxicated with life and rebellious against the strictures placed on her sex, and juxtaposes her with the dictates of class and gender that will force her into the same roles as her mother, sisters, and all the other women around her. To underscore the encroaching tragedy of the death of this girl's
spirit, Kelley develops carefully the liveliness of a normal little girl whose exceptional abilities will be sacrificed to the conditions awaiting her. As Cook shows, "her sex, her imagination, and her love of beauty are all qualities which in her world 'foredoom her to failure'. . . ."

To emphasize the fate of poor women and to intensify the tragedy of Judith's eventual destiny, Kelley offers the reader a mother figure far different from those found in the other novels of this study. Judith, like Marie Rogers in *Daughter of Earth*, idealizes her father. Kelley creates a sympathetic portrait of a kind, indulgent father who loves his children and does the best he can to keep his family together. Unlike the fathers of *Daughter of Earth* and *Yonnondio*, he does not abuse his family, nor does he ever abandon them. Conversely, though we have a clear picture of Bill Pippinger, Judith's mother is hardly existent. There is no transposition of affections to the mother because she is more absent than present for her daughter. Annie is an overworked woman who seems to disappear even as we try to see her, which,
Kelley suggests, is the fate of the farm wife burdened with chores, housework, and children. She is described only as "a small, inconsequential woman in the early forties . . . all of one color, like an old faded daguerreotype" (6). We see no communication between mother and daughter; instead, Kelley presents the mother in terms of the daughter's eventual destiny—to be worn out at forty and to die a painfully lingering death, leaving her children "dazed more than grieved by their mother's death" (49). At her funeral, "the mouse-like little woman was claiming more attention now than she had ever done in all the forty-odd years of her drab existence" (50). By sketching such a pitiful existence for the mother, Kelley captures the invisible working-class woman who lives and dies with little recognition that she was ever here. Furthermore, Kelley suggests the alienation between mothers and daughters that Adrienne Rich writes about. Here in Weeds the reader glimpses "the essential female tragedy" of mother and daughter completely estranged from one another.
But Kelley only intimates this women's issue, for her major purpose is to remove Judith from her parents' home so she can explore other ramifications of class and gender consciousness which will impinge on her heroine's identity. Judith, like Marie Rogers, works outside the home, and, like Smedley, Kelley castigates the employers of the poor. The Pettits are a miserly couple, one of the few remaining of Kentucky's old "first families." Like Annie, Aunt Eppie has inherited land from her father, but where Annie's is hard, unyielding clay, Eppie's is fertile soil. Where Annie has a three-room shanty surrounded by rusted out junk, Eppie enjoys her father's pre-Civil War mansion. Because her father had been ruined during the War and had to start over, Eppie has become stingy about money and possessions. She and her husband Ezra pay the lowest wages and have the worst attitudes toward the poor. Property and advantage, Kelley insists, constrict the soul as much as poverty does. Judith assumes the farm work; but after sixteen weeks of living in such a penurious environment—she makes only a dollar a week—she
leaves, "'cause I want to,'" with unashamed simplicity. Eppie, judgmental of those less fortunate than she, labels Judith "'thankless an' shiftless--like all of 'em'" (82). Now Eppie will have to hire a man to do Judith's work—and pay him four times as much. Fifty years before the modern feminist movement, Kelley alludes to the inequity of pay rates between male and female employees, stressing the culpability of advantaged people who want to pay as little as possible for as much work as they can get—naturally assuming men are worth more money than women are. Kelley does not pontificate, but simply and quietly makes her point, anticipating contemporary feminists' own efforts to win equality for women in the job market.

Another important issue Kelley focusses on is the fate of working-class wives. Although Kelley describes Jerry Blackford as a handsome, decent, hardworking young man who obviously loves Judith, wooing her even when she teases him unmercifully, Kelley also characterizes him as a man who is not going to be a liberating force for a lively sixteen year old girl. Jerry does not like women. What he
admires in Judith is her "masculine" qualities: "'I don't like wimmin,'" he tells her, "'There's sumpin' small an' mean an' underhand an' foul about most all of 'em . . . . You're the on'y woman I know that's got a man's ways, Judy. You hain't spoiled'" (103). Jerry is not alone in his assessment of women. Judith's beloved friend, Jabez Moorhouse, believes all women are harlots. Both he and Jerry like Judith because she is an "exception," and because "'she seems more like a boy . . . . Too bad she hain't a boy'" (99).

Kelley emphasizes the patriarchal bias Judith faces among her own kind; yet she also mocks male arrogance: "'Why does a man allus like to feel hiself big an' important an' better'n every other man?'" Judy questions Jerry (102-103).

Kelley tries to demonstrate what she feels is the absurdity of male competition, but at the same time she is in sympathy with Jerry's desire to work the land and provide for a family.

However, Jerry does not understand that Judith is totally incapable of appreciating his values. The confinement of housework is anathema to her, an
antipathy with which Kelley sympathizes. She, like Olsen and Arnow, reveals an important point about the effects of houses on women: the closure and stasis of confinement drain women's energy and deprive them of the freedom represented in the open spaces around houses. Judith sees them, especially the shanties she must live in, as "12 X 14 packing cases" (84). Her first home is "a little two-room frame shanty in a deep hollow between two hills and about half a mile from the main road" (104). For Judith, who has "always disliked the insides of houses," and has always preferred the outdoors—sun, animals, and hard work unconnected with dishes and cleaning—the shanty is stifling and depressing with its gloom, dead chill, and dust: she is "always glad to escape into the open" where there is "light, life, and motion and the sun and the wind kept things clean" (116). Her second house is not much better; it is "like a weathered packing case into which someone had sawed two or three holes" (243).

The allusion to packing cases and boxes with holes—clearly associated with the boxes Judith
had used to entrap insects and small animals—expresses Kelley's perception of houses as prisons that threaten women's inner selves while isolating them from the community. They jeopardize women's freedom and cause the death of the female self as surely as animal traps, depriving the minnow and butterfly of their natural environments, eventually become their tombs. Kelley's equation of houses with death-dealing traps anticipates contemporary feminists' concerns. For example, Betty Friedan compares houses to Nazi concentration camps for women:

American women are not, of course, being readied for mass extermination, but they are suffering a slow death of mind and spirit... It is not possible to preserve one's identity by adjusting for any length of time to a frame of reference that is in itself destructive to it. It is very hard indeed for a human being to sustain such an 'inner' split—conforming outwardly to one reality, while trying to maintain inwardly the value it desires. The comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into, or have
been talked into by others, is just such a reality, a frame of reference that denies woman's adult human identity. 16

Judith is constantly trying to flee the oppression of houses, but the facts of biology gradually commit her to the house and the same fates as her mother and sister, Lizzie May, who disgustedly comments: "'If I'd thought married life was a-goin' to be anything like this, I don't think I'd a been in such a hurry to git married. . . . It wasn't like that in the books we used to read'" (119-120). Kelley implies that women are lured by the romance of love and marriage, only to become disillusioned when they discover the castle is really a trap and the prince is actually a toad. For example, Lizzie May's husband, Dan Pooler, spends much of his time drinking and fox hunting, leaving Lizzie to clean mindlessly an already spotless house, lie awake at night fearful of every noise, and bitterly curse the hounds she must cater to along with her family. She envies Judith because Jerry is a better husband; but she
finds her solace in pregnancy and housework—because she has no choice. Hat Wolf spends her time reading "women's" magazines, which teach her how to become more "fascinating" and "alluring" and snooping on her neighbors. She knows every detail of her neighbors' homes—"such capacity for detail does solitude engender in the female mind" (137).

Hat is not an admirable character, but Kelley sympathizes with her anger at the stolid Luke Wolf. Always getting the "dirty" jobs, like plucking geese—which Luke insists is "'wimmin's work'"—Hat finally expostulates, "'I'm jes sick an' tired of slavin' like a mule an' gettin' nothin' fer it'" (145). She resents men, especially Luke, who loaf while she works, then pockets all her money, making her beg for a few cents while he gossips with the men in the barnyard. "'Men makes me sick,'" Hat exclaims, "'always a-runnin' theirselves around the barnyard like flies on a dunghill'" (145). Eventually, Hat succeeds in getting her own bank account and spending her money the way she chooses. Kelley approves of her small victory and through her anticipates the contemporary feminist concern with breaking
the oppressive patterns of labor and money management in the patriarchal household.

Another women's issue Kelley focusses on is pregnancy. Like Olsen, she does not romanticize maternity; rather, she emphasizes its negative aspects. For a sixteen year old girl who only wants to have fun, pregnancy is the end of life. Judith is so young and so ignorant of her body that, like Marie Rogers, she does not know what is happening to her. She only knows that she feels nauseated, that everything smells and tastes bad to her, and that the world becomes ugly and repulsive. Kelley describes the onset of pregnancy as a thief stealthily robbing women of themselves before they know they are threatened: "It came on so slowly, so subtly and insidiously," Kelley writes, "that she was in its grip before she fully realized there had been a change" (141). The change is not only in her body, but in her entire life. She begins to hate everything around her, including her neighbors. When Judith consults Nat for help, Kelley reflects on the viciousness of women who are themselves trapped and take delight
in other women's imprisonment. Hat, who is childless, offers a vulgar and salacious description of pregnancy. Other female neighbors immediately begin giving Judith "advice," which she loathes as a "pestilence." They seem to her vile in their secrecy and assumed authority, and she hides from them when they visit. Kelley associates the "tyrannical web of custom based on 'neighborliness'" with the encroaching oppression that sucks Judith into its center, demanding her conformity. She regards the neighbors as "stuffy old women" whose "prying eyes" leer at Judith even when they are not present, creating a "stifling and oppressive aura" that leaves Judith limp and defeated (157).

During Judith's second pregnancy, she withdraws completely from the neighbors and her family "with something of the feeling of a creature of the woods." She becomes an "automaton" who plods through the routine of her daily tasks without thought or feeling (189). Kelley tells us that the year and a half since the birth of the first child have left no mark on Jerry, but have changed Judith forever: "It was as if the life spirit in the still young body had grown"
tired" (197). Like Anna Holbrook in *Yonnondio*, Judith sits and stares, only rousing herself to do a little housework or tend the baby.

Pregnancy leaves Judith pale and listless, sapped of energy and increasingly temperamental. She screams at and slaps her child, learning to hate both him and the unborn baby, then to hate Jerry for "that strong, male vitality of which she was the victim" (209). The birth of her second child leaves her so ill that Jerry must beg and borrow to feed her so that she can regain her strength. What has happened to Judith, Kelley avers, is that the children have consumed her. Billy and Andrew are "two little greedy vampires working on her incessantly . . . bent upon drinking her last drop of blood, tearing out her last shrieking nerve" (208).

After her recovery, Judith confronts her "failures" as a wife and mother. She hates housework, "as the galley slave loathes the oar" (216); she loves her children, but resents them because they bind her to them, making her a victim of their infantile caprices. They have their "hooks" into
her and will "never let her go" (217). As the demands on her increase, Judith finds herself "longing ardently for a single day, even a single hour when she could be by herself, quite alone and free to do as she chose" (217).

Adrienne Rich has commented on the problems for mothers deprived of enough time for themselves, the damage potentially so destructive that it can lead to nervous breakdowns like that we see in Anna Holbrook. Kelley, too, is worried about mothers. Throughout Weeds she shows Judith continually withdrawing into herself, fantasizing more and more. Both Kelley and Rich indict the institution of motherhood as it exists under patriarchy for women's bondage. Although Judith eventually resigns herself, Kelley depicts what can happen: the half-crazy Bessie Maud finally crosses over the brink, and only her husband's timely return prevents her from killing the children. Judith and Anna do not actually threaten their children's lives; but they do hit, lashing out at them from their own frustration. They also both retreat into nostalgia for past happinesses, and they both become ill enough
to require the much needed sleep and care they
normally miss. Rich writes:

What woman, in the solitary
confinement of a life at home
enclosed with young children,
or in the struggle to mother
them while providing for them
single-handedly, or in the
conflict of weighing her own
personhood against the dogma
that says she is a mother,
first, last, and always--
what woman has not dreamed of
'going over the edge,' of sim­
ply letting go, relinquishing
what is termed her sanity, so
that she can be taken care of
for once, or can simply find 18
a way to take care of herself?

At age nineteen, Judith finds herself preg­
nant a third time. Filled with "mingled rage and
horror" (236), she humiliates Jerry by refusing to
help on hog butchering day. She is incensed by the
pregnancy and incensed because Jerry and Luke, pre­
dictably, are enjoying their part of the work and
have left to Judith "the only part of the job that
was tedious and hateful"--that of "running up" a tub
of stinking pig entrails (240).

For the first time in three years, Judith es­
capes the house and walks the hills and woods for
miles, putting distance between herself and the life behind her. She gazes toward the horizon, which represents freedom throughout Weeds, and delights in nature, "like meeting with an old lover" (240). She loathes the idea of another baby: "she wanted to be unnatural. She was glad she was unnatural" (240). But she knows she must return to Jerry and the children, doing so with despair: "a heavy cloak of misery hung about her its cold and clammy folds. The thought of her own utter helplessness against her fate settled upon her like the weight of something dead" (240). Like Ellen Chesser, who suffers through an unwanted fourth pregnancy in The Time of Man, Judith might also lament, "'out of me come 19 people forever, forever.'" For the working-class woman, Kelley says, biology is destiny. Unable to control her fertility, she is continually pregnant, a procreative vessel for generations of people, who, like her, will continue to be oppressed.

To underscore this oppression further, Kelley pays more attention to Judith's third child than she does to the first two, for this child is a girl who
is the favorite of both her parents. When Annie nearly dies from pneumonia, Judith, though agonizing for her daughter, also secretly thinks she would be better off dead rather than inherit the only life open to a rural female. Kelley reminds us that this little girl's destiny is to become either a "prim and dull old maid" or a "harrassed wife" like Judith. Which is worse is academic since there is no other choice (330). Annie is

the kind of little girl one sees often in country places and very rarely in towns. She had a puny, colorless, young-old face, drab hair thin and fine, that hung in little straight wisps about her cheeks, a mouth scarcely different in color from the rest of her face, and blank, slate-colored eyes. There was neither depth nor clearness in the little eyes, no play of light and shade, no sparkle of mirth or mischief, no flash of anger, nothing but a dead, even slate color. They were always the same. In their blank, impenetrable gaze they held the accumulated patience of centuries. Looking into these calm eyes, Judith shrank and shuddered. (280)

Annie has inherited the color of her mother's eyes, but none of the life. She is not her mother's child, but the child of the race of backwoods women who
passively accept their fates. Kelley describes the impossibility of any future for Annie:

Of what use after all that this baby should live? She would live only to endure, to be patient, to work, to suffer; and at last, when she had gone through all these things, to die without ever knowing that she had never lived. . . . In every way she was a product of the life that had brought her into being, and that life would claim her to the end. (321)

In an attempt to inject variety and life into her bitter existence, Judith indulges in an affair which gives her heady excitement while it lasts, but which she herself ends when it, too, becomes dull—walking away from it "like some primal savage woman" (279). But, ironically yet predictably, Judith finds herself pregnant again. This time she is determined not to have the child. Kelley inevitably must now explore the problems of a woman who is not only constantly pregnant, but is now pregnant with a child she must not have. Like Smedley, Kelley addresses the issue of abortion—its horror and desperation for the woman. Judith tries to use knitting needles, but cannot bear the pain. She tries riding
the mule at full gallop, tries drinking a noxious brew made from herbs, but nothing works. Finally she tries suicide by drowning herself in the horse pond, only to come up laughing hysterically as she remembers that she is a good swimmer. However, Judith's efforts to abort herself are rewarded when she eventually miscarries. The women who tend her "know" what has happened and condemn her, but Kelley focusses on the sick woman: "in her wasted youth she looked more ready for the grave than any of the old duennas about her" (291).

Kelley's sympathy is clearly with her heroine who becomes the epitome of Simone de Beauvoir's eloquent description of the poor woman without contraceptive aid, who finds herself forced to painful and life-threatening self-induced abortion. "In lower-income groups," de Beauvoir writes, "miscarriage and abortion, however desperately needed, usually mean the resignation of despair and much suffering for each woman concerned." In Smedley's novel, Marie Rogers at least has access to a medical abortion; but in the Kentucky backwoods, as Kelley reveals, Judith Pippinger has recourse only to the most primitive methods—which
almost kill her. Kelley's depiction of the working-class woman's desperation and anguish is a powerful testimony against the patriarchal control of women's bodies which drives them to seek abortions or to abort themselves rather than have still another baby. Though Judith survives, in most cases such abortions are a death sentence since during Kelley's time and until the Supreme Court decision of 1973, thousands of women died every year from illegal or self-induced abortions. Novels like Weeds and Daughter of Earth remind us of the alternatives should women lose the right to control their own bodies and to have access to safe medical abortions.

Just as Judith's pregnancies are no joy, motherhood itself is unwelcome. Judith at first regards her baby as a plaything, a doll, for she is little more than a child raising a child. Since Jerry will no longer allow her to work in the fields, a job she prefers to housework, motherhood is now her only role. The expanses around the house are denied her as she is bound to the baby. With this loss of freedom, along with the routine
of tending a baby, Judith becomes more fretful and resentful. The "round of small activities," Kelley notes, brings with it demands which tug at women with "innumerable small restraining bonds" (158). Like Smedley, Kelley regards institutionalized motherhood under the conditions of poverty as slavery: Judith is filled with bitterness, yet Kelley says there is no release for her: "... dislike her bondage as she might, she was his slave... Everything was for the baby... He was always in her thoughts... And yet she became daily more irritated and harassed by the constant small cares that his presence demanded of her" (159).
Kelley implies that it is the small, unrelenting tasks that chip away at women's freedom and identity. Judith, who had always before hated visiting, now seeks escape in visiting her neighbors and trying to engage in the discussions surrounding housework and children—even this, Kelley suggests, is better than being confined alone with the child.

With winter, however, comes not only hunger for nutritious food, but starvation of the spirit, for now Judith is totally confined to the house and baby. To occupy herself, she tries to draw; but her
sketches all have "one thing in common: the sweep of hilltop lining itself against the sky" (160). The hills, like the sunsets and horizons which figure prominently in Weeds, represent distant freedom; but at the same time they serve as symbolic reminders of Judith's enclosure on all sides.

Kelley, like contemporary feminists, explores the drudgery for women of unrelenting motherhood. Sheila Rowbotham discusses the resultant physical and mental illnesses, which Kelley alludes to throughout Weeds:

The neurosis of nothingness comes directly from the nature of women's work in the home. Self-affirmation can only come through self-abnegation. The "feminine" woman, the good mother, can only realize herself by pouring herself into her husband and children. She has to give herself in service and find herself through other people and through the objects around her in the house. 21

It is no wonder that with spring Judith wants to accompany Jerry to Court Day in Georgetown, "'because I'm sick o' doin' allus the same thing everyday'" (168). Able to leave the baby with Jerry's mother, Judith can finally anticipate a respite from
Kelley uses the Georgetown episode to comment further on the lives of poor women. Judith meets a trader's wife with three children, "a faded, harassed looking woman, who was probably in her late twenties, although she looked much older" (178). She has a difficult life on the road with her husband and would trade places with Judith; but, she explains,"'seems like folks hain't in this world to git what they want, 'specially wimmin'" (178-179). Judith thinks her life "would be a jolly one, if one had no babies" (179).

Kelley's point here is not so much that babies in and of themselves are stifling to women, for many women, including Judith's sister, enjoy raising children. Rather, Kelley portrays the damage done to women's consciousness and ontology when children are born too soon to a teenager who has not only not had a chance to live, but is additionally possessed of an adventurous spirit that she will never be
allowed to realize. Kelley frequently comments on Judith's immaturity--she is often selfish and willful--but in another respect Kelley always seems to sympathize with her lack of joy and freedom.

Kelley further explores Judith's lack of freedom by including the subject of sexual inequality. When Judith associates with Bob Crupper, she notices the condemning looks of the people and understands that since she is married she can no longer speak to other men without raising eyebrows. At the same time, however, marriage does not protect her from gossip about her most private self. Judith has always noticed that people talk about her and that men seem to snicker when she is near. It is in Georgetown that she discovers her husband has been sharing the intimate details of their pre-marital sexual relationship with other men. Judith is filled with loathing, with "disgust, like an avalanche of dirty diswater," and considers not returning home with Jerry, except that she must for the baby's sake. Jerry explains his indiscretion as normal, "manly" drunkenness and bragging. Kelley is somewhat critical of Judith's intolerance, yet understands her inability to comprehend Jerry's youthful male ego and urge to
"publish abroad his sexual achievements" at his wife's expense. She sees him and his cronies as "low, vile, and contemptible" (184). Kelley thinks it is abhorrent that men gossip and laugh about women's sexuality. Not only must women be in service to men and children, she points out, but they must also suffer the indignity of having their few private pleasures transformed into a subject for the community's titillation.

The estrangement caused by Jerry's contempt for Judith's sexuality exacerbates an already volatile situation. While Judith is sick with influenza she silently vows to preserve her identity as much as possible:

She wanted no more children that she could not clothe, that she could hardly feed, that were a long torture to bear and a daily fret and anxiety after they were born. Her flesh recoiled and her spirit rose in fiery protest against any further degradation and suffering. . . . She would be a tool no more of man's lust and nature's cunning. . . . She would be mistress of her own body. (300)

Her resolve helps her recover, but increases the tension between the young couple. The quarreling inevitably
results in violence. Judith hits Jerry on the head with a stove lifter. As he shakes her, she longs to plunge a knife into him. Jerry, too, is murderous: it is the sound of her head beating against the wall that finally makes him stop short of killing Judith. Judith and Jerry continue in the marriage with cold respect, but hard enmity, treating one another "with the chilly politeness of strangers who do not much like each other's looks" (319). Judith moves out of the bedroom and becomes more listless and withdrawn, "perhaps," Kelley comments, "because it was the only way in which she could continue to endure the burden of existence" (307).

The violence in the relationship is based on a complex conjunction of conditions which Kelley explores throughout Weeds. The passive, patient women like Lizzie manage to put up with their men and find solace for their poverty in domestic crafts like sewing and rugmaking. But a woman like Judith, who compares men to tom turkeys and has no respect for their goals, is not going to be a "good wife." Furthermore, a woman as wild
and free as Judith can only be like a caged animal when she is married. The fact that men have more mobility, more camaraderie, more activities away from the house lends them a freedom women have never had unless single, childless, and moneyed. While the men have time to relax, the women never relax; they are perpetually cooking, washing, bearing children. Their hands and bodies are never idle:

For them there was no such thing as change nor anything even vaguely resembling a holiday season. Families must be fed after some fashion or other and dishes washed three times a day, three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. Babies must be fed and washed and dressed and 'changed' and rocked when they cried and watched and kept out of mischief and danger. The endless wrangles among older children must be arbitrated in some way or other, if only by cuffing the ears of both contestants; and whatever lies a harassed mother could invent to quiet the fretful clamor of discontented childhood. Fires must be lighted and kept going as long as needed for cooking, no matter how great the heat. Cows must be milked and cream skimmed and butter churned. Hens must be fed and eggs gathered and the filth shoveled out of henhouses. Diapers must be washed, and grimy little drawers and rompers and stiff overalls and sweaty work shirts and grease-spattered dresses and kitchen aprons
and filthy, sour-smelling towels
and socks stinking with the putridity of unwashed feet and all
the other articles that go to
make up a farm woman's family wash.
Floors must be swept and scrubbed
and stoves cleaned and a never
ending war waged against the constant encroaches of dust, grease,
stable manure, flies, spiders,
rats, mice, ants, and all the other
breeders of filth that are continually at work in country households. These activities, with the occasional variation of Sunday visiting, made up the life of the women, a life that was virtually the same every day of the year, except when their help was needed in the field to set tobacco or shuck corn, or when fruit canning, hog killing, or house cleaning crowded the routine. (194-195)

Kelley's description of the lives of poor women in the Kentucky backwoods is both a celebration of their strength and a condemnation of the system that perpetuates their misery. It is also an explanation for the violence that erupts in the Blackford home.

Kelley is equally critical of the social system which engulfs women and their loved ones. Again without romanticizing her characters or trying to convert them into tragic figures, she simply recounts what an exploitative socio-economic culture does to the people who slip out of the net. She concentrates
on three aspects of the authority of upper-class society and its effect on the working class: religion, war, and classism.

Like her contemporaries, Smedley and Emma Goldman, Kelley has little use for organized religion. She differentiates between "religion," which is for the idle rich, and camp or tent revivals for the poor. The religion preached among the poor—like that in Daughter of Earth and The Dollmaker—is of the hell-fire and brimstone variety. Preachers bully the poor with threats of everlasting damnation, which terrifies Judith as a child and makes her quake before the idea of Judgment Day. In a dream, Judith thinks she hears Gabriel's horn sounding the fatal day; but—in a touch of wicked satire—Kelley tells us the ominous blast is only Bill Pippinger blowing his nose on the ground outside Judith's bedroom window (22-23).

The preacher at Annie's funeral service is an "insignificant" man "elbowed into this poor land by the law of the survival of the fittest" (51). His eulogy for Annie is perfunctory, and the sensitive Jabez does better justice to the dead woman. Jabez
is one of the more intelligent of Judith's neighbors. He is bitter about their poverty, yet philosophical about life and compassionate about death. Through Jabez Kelley suggests that the poor do not need preachers and are better able to comfort one another and bury their own without the intervention of religion, especially since religion is an instrument of the authoritative ideology that oppresses them. When the preacher ducks the graveside services, handing Jabez the appropriate leaflet for the burial, Jabez sardonically declines the offer and commits Annie's body to the ground "tenderly, as one who has come to realize that to be committed to the ground may be sweet, soothing and desirable" (53).

Kelley's most strenuous criticism centers on the evangelist with whom Judith has an affair. Despite his pose as the inspired man of God who wins sinful souls to the deity, he is as lustful as the next person, willingly becoming involved with a married woman, engaging in all the sin and subterfuge he condemns from the pulpit. When Judith ends the
affair, he also condemns her as a scarlet woman and flees "from this monstrous creature, this cold and sinful woman who knew neither fear nor shame" (278). Kelley's cynical treatment of the evangelist clarifies her opposition to what she sees as the hypocrisy of religion and its doomsday prophets.

In the world of Kelley's Scott County, Kentucky, God, like Smedley's God, is a heartless deity. When Judith rides the mule furiously through the countryside, she imagines herself as God "looking out upon these poor children he had made in his own image and condemned to a life of toilsome grubbing in the dirt that ended only with the grave." But as the nausea of her fourth pregnancy--fruit of the evangelist--sweeps over her again, she realizes that she is not God, "but only one of these pitiful, groveling creatures, doomed to the same existence and the same end" (285). Kelley, if she allows the existence of God at all, does not see him as a benevolent father figure, but as a malignant force who is directly responsible for "condemning" the poor to a life of exploitation with no hope of relief--except in the grave. Kelley associates God and religion with the tyranny of poverty and classism which afflicts the poor.
Along with her criticism of religion, Kelley, like Smedley and Arnow, condemns the waging of war. When the United States enters World War I, the men of Scott County realize the war machine will ensnare them, yet they parade and preen as though they know all about the war in Europe and are willing to do their duty. Kelley explains how the ignorance of the world and the truths of war encourages the backwoods peoples' provincialism and makes them dupes of the war wagers. In one of her few overt protest statements, Kelley heavily satirizes both men and women, while also calling attention to their fates as eventual cannon fodder and grieving mothers and wives. War is a middle-class phenomenon fought by the poor: "In the tired bodies and shrinking minds of these underfed young men there was little to foster a thirst for adventure, still less any feeling of adherence to such a middle class luxury as patriotism" (253).

Some of the women protest that war is ridiculous: "'the idee o' them folks a-goin' to fightin' each other. It's a shame an' a disgrace an' it'd atta be put a stop to'" (192). But to all the men, the
war talk is "meat and drink," and they become ex­
erts, though Kelley indicates none of them knows
what he is talking about. Eventually the fear
and bravado are transformed into hatred and ethnic
prejudice. The men want to go over and "'beat 'em
all up'" and the women, too, become vicious, the
mothers complaining because some sons have escaped
the call, while others who have no sons burn "with
righteous zeal against the Hun" (254).

Kelley clearly wants her readers to turn
away from the zealots of war, just as she has
Judith, in disgust, comment to her mother-in-law
that "'if you'd been born a German you'd be the
fust one to hate us Americans same's you're a-
hatin' the Germans naow. An' either way there'd
be about as much sense to it'" (255). Mary Blackford
accuses Judith of not having "natural" feelings.
"'When times like these comes,'" she bristles,
"'they show up folks in their real nater,'" to
which Judith cooly responds, "'Yes, they do'" (256).
Kelley strips away the thin veneer of patriotism
used to foment war fever and reveals what is under-
neath: the government's encouragement of the common
man's weakest traits—ignorance and hatred, which are
well-suited to killing. War, like sexism and classism,
is an institution of capitalist patriarchy to
oppress people it regards as inferior species, both
its soldiers who fight to maintain its values and the
"enemy" who threatens them. It is part of the in­
herent violence of patriarchal power structures, which,
through Judith, Kelley clearly rejects.

When Bob Crupper is blown to pieces in Europe,
Kelley decries the futility of war and the insigni­
ficance of life in the hands of the government. Judith
slaps a fly on the wall with her dustrag:

It fell mashed and mangled to the
floor. It came over her suddenly
that he had died like that. With
all his health, vigor, and charm,
his power to make women love him,
he had died like that fly. Some
great, pitiless engine of war had
mashed these things out of him,
and left only a few bits of stink­
ing flesh. "What are we all any­
way but flies," she said to her­
self bitterly. (297).

In her voice, the reader hears Kelley's own bitter­
ness. Writing this novel shortly after the end of
World War I, she expresses the pain and disillusionment
of millions who were exhausted and destroyed by the war.

Underscoring Kelley's hatred of the inequities of religion and war is her censure of classism. Lizzie and Judith voice Kelley's criticism of pulp literature which promises joy and love in marriage for women. Lizzie mentions the names of several novels by "purveyors of roseate fiction"; but Judith reminds her they "'allus ends when they git married . . . . They never tell what happens after. All they say is that they lived happy ever after.'" Lizzie remarks that "'they're allus about rich people. . . . I did used to love to read them books an' fancy I lived like that. I guess rich husbands is dif'rent. It must be awful nice to be rich. . . . When you're poor an' stuck allus in the same place, life gits to seem so dull'" (120). Of course rich husbands are not "dif'rent," but Kelley alludes to the dreams of poor women who think that money and property would make their lives easier. Indeed, after Lizzie's husband dies, she does "marry up," becoming as snobbish as the other privileged people Kelley criticizes.

The world of the rich has never interested Judith; through her eyes Kelley scathingly attacks affluent
people, those "smug, well fed dignitaries of church and state," business magnates "still smugger, fatter, and more rigorously curried," kings and generals "pompously pinning medals to the coat lapels of heroes of war," "dismal stuffy people given new life by Tanlac or Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound," actresses and movie stars who are "simpering and insipid." To Judith, as to Kelley, the wealthy are "with but few exceptions, solemn and sodden creatures in no way to be envied" (300-301). Judith, in her empathy with animals, thinks it is a shame they must be raised to feed the wealthy: "it seemed a pity so much beauty, pride, and joy in life should go to tempt the cloyed palate of some smug bishop or broker who had, compared with the soul that had lately animated the bit of white meat on his plate, but a poor notion of what it was to love, to play, and to enjoy the sun and the fruits of the earth" (67).

Kelley clearly dislikes the privileged classes; this sympathy for the animals relates to her sympathy for the poor, on whom the wealthy also feed, growing fat and smug in their complacency.

Kelley's cynicism about the wealthy and her occasional ironies about the working class do not
blunt her genuine concern for the poor. Their poverty, hunger, hard menial labor for a pittance at the hands of an unreliable market controlled by the upper classes touch her deeply, and she delights with her characters the few times they are able to dupe their oppressors. Sam Whitmarsh outfoxes Ezra Pettit by coaxing him into selling his hay for less than it is worth; Jabez Moorhouse "steals" one of Pettit's rams he finds caught in a fence so he can feed his hungry neighbors. Kelley condones the theft because, as Jabez avers, despite the Bible's promise "'that he that tilleth the soil shall have plenty o' bread,'" the poor "'don't allus have plenty o' bread, an' still less o' meat.'" Because "'the earth's a mean an' stingy stepmother,'" the poor must do what they can to survive (201-202).

The struggle for survival in Weeds is waged on the inevitable road to the grave. Physical and spiritual death permeate the novel: along with the deaths of loved ones, the people endure the deaths of crops and livestock necessary to their survival. Judith watches the death in life of her children: "on their baby faces she saw already appearing traces of a look she had
learned to dread, a look that stamps itself upon
the faces of those who for generations have tilled
the soil in solitude, a heavy, settled, unexpect-
tant look" which precedes them to the grave (279).
Jerry--only in his early twenties-- is already aging;
fatigue, disappointment, and despair sap his youth-
ful vigor, leaving him sitting at the table swilling
his food "bestially, without lifting his eyes, his
head sunk between his shoulders" (280). The impetus
of Weeds is toward the death of the poor. Before
the inexorable fate of her people and her own life,
Judith finally resigns herself:

Lying between her husband and child,
she felt alone, cold and dismal,
alone yet inextricably bound to them
by something stronger than their
bonds of common misery. Their
future lives stretched before her
dull, drab and dreary, and there was
nothing at the end but the grave. (281)

As Judith cries herself to sleep, Kelley pulls the
reader back from the scene to view the family in the
ghostly dawn: they are "lying stretched out stark and
pallid like corpses" (281).

Throughout the novel Kelley insists that the
poor walk "the path to the grave straight and plain" (286),
without ever having lived. Because in a patriarchy there is no escape for them, there is no use in struggling against the bonds of poverty. Judith decides there is no hope in rebellion: "Peace was better than struggle, peace and a decent acquiescence before the things which had to be . . ." (330). Judith chooses "a willful resignation of her lively consciousness to the numbness of endurance."

She decides to work with Jerry rather than against him, to give him peace as a gift, a "spontaneous return" for his love and devotion. She has grown up enough to understand her own mistakes in the marriage and to appreciate Jerry. She is through with discord and accepts her fate as a backwoods woman: "Already people were beginning to call her Aunt Judith" (331).

But Kelley is not content to leave her novel with even an approximation of a "happy ending," for she is no "purveyor of roseate fiction." Just as Judith has achieved an uneasy truce with her fate, Jabez' death comes as a cruel blow. Jabez had been Judith's only real friend, someone with whom she could talk and who had treated her as a kindred spirit. His concern for her, as well as his calm, had always been a source of
comfort for Judith. His death creates a void that spreads around her:

What light and color had remained for her faded out before this grim fact into a vast, gray, spiritless expanse. . . . A weight like a great, cold stone settled itself upon her vitals; and as she gazed out over the darkening country it seemed to stretch endlessly, endlessly, like her future life, through a sad, dead level of unrelied monotony. (333)

Vivian Gornick notes that "the vision of nothingness haunts this century, and it is not uncommon that that vision finds expression through the portrayal of a woman breaking down in the face of that void."

Although Kelley does not depict an emotional or a physical breakdown, she does associate the void with her heroine's final spiritual breakdown. Significantly, the last time the reader sees Judith, she is going back into the house, back into the box that represents stasis and defeat for Judith. The conclusion of Weeds is not a celebration of the values of home and family, but a depiction of the end of one woman's life, at the age of twenty. The house might as well be Judith's grave.
The "path to the grave" is the path Judith has been traveling all along. Krutch commented that "the story which tells how Judy was disappointed by life is the story of all women." He did not elaborate, but his observation is applicable to Kelley's theme and expresses the core of Weeds' importance to women's literature. Judith is not a particularly exceptional human being, as Bruccoli notes, but she does begin life with a little more promise than her peers. Her tragedy is the tragedy of all women whose dreams and small talents are thwarted by the exigencies of biology and social custom. Her tragedy is also the tragedy of her people, the working-class poor who live in ignorance and without hope as long as they continue to be victimized by the twin tyrannies of male supremacy and capitalism.

Elaine Showalter, who praised Kelley as "one of the most impressive 'lost women' writers," warns that "without critical attention, Kelley and other women writers may quickly become lost to us again." I hope that Kelley's contributions to feminist theory, as well as her importance to women's literature, will not disappear again, that she will join other
rediscovered women writers like Agnes Smedley, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Rebecca Harding Davis in having her works read, taught, and written about as feminists continue redefining and re-envisioning women's experiences and potential.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


3 Biographical information is drawn from Schorer, pp. 113, 115-116, 118, passim; Brucoli's Afterword to Weeds, pp. 335-343; and his Afterword to The Devil's Hand by Edith Summers Kelley (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), pp. 291-298; and Patrick Kelley's Postscript to The Devil's Hand, pp. 299-301.

4 Joseph Wood Krutch, Rev. of Weeds by Edith Summers Kelley, The Nation, 118, 1924, p. 64.

5 Brucoli, Afterword to Weeds, p. 335.


9 Edith Summers Kelley, Weeds (1923; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 152. All further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

11 Goodman, p. 15.

12 Krutch, p. 65.

13 Kahn, p. 117

14 Cook, p. 21


16 Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974), p. 296. Friedan has recently reversed many of her earlier opinions about home and family; nevertheless, much of what she has said in this work continues to be useful for feminist studies.

17 Kahn, p. 117.


23 Cook, p. 22.


25 Krutch, p. 65.

26 Bruccoli, Afterword to Weeds, p. 343.
II. "The Suffering of the Dispossessed"; Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*

Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*, written in Berlin in 1927 and published in 1929 after the author left to spend thirteen years working in China, is largely the story of Smedley's own life. It is an angry novel with no pretensions to aesthetic consciousness; it is, in fact, a flawed novel that could be labeled propaganda rather than art, for its political design supersedes its artistic purpose. *Daughter of Earth*, however, is valuable for modern feminists and literary critics as an historical document; it is a ground-breaking work that explores many women's issues, some treated for the first time in literature by a woman writer. "I do not write mere words," Smedley tells us; "I write of human flesh and blood. There is a hatred and a bitterness with roots in experience and conviction. Words cannot erase that." She is among the earliest women writers (along with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, and others) to combine her socialism with feminism; as a
socialist-feminist writer, she recognizes the interdependence of the goals of socialism and feminism. She is also one of the earliest writers to insist that the daily personal experiences of women are political issues. She uses her own life as a paradigm for the political issues she addresses, using the autobiographical form as the vehicle for her revolutionary and feminist ideology.

Smedley's novel is written on behalf of the dispossessed, the working-class poor, especially poor rural women:

What I have written is not a work of beauty, created that someone may spend an hour pleasantly; not a symphony to lift up the spirit, to release it from the dreariness of reality. It is the story of a life, written in desperation, in unhappiness. (3)

Smedley writes "of the joys and sorrows of the lowly," of those who are "exhausted by poverty, victims of wealth and power, fighters in a great cause" (3-4); these are the "daughters of earth" who are closely connected to the land and who struggle for their right to a place, for existence in a world dominated by the capitalistic patriarchy, which Smedley sees as exploiting the poor. She wants her readers to comprehend the
loss of dignity, worth, and power suffered by the dispossessed at the hands of the privileged, the result being a struggle for mere survival. Particularly, Smedley wants to point out that sexism crosses class lines: the misery of poor women is due both to economic oppression, as Marxists-Leninists believe, but also to male dominance in the patriarchal institutions that are based on sexual bias.

Despite its socialist-feminist interest for readers, or perhaps because of it, Smedley's novel, like so many women's novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fell into obscurity for decades until it was rediscovered and reprinted by the Feminist Press in 1973. When her sympathies with China became apparent (reflected in her articles and books, especially *Chinese Destinies*, 1933; *China's Red Army Marches*, 1934; *China Fights Back: An American Woman with the Eighth Route Army*, 1938; and *Battle Hymn of China*, 1943), her books were banned from libraries and school book shelves in the United States. She died virtually unknown in England in 1950.

Smedley's political works enjoyed far more attention during her lifetime than did her one novel.
The works of male socialist writers such as Michael Gold, Upton Sinclair, Waldo Frank, Granville Hicks, Theodore Dreiser, and John Steinbeck were far more popular. Nevertheless, there were a few contemporary reviewers who did appreciate *Daughter of Earth*. Lewis Gannett called it "...a fiercely honest book without literary varnish and utterly without sentimentality." Freda Kirchway commented that Smedley "writes about life more intensely than most of us live it. The story seems to have been propelled into being by an urgency too desperate to be denied." Walter Rideout, in his important 1956 study of the radical novel, gives *Daughter of Earth* some notice, calling it a "crude, but magnificently bitter narrative. ..." Although he apprehends its basic message—it "links political revolt with personal revolt against 'bourgeois' sexual morality,"—still he considers it "aesthetically crude" and gives his imprimatur to other socialist works, most of which, incidentally, have not been resurrected. Another twenty years elapsed before Smedley's novel again earned critical attention. Marge Piercy, whose *Woman on the Edge of Time* is something of an heir to *Daughter of Earth*, remarks that Smedley's novel "is about the
high cost of becoming a full, educated, and political human being when you are born a woman in a dirt poor farming and mining family. (It is) unusually, in fact painfully, honest for a political autobiography." Vivian Gornick eulogizes Smedley as a rediscovered woman writer and sees in her novel "the outraged democratic sense of self pushing up out of nowhere to demand its own life. . . ."

Although Daughter of Earth now receives occasional critical notice and is being taught in Women's Studies courses, it still has not gained full critical treatment, even though it is a novel which speaks across half a century to students, feminists, and socialists. Smedley and her fellow socialist writers accord the depiction of proletarian experience its place in literature. More important for the feminist critic, Smedley also concentrates on the relationship between the experiences of the working class under patriarchy and that of women equally oppressed by the same dominant ideology. Both women and workers suffer from the politics of authority that determines the roles they shall assume while at the same time deprives them of full political and personal autonomy. Smedley's novel is an excellent example of Rideout's
conception of the protest novel; it "demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that its author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and advocates that the system be fundamentally changed."

Many contemporary feminist critics are questioning the established criteria for mainstream literature and are granting more attention to secondary works by and about women. Lillian Robinson feels that literary criticism should recognize the historical perspective of literature, should itself be "criticism with a cause. . . . It must be ideological and moral criticism; it must be revolutionary." Protest writers like Smedley give modern critics the opportunity to test our conceptions of critical theory, thus enabling us to continue redefining its function and purpose. For socialist-feminist critics, especially, Smedley's novel is an important contribution to the ongoing study of the critic's métier as well as her efforts to re-envision women's place in literature.

The most influential human relationship Smedley explores in *Daughter of Earth* is that between
mothers and daughters. She begins her narrative with the painful interchanges between Marie Rogers and her mother Elly, then carefully examines both the complexity and the flexibility of that relationship, as seen through the eyes and experience of her autobiographical persona. Smedley describes the violence, anguish, and final tenderness of this association to analyze why mother-daughter alliances traditionally have been so difficult. Decades before modern feminists began exploring these tensions, Smedley offered considerable wisdom to our understanding of a subject rarely discussed in literature until recently.

The first years of Marie's and Elly's lives together are markedly strenuous. Marie is a rebellious child who prefers her vagabond father to her mother. His power and freedom are understandably attractive to a little girl being raised in the oppressive climate of poverty and gender-bias. From the beginning she sees her mother as a menial, confined to the house and five children--an unmerciful tyrant who regularly beats her. The two are caught up in a bitter interchange of self-hatred and savagery. Marie comments that "as the years of her unhappy
married life increased, as more children arrived, she whipped me more and more! (7). Elly "develops a method" in her beatings, threatens Marie, accuses her of lying, until, finally, Marie learns to lie to stop the beatings. Elly, perhaps like Marge Piercy's Connie Ramos in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, may see in her daughter the youth she has lost and the future she has been subjected to; the beatings may be both self-flagellation and warning to her daughter. Elly, like Judith Pippinger in *Weeds*, is a victim of institutionalized motherhood under patriarchy; she is bound by the home, the daily routine of caring for children, the numbing monotony of existence for others at the expense of her own identity. Her violent outbursts stem from what Adrienne Rich has called the "deep reservoirs of anger," the "heart of maternal darkness" which afflicts women expected to live out their lives for men and children in isolated prisons called homes.

The violence of Marie's and Elly's relationship, however, is also due to the poverty of the family: Smedley sees her family as victimized by the patriarchal-capitalist system that creates the oppression of both the working class and women.
Rich has pointed out that "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities," that "under patriarchy, female possibility has been literally massacred on the site of motherhood." The institutionalizing of motherhood has destroyed the intimate bond of mothering as well as the notion of the home as a productive unit. At the poverty level, the situation becomes acute as the mother experiences both prejudice against her as a woman and as a member of the lower classes. Frederick Engels and August Bebel had earlier suggested that in traditional marriage the male is the bourgeoisie and the women and children are the proletariat, a condition which they avowed was prostitution and slavery for the women, with the working class marriage the most oppressive for women. However, as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and others have established, the socialists are only partially correct because they see the oppression of women in marriage as a result of the economic inequities of capitalism, but do not apprehend the patriarchal bias against women which pre-dates capitalism. Millett avers that "the subjection of women is of course far more than an economic or even political event, but a
total social and psychological phenomenon, a way of life. . . ." For the feminist critic, the historical male supremacist attitude toward the female is at least as critical a determinant for understanding the oppression of women in marriage and the dissolution of the relationship between mothers and children, especially daughters. Emma Goldman, Smedley's contemporary, called motherhood "that blind, dumb force that brings forth life in travail, wasting woman's youth and strength, and leaving her in old age a burden to herself and to those to whom she has given birth."

The violence Elly inflicts on Marie is a result of her economic and sexual oppression—an oppression which has caused her to both hate herself and lash out against her daughter. Smedley shows that the poverty and servitude of their existence embitters both their lives and impells her heroine to reject her mother's life. Yet the horrors of this existence are handled with a subtlety that modern feminists can appreciate. Smedley does not allow Elly simply to be an abusive mother, or her daughter simply to be a resentful child who escapes as soon as she can. Instead, she allows the relationship gradual modification. As
Marie matures, her father seems less attractive: previously, seeing in the male the source of power she wishes for herself, she had defiantly proclaimed, "I was my father's daughter" (10); but she is disenchanted when she begins making connections about the ways females are perceived by men. Male animals cost more than female animals; women are "broken" into marriage and are the property of men; sons are valued more than daughters. When her brother George is born, her father proudly hands out cigars to "men who drove up to congratulate him as if he had achieved something remarkable" (11). Marie feels neglected and runs to her father for an embrace; but he brushes her off, telling her to go away. This leaves her with the first crisis about her gender: "There seemed something wrong with me . . . something too deep to even cry about" (12). Her growing self-hatred, anticipating later feminist analyses of the causes of female self-denigration, is underscored by her intimations of sex between her parents, which fill her with revulsion and create a "gulf of hostility" between her and Elly (12). Smedley's concern here is not with sex itself, but with the sexual
thraldom of women. The female image her heroine faces comprises anger, violence, humiliation, constant childbirth and poverty, all in subjugation to the male. What Marie remembers throughout her life is Elly's weeping: "Her tears . . . they embittered my life!" (32).

Yet those tears, seen again in other married women, also serve as her means for understanding the plight of wives. While Elly's tears do indeed "poison" Marie for love and marriage, they also are contrasted with Elly's strength; for in Elly, Smedley discloses a woman of far more endurance, sympathy, and potential for survival than the reader anticipates at the beginning. Significantly, Elly's character emerges during the father's frequent absences. It is Elly who keeps the children together and alive by taking in boarders and laundry; it is she who insists the children attend school and who urges Marie to improve her own life; it is Elly who quickly grows old and weak from illness, yet retains enough strength to defy her husband when she votes and to understand the inequities of the class system, becoming "an unskilled proletarian" (111). Marie watches her mother, works with her, shares her books with this
woman who so values education, and finds her allegiance shifting to Elly. She eventually defends her mother when John returns and decides to beat her, because beating women and children is a husband's "right." The moment of solidarity between mother and daughter creates a bond—admittedly one of misery—that is never broken thereafter (107). Years later, when Elly is dying, Marie walks many miles to be with her; Elly dies with tenderness in her eyes for her daughter and with Marie's name as the last word she speaks.

Elly is a heroine who, despite her victimization by her husband and the system that makes her one of the dispossessed, continues fighting for her children and for survival. The focus on her relationship with Marie is crucial. Mother and daughter have experienced the denigration of what Rich has called the most important human relationship: "Before sisterhood," Rich writes, "there was the knowledge—transitory, fragmented, perhaps, but original and crucial—of mother-and-daughterhood." She labels it "the great unwritten story" of "the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement." There have been very few explorations of mother-and-daughterhood in
literature. Throughout the history of literature, the mother figure has been conceived of as a saint or a buffoon, or as simply an absent figure. In Austen the mother is often absent or is a comic figure; the Brontë sisters, because they were motherless, both created orphaned heroines frequently in search of the mother; in Woolf—whose mother died when she was seven—the daughter is both at odds with and in search of the mother; Cather created pioneer women who were glorified or mythologized as super-heroines. Rarely has the mother-figure been treated realistically; rarer still has an author treated the mother-daughter relationship with all the ambivalences attendant on it. Smedley's contribution to feminist literature in this respect is to open up the association to all its anger and tenderness, emotions later writers like Harriette Arnow, Je Beauvoir, Rich, Mary Daly, Tillie Olsen and Doris Lessing have investigated in more detail. Their works have the impact they do because the feminist movement's insistence on the truth of women's personal experiences has compelled our analysis of such issues as mother-and-daughterhood.
Cheri Register notes that the mother-daughter relationship is an "intriguing alternative to the woman-as-victim and writer-as-subversive-feminist models that have dominated feminist criticism. It reopening the question for which we ought to be accumulating answers all the time: What is our mythos? What is women's literature about? What stories do women tell about female experience to create a group identity?" This new alternative would not be as accessible to us or have as much credibility if earlier women writers like Smedley had not first broached the subject and explored its possibilities. As contemporary women writers have rediscovered Smedley they have found corroboration and source material for their own discoveries about female experience. For Rich, "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy." Smedley also understood this and provides some of the groundwork for analyzing the self-hatred and guilt mothers and daughters experience, as well as their refusal to become victims of external pressures to divorce them from one another. At the same time, Smedley uses the relationship to explain the daughter's
flight from the mother. Again Rich's commentary can illuminate Smedley's thesis: "A young girl may have lived in horror of her mother's childworn existence and told herself, once and for all, No, not for me." 19

Smedley does insist that Elly's life is not for Marie—not for women in general; but she complicates the issue by having Marie flee from the existence of another mother-figure, that of her beloved Aunt Helen, who has chosen prostitution over marriage, rather than become enslaved by a husband, forever his property: "'when a woman gets married and can't make her own livin', a man starts remindin' her of her past,'" she tells Marie (91). It is through the double-image of Elly and Helen that Smedley explores the ancient dilemma of women as enforced by patriarchy and later by capitalism as well. The wife and the whore both sell themselves to men for security and survival. Marie sees little difference between Helen's existence and the lot of wives: "her profession seemed as honorable as that of any married woman—she made her living in the same way as they made theirs, except she made a better living and had more rights over her body and soul" (136). In this sense, Smedley corroborates early feminists as well as anticipates modern
feminists who decry the condition of women as a sexual commodity and the patriarchal ideology which insists on the control of women's sexuality. Under poverty, even a woman as bright and talented as Helen finds that the only profession open to her is prostitution, for which she is condemned, even though she uses it to support her sister's family: "greater love hath no woman than she who will sell her body for the sister she loves" (132). Despite Helen's sacrifice and her determined independence, she remains the property of men; when her attractions fade, she is reduced to factory work. Both Elly and Helen, deprived of freedom, education, money, privacy, and respect suffer the fate of women in Smedley's world; for them "nothing seemed good or bad . . . everything just was . . . all was an experience to be endured" (219).

In *Daughter of Earth* the oppression of women is epitomized in the institutionalized attitudes towards women's bodies. Smedley says concretely what other feminists of her time were employing euphemism to express; she foreshadows the major issue feminists since de Beauvoir have demonstrated,
namely, that women have for centuries been controlled by men. Women must be virgins in order to be accepted by men; women must be faithful in marriage; women must bear children (preferably sons) and keep house, deferring to their mates in every respect. Through these means women are suppressed and the legitimacy of their children, the property and inheritance of the male line, are assured. Women must trade their virgin bodies for room and board, then "mind" their husbands, lest they forfeit their only protection and survival (101). If the boredom of conjugal inactivity impells a woman to desperately plead for employment outside the home, the threat to her security is immediate; he can say, "'Give me back the clothes I bought you!'," to which she, in her social and economic vulnerability, can only respond, "'Damn it kid, you know I love you!'" (66). Marie says, "those two sentences sum up, in my mind, the true position of husband and wife in the marriage relationship" (67). Smedley believes that for women love is a terrible thing: "it means that the individual is lost, submerged in another. . . ." (101). The danger for women is that love can induce them to sacrifice their independence and finally their souls.
For Smedley, the solution to women's suppression lies in work and money; "by the standards of our world, a woman who earned her own money was a free woman. Only a married woman had to take orders" (71). To stress her point, Smedley has her heroine experience love and marriage twice, yet throughout Marie's life Smedley protects her heroine by having her educated and trained for a profession. Smedley is able both to explore her genuine hope for healthy, egalitarian relationships between men and women and also keep her female protagonist strong enough and independent enough to extricate herself when those relationships--because they are not yet free for women--inevitably fail. Smedley suggests that as long as women are dependent on men they can be exploited. As long as love, sex, and marriage define women by patriarchal standards, women must say, "no, not for me" and flee these conventions:

What was love? I considered it: a confused, colorful mingling of the fairy tales I had read as a child and novels I had read later on; a very lovely but forbidden expression,—sex. Sex had no place in love. Sex meant violence, marriage or prostitution, and marriage meant children, weeping nagging women and complaining men;
it meant unhappiness, and all the things that I feared and dreaded and intended to avoid.

My fear of sex expression had grown with the years. Yet I resented virginity and the so-called 'purity' of woman, and reacted violently to any suggestion about it. It had always shamed me that men judged women by such a standard.

In my hatred of marriage, I thought that I would rather be a prostitute than a married woman. I could then protect, feed, and respect myself, and maintain some right over my own body.

Nobody spoke of 'fallen men' or men who had 'gone wrong' or been 'ruined.' Then why did they speak so of women? I found the reason: Women had to depend upon men for a living; a woman who made her own living, and would always do so, could be as independent as men. That was why people did not condemn men. (181-182)

If the double standards inflicted on women are not eradicated, Smedley believes, then even the most free-spirited of women still find themselves governed and controlled by the patriarchy, vulnerable to its prejudices against them, finally even adopting those prejudices in the ancient misogynistic rites that
turn women against themselves.

Smedley offers several examples of the fate of women under institutionalized gender-bias. The first concerns the issue of abortion. Marie does not want children because she has seen the effects of children on women's lives when women are their sole caretakers and have no other identities. Furthermore, by discussing abortion—a shocking theme for her time—she also can expose the problems for women deprived of contraception and at the mercy of their own bodies, about which they have little or no understanding. When Marie becomes pregnant during her first marriage to Knut Larsen, Smedley poignantly describes the panic surrounding an unwanted pregnancy:

Everything that was hopeful vanished—I saw myself plunged back into the hell from which I was struggling—the hell of nagging, weeping women, depending for food and clothing upon my husband, with study but a dream. I looked upon my baby with concentrated hatred. (197)

Compounding this classic terror known only to women is Marie's discovery of her nearly total ignorance of her own body: "I did not even know how my own body was constructed. In secret and blind terror I
tried to learn. I had not the least idea of the nature or workings of my body, of the conception or nature of growing life" (198).

Smedley also recounts the ambivalence of a woman who goes through abortion because she has no choice if she is to remain free of her mother's fate, yet is in anguish for the lost child. Knut is smiling when Marie awakens, and her internal response is painfully accurate for any woman who has had the experience:

> When I came back to consciousness Knut was sitting by my bed­side, smiling. I lay gazing at him and hating the smile—hating it, hating it, hating it! How dared he smile when my body was an open wound, when I had stood before eternity . . . how dared he smile when a child had been taken from my body, and now my body and mind called for it . . . how dared he . . . he a man who knew nothing, nothing, nothing! (198-199)

Although Marie does not want the child and the attendant problems it would bring her, the abortion is not something she anticipates. Knut is not behaving insensitively; he simply does not understand the power of Marie's psychic response to the abortion. Nevertheless, it is his lack of understanding--the male's
ignorance of the female's experience—which elicits Marie's anger.

Marie finds herself pregnant a second time and is subjected to the indignities both of the abortionist and her husband. The abortionist's practice is in a respectable neighborhood "where such men ply their practice and make fortunes" (208). The abortion typically takes place in a back room; afterwards, the nurse angrily tells an agonized Marie to "'Walk! . . . or people will suspect this house!'" On the bus Knut harshly demands, "'Sit up! People are looking at you--do you want to make a scene in public?'" (208-209). His words echo in Marie's head; later, when he is again tender, she is unmoved: "I did not need his kindness now . . . That was the end" (209). Despite mutual unkindnesses during their marriage, what Marie cannot abide is his ordering her—"the command of a husband to a wife . . ." (209). Her two abortions become the means by which her fear of children and husbands is affirmed. Both her body and her husband betray her: sex can make her pregnant; people can issue commands to her as a result; Knut can fail to comprehend her private grief, fear, and pain.
In the two episodes about abortion, Smedley anticipates the modern feminist concern with women's freedom of choice, with women's right to control their own bodies; at the same time she sensitively captures the lonely anguish of such decisions. Smedley also evokes the centuries-old ignorance and prejudice that surround women who must make the choice to abort. Her concern is not with the moral issue of abortion itself, but with the personal experience of women caught in the necessity of making such decisions—clearly a political issue with respect to the rights of women to choose whether a pregnancy will continue, to decide what course their own lives will take, without intervention from husbands, government, church, or special interest groups. When women are free of compulsory pregnancy, then the quality of their lives, should they choose not to have children, may be improved. In the absence or failure of contraception, abortion—though a painful alternative—relieves women from the patriarchal control of their bodies and lives. Smedley is clearly a proponent of such choices, an early spokeswoman for contemporary pro-choice advocates.
Another way in which Smedley anticipates contemporary feminist concerns is through her insight into the political implications of rape. In previous literary treatments of what was usually called "seduction," the woman is portrayed as the hapless, and often stupid victim being stalked by a lascivious suitor. She either successfully fends him off with her "innocence," eventually gaining the "reward" of marrying him (e.g., Richardson's *Pamela* and others); or she succumbs, then is left to suffer the burden of her "shame"—it is never his shame (e.g., Hardy's *Tess* and others). Rarely, if ever, was rape portrayed in terms of its effects on the victim; certainly no woman author before Smedley had demonstrated that the personal experience of rape for one woman has political ramifications for all women. When Juan Diaz assaults Marie, Smedley painstakingly reveals both the immediate physical and psychological horror and the long-range consequences of rape. Diaz insists that Marie has always "wanted" him, carries her to the bed, and hurls himself on her. Marie is paralyzed with "a cold fearful trembling, so cold it froze me," with terror that is like "the shadow of
dark, outspread wings of a bird, swooping, . . " (283). Diaz interprets as acquiescence the fear which prevents her from defending herself. His sole concern is that she tell no one, lest his reputation among his com­ patriots be ruined. Marie's life-long ambivalence about sex augments her confusion about what has actually happened to her, causing her to distort the act, to regard herself as culpable because she did not resist (285). Much later, when Diaz' gossip transforms the rape into an affair, Marie realizes she does not deserve blame: "I have had to pay with my life's love for the one experience for which I was least responsible" (369). Smedley is the first woman writer to show that rape is a crime of violence perpetuated on a woman who is later made to feel guilty and to suffer the scorn of her husband and of society. Marie's husband tells her that even if she "were in the right," no one would believe her version because "'he is a man and you a woman!'" (373). Marie's husband, himself, does not believe her, thus effectively allying himself with the power structure--male supremacy--which countenances the act of rape to control and punish women.
Smedley's treatment anticipates modern studies of the politics of rape. Susan Griffin has shown that the threat of rape all women know as a daily possibility is a political act of terror against women, one that has not been countered because men do not experience that threat and because the patriarchy subconsciously endorses it: "... the existence of rape in any form is beneficial to the ruling class of white males. For rape is a kind of terrorism which severely limits the freedom of women and makes women dependent on men." Susan Brownmiller's important historical study of rape notes that Marx and Engels are silent about rape, although Bebel does try to incorporate it into his theories about class, private property, and production. But even the most progressive male socialists have not comprehended the psychology of rape, which Brownmiller calls the "conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." The act of rape is "not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear."
Smedley understood the psychology of rape, understood that what happens to Marie is not an isolated incident, but a crime perpetrated by a man filled with hatred and resentment for her, who, by the very fact that he is male, is able to rape her, then make her the criminal in the eyes of other men who then regard women as seductresses and possessions. The patriarchal double standard ironically sets itself up to "protect" women, then violates and abandons them. Griffin has stated that "chivalry is an age-old protection racket which depends for its existence on rape." In fact, chivalry does not exist: Smedley demonstrates that in patriarchal institutions women are vulnerable to men who have both the physical power to rape and the ideological power to use women's sexuality as an excuse for their aggression. Here even socialism fails Smedley and continues to fail women today, for socialists have not seen the political implications of rape for women, the on-going use of violence, humiliation, and degradation specifically directed against women as a caste to maintain them through fear in a submissive role. While socialism would eradicate classism and economic competition
in order to purge male supremacy, feminism would further eradicate the constant threat to the autonomy and dignity of women which is symbolized by and effected through rape.

Smedley deliberately juxtaposes Marie's rape with her marriage to Anand; she continues her depiction of the direct effects of rape on women as well as analyzes the failure of institutionalized marriage for women. There is no question that Marie and Anand love one another; in fact, Smedley romanticizes their one-week courtship as Marie finds herself helplessly falling in love and lowers the defensive barriers she has carefully erected throughout her life. However, the romanticism is a device Smedley uses for contrast with the realities of this marriage. After the marriage, she quickly dispenses with the fairy tale glow of romance and scrutinizes the decline of their relationship, which follows almost immediately with Anand's jealous inquiries about Marie's previous lovers, evoking Helen's earlier warning. Anand tells her why he "hopes" none of her former lovers was Indian: "'Such things must be kept from our movement ... you know
our comrades and how they think of such women" (362; italics mine). Anand unconsciously mimics Juan Diaz: his only concern is for what other men think, and he assumes women who have had sexual experience are ruined—so repugnant that men cannot acknowledge them. Smedley emphasizes the sexist dichotomy: "sex experience enriches the lives of men, but ruins that of women" (369). It is not surprising, therefore, that Diaz so easily poisons Anand against Marie; he is a man; consequently, his word takes precedence over hers. Even though Anand believes in the liberation of women, in their joining the universal struggle against classism, he cannot grant women, even his wife, personal or political equality because he is still controlled by patriarchal ideas regarding the integrity and sexual freedom of women. But Smedley refuses to allow her protagonist passively to acquiesce; Marie will not submit to the lies, will not be driven into oppression, to be "a female at last . . . to depend upon another for my bread. . . ." (377), particularly when the power men hold can destroy her. She knows that she cannot remain in the marriage: "It would mean insanity or . . . death" (386).
Smedley insists that love and marriage not only enslave women, but, along with the patriarchal need to indulge in condemnation of women's sexuality, they are responsible for the mental breakdowns so prevalent in women. This is an area of concern explored by many women writers, among them Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the early history of feminist literature and by de Beauvoir, Millett, Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Margaret Atwood and other modern feminists. Kelley, Olsen, and Arnow also discuss the problem of mental illness in marriage. Smedley offers a realistic setting in which a woman of independent mind and character is unable to survive within the traditional expectations for women—yet by suggesting that a strong woman cannot endure marriage, she also indict the institution as it exists traditionally for all women. Conventional marriage demands too much of woman's identity; she is isolated, confined, subject to other people's imperatives and judgments. Smedley's alternative is to have Marie walk away from marriage--twice--to reject it on the grounds of personal survival. She sees this as an act of courage and determination, a refusal to be "finished off" (352). Smedley avows that there is an
option for women other than the roles of wife or whore. Women can refuse to submit to the artificial and oppressive demands made on their sex and class. Smedley wants women to educate themselves, find meaningful work, and insist on independent life styles—not necessarily apart from men, but definitely apart from their institutions.

The oppression of women is the central focus of Daughter of Earth; however, it also becomes the basis for her concern with other forms of oppression, which modern feminists share. Any power structure that exploits one group of people for its own benefit is the root of all oppression within its framework. One of the tools of oppression Smedley examines and rejects is religion, which she, like Kelley and Arnow, believes contributes to the misery of women and the working class because it encourages self-abnegation in the hope of a spiritual reward at some nebulous future time—after death, of course: "The minister who passed through the town once a month had to preach of God and heaven and not of this earth" (94).

In Smedley's opinion, religion cooperates with the double standards of classism and sexism. During the flood, when Marie's family loses everything, a
"pious" woman at the section-house advises them to pray, but does not offer them shelter. Preachers tell the poor they must accept their poverty, for "'to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath shall be taken away!'" Smedley analyzes the religious injunction in terms of class oppression: "We belonged to the class who have nothing and from whom everything is always taken away . . . God seemed an unseen and unfair foe" (67). When Marie is caught "stealing" milk from her employer, she is fired because Mrs. Hampton plans to marry a Christian man who will make her "a 'respectable' married woman now, with standards such as Christians have. And she would have to obey him" (73). Those standards do not include either forgiveness or compassion, but are directly equated with "this society of revenge" that exploits and punishes the needy, a society that cynically claims people get what they deserve; but, Smedley says, "deserve is the word which the possessors use as a weapon against those they possess" (113). When Marie endures imprisonment because of her political activities on behalf of Indian nationalism, a priest denounces her: "'it is women like you who land in prison--you women who believe in study instead
of in a home or children'" (318). Smedley emphasizes the complicity between religion, sexism, and classism: the church is part of the established male authority which maintains women and the poor in a condition of enforced suppression.

Other feminist writers echo Smedley's rejection of traditional religion. Emma Goldman, too, repudiated God: in referring to "religious lies," she sees religion as the enemy of the people because it "preached submission" to "the God of the rich and the mighty." In Gilman's utopian world, the Herlanders are horrified by the accounts of religion from the outside world, which they see as a patriarchal insistence on revenge, a "hideous false idea" too upsetting to contemplate. Both they and the people of Piercy's utopia in Woman on the Edge of Time create an alternative concept of the spiritual based on compassion and immediate needs, not at all connected with authority or punishment. Other feminists, notably de Beauvoir and Mary Daly, have discussed the misogyny of the Church, carefully documenting the historical relationship between church and state, as well as the traditional aversion to and oppression of women exemplified in religious ideology. Daly recommends the
complete dismantling of orthodox, patriarchal-bound religion and the establishment of a new vision of spirituality that fosters and celebrates women's unique value, a "fall into the sacred and therefore into freedom." Elimination of the shame, guilt, and self-hatred imposed on women for centuries by the church fathers and their heirs is one of the major goals of feminism. Daly calls this "castration of phallic morality," a notion Smedley would undoubtedly have cheered.

Along with religious dogma, Smedley is adamant in her condemnation of the prison system. Here she is not breaking ground, for obviously previous writers, notably Dickens, have passionately decried unfair incarceration of the poor. Smedley's approach is different in that she stresses the sexist treatment of women. She herself was imprisoned and conveys that experience through Marie's eyes. Marie finds herself in jail because she is educated, independent, and defiant; she should be taking care of a husband and children, not involving herself in political work. Like Goldman, Smedley learns from her ordeal. Goldman called prison "... the best school ... here I had been brought close to the depths and
complexities of the human soul," Smedley expresses a similar response; of the Tombs she writes,

It is the shadow of Wall Street, for it is the detaining place for those who are poor and commit crimes because they are poor. It is sullen and cynical. Savage. A monument of the savagery within man. Men and women pass into it—slouching, defeated, debased...

I was one of the endless stream that passed in and out of the Tombs gates. It is good that I did. It is good that we should not forget; that we be forced to the level of the most miserable of men before we judge, and that we experience in our hearts again and again the suffering of the dispossessed. (315-316)

Smedley explores further inequities in the penal system, particularly the vast discrepancies in treatment between the wealthy and the poor, with its added element of racism:

... one woman of the upper classes came among us—a college girl in black silk and jet, charged with grand larceny. Fifteen hundred dollars worth of goods, stolen. Two days later she was released without trial. The young Negro girl who took her cell was sentenced the next week to the workhouse for petty larceny—for stealing a pair of green silk stockings! She was poor and black. (317)
There are other poor women in the Tombs, the most pitiful a twenty-year-old unmarried mother who forged a check to pay the hospital bill for her twin babies ill with whooping cough. Her children die, and she is sentenced to three years hard labor. The capitalist patriarchy uses the penal system against the poor, especially poor unmarried women, to maintain control and to assert its authority. If one has money or a husband, one escapes its horrors; if one does not, one pays with one's freedom. This is not to say that other systems of government do not also imprison masses of people, for obviously they do. Smedley criticizes the hypocrisy of a government--like the hypocrisy of its professed religion--which claims to embrace a democratic ideology based on the equality of all people, yet exercises brutal vengeance on women, the poor, and racial minorities.

This exercise of power is also seen in the way government uses war to exploit the working class. It is a subject brought out in more detail by Kelley and Arnow, but Smedley does carefully enumerate what she feels are the injustices of war--opinions shared by both socialists and feminists. The privileged classes involve themselves in war for political and
economic gain; but it is the working class poor who fight their wars for them. When Marie's surviving brother, Dan, decides to enlist—even war seems preferable to his hopeless existence—she tries to borrow money to support him and prevent him from going overseas. She fails and says bitterly, "I always knew that the men who would be sent to the front as common soldiers to be blown to pieces would be working men, that only rich men would become officers" (239). This is clearly a socialist sentiment, but Smedley's perspective on war is also feminist. Adrienne Rich and other modern feminists have suggested that if men were actively involved in parenting their sons the way women always have been they might not be so eager to sacrifice them. Some of this feeling is expressed as Marie watches the young soldiers march off to Europe:

I waited and watched for Dan. When columns of khaki-clad men marched through the city, I crowded to the edge of the pavement and searched their faces. It was insane that I thought I might find him. And yet I watched. The columns marched by—his face was not there. Or perhaps the mist before my eyes blinded me and I could not see him. Often the lines of brown faces and blue eyes all looked alike, all looked like him, my brother—marching, marching,
marching, their feet falling in the endless tramp of death. The music they marched to was to me but the drum-beats of death, the flag they carried but a black banner at half mast. The faces of my brothers marched by—thousands upon thousands of them—hungry faces, young faces, driven faces, sad faces. (246)

Smedley's account of the political inequities of war combines the socialist's recognition of its inherent classism and the feminist's anguish for her victimized brothers. It makes no difference that Dan survives the war. He is not allowed to visit Marie in prison when he returns. In a letter to her he recounts his experiences in battle—of course he was in the worst, "the most disastrous battles." He writes "not one word about democracy, glory or patriotism," but only of "his hopelessness and horror" while surrounded by mud, blood, and death. He determines that when the next war is called he will not fight: "'They can stand me up against a wall and shoot me, but I won't go'" (339-340). Smedley sees in war still another tool of the oppressor, used when the upper class feels its interests are in danger. It forces the very people it has dispossessed to protect the interests they do not share in, and it leaves women in fear for their loved ones.
Smedley's evocation of the injustices permeating marriage, abortion, rape, religion, imprisonment, and war are based on her conception of the entire white male supremacist-capitalistic oligarchy that pervades every aspect of the lives of women and the poor, creating and sustaining the class and sexual caste systems she, her contemporaries, and modern socialist-feminists deplore and want abolished. Throughout *Daughter of Earth* she consistently exposes the damage caused by patriarchy, an oppressive class-caste power structure that creates and exploits the conditions of sexism and classism. Marie's parents naively believe "that a harvest followed hard labor; that those who work the hardest earn the most" (56), a pitiful fantasy that Smedley undercuts with her perceptions of a system that lives off the labor of the working class and off the bodies of women without returning any compensation. Not only does the ruling class exploit the poor, but it also treats the dispossessed as though poverty were a sin for which the poor are responsible, thus instilling in the poor the same feelings of guilt and shame it perpetuates in women. Elly never returns to her children's school because her best calico dress
shames her before the other, better dressed mothers. As a child, Marie takes bananas bought at great price by her mother to a rich girl's party; they are treated with disdain, as she is. Landlords are free to steal from their tenants; doctors treat the sick poor like lepers; mining companies work the miners to death in hazardous conditions; police brutalize strikers and dissidents. Smedley is suspicious of bourgeois intellectuals who want to champion the working poor; they do not "understand the things that grow in poverty and ignorance" (232), the hatred and bitterness that warp and blind people, cause them to steal for survival, and later lie dead in a ditch, like her brother George, his life paid for by the Company with $50.00, the same amount Diaz paid for Marie's silence. After George's death, Marie walks in misery along Riverside Drive and evokes Smedley's most damning indictment of classism:

The streets were deserted that night and the light glinted on them as I walked . . . without weeping, without thinking. The heavens were black. There were trees and the Hudson was dark and silent, flowing . . . the earth cold and damp against my body when I lay face downward in Riverside Park. Above on the hill—on Riverside Drive, were the mansions of the wealthy . . . they who live and sleep in peace and luxury . . .
during the day they never work . . .
their women do not know what work
means. My mother was gentle, sweet;
my father did not drink so much as men
up there . . . their sons go and
study . . . my brothers hunger and die.
My brother . . . so young and so miser-
able. We pay for those up there . . .
we, such as my brothers and I. . . . (235)

Smedley questions the morality of one group of
people who demand less for others than they demand for
themselves; yet since this is the power structure she
confronts, she places her faith in the working class;
through Sardarji she iterates her belief that the
working class "can afford to think and dream and
create; it has nothing to lose by doing so; it has no
fear, no money, no petty possessions to cling to and
stumble over" (264). For Smedley the differences in
race and gender have been used by those in power to
suppress individual groups. Smedley avers that "there
is no place on this spinning ball of earth and stone
for anything but freedom," and she calls for "the great
masses organizing and fighting for it" (270), a revo-

cutionary cry for social change picked up again fifty
years later by another feminist writer. In Woman on the
Edge of Time, Piercy has Connie Ramos revolt against
the patriarchy because "power is violence. When did it
get destroyed peacefully?"
For all her real pain and disappointment, Marie is not "finished off"; she has, in fact, survived through courage and defiance. She has not allowed herself to become the submissive being she has always dreaded; she has not opted for the role of victim, or capitulated to the oppressive demands made on her sex and class. But while Smedley insists on the possibility of independence, she recognizes that giving her heroine the courage to walk away does not obviate the fact of oppression. Through *Daughter of Earth* the reader confronts the injustices of poverty, sexism, religion, prison conditions, and war—all related in the angry socialist-feminist voice which protests the supremacy of a power-focus that wants less for others than for itself. In her call for revolutionary social change, Smedley's novel fulfills both the demands of socialism and feminism. "Feminist art, by definition, must be a force for change, rather than a reflection of society as it is." Feminists can borrow from socialism the belief in interdependence, development of potential, and integration of human skills as they reject the isolation and alienation of capitalism. But while it insists on the social and economic equality of all people, feminism also works for an understanding
of women's experiences, inclusion of women in re-envisioning society, and the absolute elimination of sexual polarities which lead to the exploitation of half the human race. These goals Smedley understood fifty years ago and continues to assert through her only novel.

For Annis Pratt, feminist criticism and analysis "considers the relevance of a group of works, even if artistically flawed, as a reflection of the situation of women." *Daughter of Earth* is of considerable importance to feminists, particularly for what it has to say about the situation of women; and Smedley is important as a woman writer once lost to us and now available. Vivian Gornick advises us to

Consider the contribution a woman like Agnes Smedley made to the history of radicalism in this country. Reading *Daughter of Earth* today, one sees clearly the intimate relation between the struggle of women to live free lives and the struggle of the last two centuries to salvage human consciousness from the relentless oppression of modern industrialism. . . . With each day that passes, we become more acutely aware of the 'lost' history of women: the deletions and distortions, the elliptical references and half-truths in the official
histories that have served to wipe out the complex role women have played in the development of American politics and culture.

Smedley is no longer part of that lost history and can now be studied along with other rediscovered women writers for her significant role in the history of women's literature and the development of feminist theory. Her work, though "propagandistic" itself, is also a refutation of the propaganda of oppression and invites both close attention and thoughtful consideration as feminists continue to redefine the concept of mainstream literature and expand the function of critical theory.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth* (1929; rpt. New York: Feminist Press, 1973), p. 246. All further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.


3 At her request, Smedley's ashes were entombed in Peking's National Memorial Cemetery of Revolutionary Martyrs. Her inscription reads: "To Agnes Smedley, friend of the Chinese Revolution." She is still the only non-Communist buried in the Cemetery.

4 Lewis Gannett, Rev. of *Daughter of Earth*, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 10, 1929, p. 5.


8 Gornick, p. 203

9 Rideout, p. 12.


11 Adrienne Rich, _Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution_ (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), Chapter X.


21 Susan Griffin, "Rape: The All-American Crime," in Ruth, p. 311. See, also, Diane Herman, "The Rape Culture," in Freeman, pp. 41-64.


23 Griffin, p. 305.

24 Goldman, pp. 125, 143.


27 Goldman, p. 148.


31 Gornick, p. 206.
In the past decade, Tillie Olsen has become a prominent voice in feminist literature, especially noted for her revival of the works of "lost" women writers such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Agnes Smedley. Olsen's first priority has always been the lives of "ordinary" people; both her political and literary purpose is to lift them out of the silences imposed on them by society—to give them a voice.

Like Agnes Smedley, Olsen was born into the working class. The second of six children, she was from birth exposed to revolutionary ideologies. Her parents, Ida and Samuel Lerner, were involved in the Russian revolution of 1905; when it failed, they immigrated to Omaha, Nebraska, where her father was the state secretary of the Socialist Party as well as a farmer, paper hanger, and packing house worker. Olsen dropped out of school in the eleventh grade, but her
education did not cease. She read and was influenced by Whitman, Ibsen, Hugo, Lawrence, Mansfield, Cather, Schreiner, and a variety of socialist writers. In 1931 she joined the Young Communist League while she held jobs as a waitress, tie presser, packing house worker, and housemaid. Like Smedley, she spent time in prison for her political activism: she was jailed in Kansas City for circulating socialist material to packing house workers. In 1932 she moved to Faribault, Minnesota, where she led a quiet life recovering from the early stages of tuberculosis resulting from pleurisy she contracted in the tie factory. It was here, at the age of nineteen, that she began Yonnondio and also bore her first child, a daughter. In 1933 she moved to California and resumed her work with the YCL. In 1934 she was involved in the San Francisco Warehouse Strike; she worked in union headquarters, wrote strike articles for leftist journals, and was jailed again. "The Iron Throat," an excerpt from Yonnondio, was published in The Partisan Review; and, at age twenty-one, she was hailed by critics as a literary genius. In 1936 she met and lived with Jack Olsen, eventually marrying him and bearing three more daughters. She spent the next twenty years tending her family, holding odd jobs
to help support them, and continuing her activism. She did war relief work for the Congress of Industrial Organizations, served as president of the California CIO's Women's Auxiliary, wrote a column for People's World, and worked with the PTA to upgrade child care facilities and improve education. She did not resume her literary writing until the mid-fifties and was fifty when "Tell Me a Riddle" was published in 1961, winning the O'Henry Award for the best short story.

Olsen had thought the manuscript of Yonnondio was lost; but, as she tells us in her foreword, she and her husband rediscovered it while searching through old papers for another manuscript. She decided to revive it "in arduous partnership" with "that long ago young writer"; however, she did not rewrite or complete it, an important point about which I will say more later.

Yonnondio is "from the thirties" in that it is a consequence of the Great Depression and of Olsen's socialist activities in her youth. Like Smedley's Daughter of Earth, it is frequently angry and propagandistic; like Kelley's Weeds and Arnow's The Dollmaker, it is also frequently lyrical and melancholy. As a socialist writer, Olsen uses art as a weapon in the class struggle to describe the suffering and the
dignity of the working class; as a feminist writer, her focus is on the proletarian woman, for she recognizes that male socialists, while encouraging the resolution of women’s issues, continue to express patriarchal attitudes toward women, wanting them to "wait until after the revolution." By incorporating the feminist perspective and literary techniques such as the floating narrator, Olsen defies the leftist insistence on strict proletarian realism.

The title of her novel is borrowed from Whitman's poem about people lost to history, the "unlimn'd" who disappear without "a picture, poem, statement," all "black and gone and still and utterly lost."

"Yonnondio" is a Native American word meaning a lament for the lost; in Olsen's novel it becomes a lament for the working class, specifically for the proletarian woman whose potential talents have been sacrificed to the needs of others. She believes engaged writers have a responsibility to "voice the unvoiced ... to speak for all those millions like us whose lives are such that they can never come to writing, to give form to that experience which has never, or rarely, been part of literature." Olsen's concern with the silences surrounding women is echoed by contemporary feminists
who also recognize the loss to women's history and literature. Lynn Sukenick writes that "the emphasis on innate differences between men and women tends to reinforce women's voicelessness or impose at least a separate decorum on their speech. . . . For women writers, silence has greater relevance and danger (than for men), for it is all too congruent with their alleged destiny." Because there is such a gap in women's history, feminist writers and critics must, in Sheila Rowbotham's words, "listen very carefully to the language of silence," and try to articulate the experiences of women who have for too long been voiceless.

In "One Out of Twelve," a talk first given at the 1971 MLA Convention, Olsen discusses the "unprivileged lives" of women who never have the opportunity to create art. She points out that, statistically, there has been only one woman writer for every twelve men writers, a condition Virginia Woolf attributed to the lack of time and space—a room of one's own. Although women are starting to claim their rights to live and create independently of their traditional roles, the damage done to most women's lives as a result of discontinuity—i.e., traditional marriage, childbirth,
housework, poverty, patriarchal bias, etc.—leaves the 
"weight of things unsaid." Olsen urges her audience to 
rediscover those women like Gilman, Davis, Chopin, 
Smedley, and others who did write and were lost for 
decades; but she also advises us that there are women 
who have been silenced by racism, sexism, and classism, 
whose talents are never discovered; "We cannot speak 
of women writers in our century . . . without speaking 
also of the invisible, the as innately capable: the 
born to the wrong circumstances, the diminished, the 
excluded, the lost, the silenced. We who write are 
survivors, one—out of twelve." She also asks women 
to remember, however, that "not to be able to come to 
one's truth or not to use it in one's writing, even 
when telling the truth having to 'tell it slant,' robs 
one of drive, of conviction; limits potential stature; 
results in loss to literature and the comprehensions 
we seek in it."

In her feminist essay, "Silences: When Writers 
Don't Write," Olsen further defines her thesis: "The 
silences I speak of here are unnatural (as opposed to 
'natural' silences when writers gestate ideas); the 
unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into 
being, but cannot." What most interests her, similar
to Woolf's concept of "Shakespeare's sister," is the "unmined genius" of women who never write, "the mute inglorious Miltons: those whose working hours are all struggle for existence; the barely educated; the illiterate; women. Their silence the silence of centuries as to how life was, is, for most of humanity." 8 Marion Glastonbury, commenting on the lives of working-class women and explaining their absence from mainstream literature, notes that poverty, illness, and exhaustion leave behind "the dull thud of the commonplace," which the public generally does not want to know about. "This is the perennial routine of the undifferentiated poor," she writes, "whom we have always with us. Yet it is unusual in any century to hear about it in detail and quite exceptional for the woman to tell us herself." 9 But in Yonnondio, these lives are detailed by a woman whose personal experiences underscore the truths about which she writes. Yonnondio takes its form from "the dull thud of the commonplace," people whose surrendered lives do not allow them to exist comfortably, much less to actualize their talents. At the same time, Olsen's novel offers some hope: like Whitman, she insists that "human nature, if permitted to express itself freely and spontaneously, will be good." 10
Its empathy with the working class, along with its remonstrative tone, has won Yonnondio critical acclaim, especially from feminists. Annie Gottlieb, while admitting that it is too melodramatic at times, admires the novel's "clean sentimentality of compassion and outrage" and finds it moving in its portrayal of the "faltering caring" of parenthood against overwhelming odds. Deborah Rosenfelt states that its most compelling theme is "the tension between human capacity and creativity—the drive to know, to assert, to create, which Olsen sees as innate in human life—and the social forces and institutions that repress and distort that capacity." Rosenfelt also emphasizes the political consciousness of Yonnondio: "Olsen's enduring insistence that literature must confront the material realities of people's lives as shaping circumstances, that the very categories of class and race and sex constitute the fabric of reality as we live it, and that literature has an obligation to deepen consciousness and facilitate social change are part of her—and our—inheritance from the radical tradition."

Sandy Boucher says Olsen "has tried to bring to focus how much strength and dedication and creativeness there is in the work of women, in the 'ordinary' lives most
of us lead. She defends the right of this experience to be accorded its place in literature. . . ."  

Finally, and perhaps most persuasively, Catherine Stimpson comments simply that in *Yonnondio* Olsen's gift is "her ability to render lyrically the rhythms of consciousness of victims"; since they cannot tell their own stories, she becomes "their voice as well as their witness, their text as well as their mourner."

Stimpson's observation captures the essence of *Yonnondio*: it is in many respects a testament. Olsen serves as a witness to experiences she lived through and knows many others continue to suffer. Her regard is for the disadvantaged who numbly endure a "longing, a want undefined, for something lost, for something never known" (71), without ever achieving it. Although she is compassionate toward the working-class men, her focus is on the women, their private lives of anguish, desperation, and even hope. Like the other women writers in this study, Olsen is resolutely conscious of the sexism that impinges on the lives of all women and becomes especially oppressive among the working class. In her depictions of Anna and Mazie Holbrook, she reminds feminists that as long as classism works with sexism to exacerbate women's oppression, there is
no women's liberation: "The freedom of the emancipated upper-class woman is simply the other side of the unfreedom of the working-class woman."

Like Smedley and Arnow, Olsen explores the mother-daughter relationship, the damage done to it by sexism and poverty. The mother of four daughters herself, Olsen has a special knowledge to offer. Like Kelley and Arnow, she also studies the effects of parenting on women, the loss of self that accompanies the loss of space and time when women surrender their own needs to those of their children. Through her concentration on motherhood, she expresses ideas contemporary feminist critics and writers have also begun to explore. Olsen would undoubtedly understand why Susan Rawlings in Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" and the heroine of Alice Munro's "The Office" seek their own space away from house and family, and why they fail. Having sacrificed twenty years of her own creative life to the duties of wife and mother—without room or time for herself—she writes from personal experience. At the same time, however, she is not entirely negative; for she, along with other women writers, is interested in exploring the positive effects
of mothering—the nurturing, regenerative power of women—as well as the often destructive results. The use of the mother-daughter relationship in women's literature offers an alternative vision; as Cheri Register suggests, "viewing the mother-daughter relationship as a creative source for women can enhance our work in a number of ways: It offers us a gyne-centric focus, shifting our visions from reflections of subordination in patriarchy to ambivalent images of community and conflict, rebellion and reconciliation. . . ." This emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship current in feminist literature provides us with new ways of looking at literature and defining ourselves. Olsen's conception of the relationship in Yonnondio as well as in her short stories, especially "I Stand Here Ironing," is a significant contribution to the development of a new mythos for women. In her treatment of mothering, Olsen writes about "the complex, painful, and redemptive interactions between mother and child" and has helped later women writers "to treat that subject with a fullness and honesty never before possible in American literature." Unfortunately, as Olsen has shown, "almost no mothers—as almost no part-time, part-self persons—have created enduring literature—so far."
She has pointed out that few women writers were married or had children: for most women the exigencies of marital and maternal life preclude the opportunity to be creative. Anna Holbrook is her paradigm for the kinds of lives women lead which frustrate whatever genius might have flourished. She juxtaposes Anna with her daughter, Mazie, to underscore the loss of the mother's dreams, mirrored in the birth of the child's.

Anna, akin to Elly Rogers in *Daughter of Earth* and to Gertie Nevels in *The Dollmaker*, is wife to a man whose self-esteem is neutralized by job inequities forced on him by the ruling class. She is also mother to four children under the age of eight, slave to a house that is more prison than home. Like Judith Pippinger in *Weeds*, she wants to flee the house and family and achieve a spiritual kinship with nature. Like Elly, she has moments of anger and violence when she threatens and hits the children; but, also like Elly, she genuinely loves her children and wants more than anything for them to be educated so they can escape her fate: "'An edjication is what you kids are going to get. It means your hands stay white and you read books and work in an office'" (4). Rosenberg says Anna "wants for her children what she can no longer
dream for herself: the freedom to live fully what is best in them; to the extent the circumstances of their lives prevent this, her love is also her despair."

Throughout the novel, Olsen concentrates on this love turned to despair as Anna's hopes for a better life are constantly frustrated by her husband and the socio-economic environment surrounding her.

Although Anna is concerned about all her children, she has a special relationship with her eldest, Mazie, who at six-and-a-half is already "like a woman sometimes" because of the poverty and responsibilities forced on her. "'It's living like this does it,'" Anna reflects; it "'makes 'em old before their time'" (3). Mazie is introduced as a child who knows her identity: "'I am Mazie Holbrook . . . I am aknoven things. I can diaper a baby. I can tell ghost stories. I know words and words'" (4). Like Cassie in The Dollmaker, she has a vivid imagination which is thwarted by social pressure. The soul of a budding dreamer-poet finds itself caught in the tragedy of her family's poverty and anguish. She and her siblings are frightened by the tension between their parents and the sudden flashes of anger directed at them, which, as Olsen insists, result from the parents'
own fear as they struggle to survive.

Even amid the violence, however, there is also tenderness, particularly between mother and daughter. When Mazie is nearly killed by Sheen McEvoy, Anna nurses her bruised head and comforts her. When Anna's tension increases, Mazie removes the youngest children from the house, tending them until Anna recovers. Mother and daughter continually protect and nurture one another and are so psychically attuned that they share perceptions and emotional responses. During the more idyllic time on the farm, Anna moves rigidly "so that the happiness with which she brims will not jar and spill over"; similarly, Mazie is described as "hurting herself with beauty" (39). As they both respond to the new life, Mazie feels her mother is the most beautiful of women. But when it becomes evident their "new life" will not be permanent, Anna turns on Mazie, beating her so that she runs away feeling "hungry, degraded" (43).

Though Anna is sometimes violent and inflicts real pain on her daughter, Olsen implies that Anna can impart to her daughter essential truths about living. Anna "has had everything to grind out of life and yet
has kept life. Alive, felt what's real, known what's real. People can live their whole life not knowing."
Anna knows it is "better to be a cripple and alive than dead, not able to feel anything" (49). Her efforts to impart some of that knowledge are subverted by her husband and by the society that has assigned her to the ignominy of poverty and the oppression of sexism. But her efforts are also subverted by her own weaknesses: she can do very little for her children because she is uneducated, unskilled, emotionally unstable, and bound to the responsibilities of a house and the demands of a husband.

Anna is further subverted by the changes and demands of her own body. When she becomes pregnant with her fourth child, she completely withdraws from the family and household duties. Olsen uses some of the same lyrical quality found in Weeds to describe the physical and psychological effects of pregnancy. Like Judith, Anna is "caught in the drowse of it, drugged by the warmth, she let things be" (52). The children grow thin and quarrelsome, while Anna grows "monstrous fat as if she were feeding on them" (53). Fights erupt because Anna is so withdrawn and neglectful of the housework and children; Jim hits her and disappears for
ten days, leaving Anna and Mazie to care for themselves and the younger children through a violent winter storm. Olsen proves here what other feminist writers also suggest, namely, that women can work together for survival; and, like Smedley, she shows that mothers and daughters have a special bond that enables them to maintain life as they grow closer.

However, the moments of solidarity are disrupted by Anna's burgeoning pregnancy, which nauseates Mazie and makes her see all the world as swollen bellies—ugly in its fecundity. Olsen implies, as does Kelley, that repeated pregnancy uses up women's energy and suffocates everything around them. The very fecundity of women is another trap, divorcing them further from healthy relationships with their children and with their private selves. Through the vision of the daughter, Olsen emphasizes the ugliness of constant subjection to one's body. Anna becomes a stranger to Mazie as she sits with "a look of not seeing, although the black gates of her eyes opened on something too far to see to." She emerges from her reverie long enough to give Mazie a compassionate, troubled look and to reassure her before her face masks "into a stranger's again" (57). Anna has become someone
else in pregnancy, someone who frightens her daughter. Mazie, though fearful and disgusted, helps her mother prepare for childbirth, then flees to the henhouse, where she looks out on the sky's "strange face" which "grieved above her, gone suddenly strange like her mother's" (59). Mazie seems to sense the physical anguish of childbirth as well as the tragedy of an additional child for Anna.

Olsen's concern is with the debilitating effects of multiple pregnancies on poor women. Anna is not only poor, she is also undernourished, so that pregnancy is especially difficult for her. Furthermore, contraception is unavailable to her, and she is married to a man who considers her body his property. For the working-class woman compulsory pregnancy means complete suppression under the dictates of patriarchy. Anna already has three children she cannot adequately feed and clothe; a fourth only contributes to her own misery and that of the other children. Not only is her identity and freedom increasingly subsumed, but she bears the added pain of a mother who must watch her children suffer. Olsen's criticism is directed at the patriarchy, which has always forced women into the role of mother, but has not given them the help or
respect they need, and at the capitalist power structure which feeds off the poor while degrading them. Anna's fecundity is not a joy to celebrate, but is Olsen's metaphor for the death of woman's spirit and hopes. "Exclusive maternity," as Juliet Mitchell shows, is damaging to both mother and child; its only purpose is to serve the ruling power structure by preserving the nuclear family for the patriarchy's own psychological and political security, without concern for the resultant oppression of women and children.

To further detail the effects of compulsory pregnancy, Olsen treats Anna's fifth pregnancy in terms of physical and mental illness. Anna is lost in "a familiar faintness" that leaves her dizzy. She feels "the gaunt haggard house" towering over her and has nightmares that it will crash down upon them all as she tries to beat it back with a broom. Mazie, now eight, is again psychically one with her mother. As Anna's illness deepens, Mazie, too, begins having nightmares of death in which she sees "a woman with her mother's face grown gaunter, holding a skeleton baby whose stomach was pushed out like a ball, and behind was a wall like darkness and misshapen furniture . . . it would be useless to resist, to cry out, because it all was a voiceless dream to be endured" (78). As Anna
becomes increasingly ill and withdrawn, Mazie also withdraws into herself, insulated from the pain around her. Both mother and daughter are marooned in "the nightmare sweat" of poverty, illness, and fear they cannot beat back. Nevertheless, they continue their community with one another: when Anna faints from fever and anguish, Mazie becomes the child who is mother to the woman, nursing Anna and helping with the other children until her mother recovers. Through the daughter's eyes, Olsen describes the mother-daughter relationship much as does Smedley: it is clear that both authors, along with other feminist writers and theorists, understand the problems of the relationship, but they also see the nurturing tenderness inherent in the love between mother and daughter. Olsen, however, takes her study further than any other feminist writer has thus far: the daughter becomes privy to her mother's rape, experiencing with her the horror and degradation.

Olsen makes no overt political statements about rape, nor does she specifically expose and define the existence of marital rape. Instead, through suggestion and the heightened sensitivity of the daughter, she
enacts the rape, subtly understating it, thereby increasing its impact. Mazie hears her father come home--drunk again--and demand his "rights," forcing himself on Anna over her protests. Mazie's child's mind intuits the violence of her father's act:

"What was happening? It seemed the darkness bristled with blood, with horror. The shaking of the bed as if something were sobbing in it, the wind burrowing through the leaves filling the night with a shaken sound. And the words, the words leaping. 'Dont, Jim, dont. It hurts too much. No, Jim, No.' 'Cant screw my own wife. Expect me to go to a whore? Hold still.'" (98-99).

Through the eyes and ears of a child, Olsen conveys the degradation possible for women in marriage, magnifying it by having the daughter witness her mother's fate. Olsen further complicates the issue of marital rape with Anna's illness, the result of another pregnancy only four months after the last childbirth. Anna's mind and body are completely exhausted. The miscarriage which immediately follows the rape is not depicted as the tragic loss of a child, but as the brutalization of a woman. Anna lies broken and bleeding
on the kitchen floor, the victim of constant pregnancy and constant assaults from Jim. Her body is not her own; it belongs to her husband and babies.

The effects of the rape and miscarriage on mother and daughter are ruinous. Anna lies in bed in a half-coma, sinking into the "merciful numbness" of illness (105). The women who tend her insist Mazie must stay home to help with her siblings because she is "the little mother now" (106); but Mazie becomes resentful and rebellious, staying away long hours at a time, wandering the nightmare streets of the city, running back home "to something that had never been" (92). The daughter is estranged from her mother and lost to herself. At a time when she most needs Anna, Mazie is deprived of her mother, a victim of "the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" which Adrienne Rich writes about.

As her daughter flees her, Anna becomes obsessed with dirt and disease; she wants to get out of bed and sterilize the house because there are "so many ways of being sick" (109). Olsen turns Anna's obsession with the house and cleanliness into an eloquent testimony to the fate of women living in
poverty. Anna stirs and rises "in the great black and blue bruise of night," lays her feverish head on the cool windowsill, fists clenched, eyes holding back tears, "in knots of pain." She thinks of money, illness, violence, dirt, and her children:

"'What is happening to them, what will be? My babies, my children... Heavy to take up again, being poor and a mother" (109-110). She lies there for a long while, then wanders through the house: perhaps if she can scrub the house, she can expunge the nightmare. But when she turns to the children's clothes—which, like their lives, are "too far gone" for mending—her strength and fury ebb:

It was not that the clothes were beyond or almost beyond mending and that there were none others and no money to buy more; not that four children slept here in this closet bedroom, three on a mattress on the floor; not that in the corners dust curled in feathers, dust that was Dirt That Breeds Disease You Make Your Children Sick; not that one of her children had stood a few minutes ago (ah, which hurt more, the earlier averted face or this?) looking at her with pain and fear and pity for her in her eyes.

It was not any and it was all of these things that brought her now to swaying in the middle of the floor, twisting and twisting the rompers in
soundless anguish. It was that she felt so worn, so helpless; that it loomed gigantic beyond her, impossible ever to achieve, beyond any effort or doing of hers: that task of making a better life for her children to which her being was bound. (116)

In agony, Anna kneels on the floor with Mazie beside her. Trying to reassure her daughter, Anna says, "'I've got . . . to do something.'" But when Mazie asks what, Anna can only continue twisting the rompers and repeating over and over, "'I dont know . . . I . . . dont . . . know'" (117). Anna's nightmare is the torment of a mother who wants more for her children than she can ever give them. Because of her poverty, lack of education and skills, she is reduced to the misery of seeing her children go without the necessities of decent clothing and food. She wants to do something, cannot, and there is no one to help her, for the society in which she lives and raises her children regards her as an animal; poor women are "damn fools" who ought to be sterilized (101).

Though Anna is in many respects a flawed character (Olsen's didacticism sometimes undercuts her heroine), she does succeed as a representation of the courage of poor women. She cannot alleviate their poverty; but
she does not give up. Like Elly, she takes in laundry; like Judith and Gertie, she starts a garden so the family can have fresh vegetables and flowers to brighten their lives. However, she knows her efforts will fail. Her frustration with her life and with the imprisonment of the house lead her to reject it all and to prefer the outdoors. Like Mazie, she spends more and more time outside; and like Judith and Gertie she wishes she could escape the tyranny of the house: "a need was in her to be out under a boundless sky, in unconfined air, not between walls, under the roof of a house" (123). Anna divorces herself from her traditional roles: "a separation, a distance—something broken and new and tremulous—had been born in her . . ." (123). She dreams of being a gypsy, of camping out and never having to go inside again, but Ben reminds her that "'Mommas always go in'" (128).

Olsen contributes to the contemporary feminist theory about exclusive imprisonment in houses. Kelley, Woolf, Lessing, Arnow and other women writers have noted that when women are married to their homes, relegated to cleaning, cooking, laundering, and tending children, without experiencing houses as personal spaces or experiencing the alternative of open spaces as contrasts,
their lives are restricted, their spirits contract, and they are isolated from each other as well as from the world outside their homes. Men have always been allowed more mobility: the very fact that they are encouraged and expected to embark on a constant odyssey of departure from and return to the home has given them more freedom, with the home as a sanctuary from the world when they need it. Women, on the other hand, are identified with the home: a woman can have no place in the home because she is the home; she has no place in the outer world because it generally does not welcome her. Ann Douglas Wood has shown that the house "has become realized, fixed" into a prison for women. It can be seen in terms of iconography of the womb, but in a new, destructive guise: it is barren and poisonous rather than a cozy, life-affirming nest. Therefore, it is understandable that Anna regards her home as a threat and wants to escape. For a short time she succeeds.

Anna's desire to escape the house and separate herself from her roles as wife and mother takes on an added dimension as Olsen continues exploring the strictures of home and family, juxtaposing them with the innate spirit of the woman, hidden for years, but
freed with the opportunity to wander at will away from her responsibilities. She roams the streets with Mazie, Ben and Jimmie, looking for dandelions—a "green leafy vegetable" for their table. She no longer wears the "mother look," no longer snaps and commands. Instead, she relishes her freedom: "'I dont remember since when I been out just walkin like this.'" (129). Anna turns the sojourn into a joyful experience. She blows dandelion fluff in the air ("a hundred wishes"), braids the stems, carries Jimmie when he grows tired, encourages the children to appreciate the beauty of nature, becomes humorous, gentle, and kind. Eventually they find an empty lot—significantly, where a house used to sit, but has disappeared, giving way to nature. The heavy fragrance of flowers and the peaceful buzzing of bees contrast sharply with the stench and cacophony of the city. Anna teaches the children to suck honey from the flowers and to admire their coloring and velvet surfaces as she tells them stories from her own youth. Mazie notices "a remote, shining look . . . on her face, as if she had forgotten them, as if she had become someone else, was not their mother anymore" (132). At first Anna's transformation frightens Mazie, but she gradually catches her mother's mood, relaxes, and begins to enjoy
the outing. Embracing her daughter and stroking her hair, Anna sings: "O Shenandoah, I love thy daughter / I'll bring her safe through stormy water!" (133). She smiles radiantly at her daughter, until Mazie's heart leaps at the promise of her mother's love and protection: "A fragile old remembered comfort streamed from the stroking fingers into Mazie, gathered to some shy bliss that shone despairingly over suppurating hurt and want and fear and shamings—the harm of years" (134). At the same time, however, the child knows her mother's relaxed happiness "had nought to do with them, with her; happiness and farness and selfness" (134). Still, Anna does not completely lose contact with Mazie: she continues stroking her hair, spinning a web of solace that cocoons her daughter, sheltering, healing, and transforming her.

Rich has commented that "a daughter can feel rage at her mother's powerlessness or lack of struggle—because of her intense identification and because in order to fight for herself she needs first to have been both loved and fought for." Mazie's anger and resentment at her mother had taken shape in rebellion against her mother's role and the duties assigned her
as she is forced into the same role. With Anna's separation from the role, she is able to offer her daughter not only the love and tenderness she needs, but also something of her own identity. No longer only a mother, she shows Mazie the essential woman, the person she is, and provides her with a little hope for herself. The mother-daughter relationship takes on a regenerative power, wherein the mother breathes new life into her daughter, becoming truly "maternal" in the sense of nurturing on a level apart from the traditional roles. The human love expressed from mother to daughter--the surmounting of tragedy and the responsiveness to beauty--heals old hurts and encourages renewal and hope.

But, as it must, the moment shifts back to reality, back into time--just as the wind shifts, bringing back the stench of the packing house, a reminder of their suffocated lives. At that moment, "something whirred, severed, sank . . . between a breath, between a heartbeat, the weight settled, the bounds reclaimed" (135). Anna senses that "now something bad's going to have to happen. Again" (142). Although Olsen believes in the regenerative power of women, she is realistic about the pressures of society.
The change in the wind with its accompanying stench is a reminder that the power of love can be crushed by circumstances which do not honor that power. Additionally, the shift at this point is Olsen's recognition that Anna's transformation will not be allowed to grow, that mother and daughter are still trapped.

Anna resumes her role as a mother, but continues to worry about Mazie, who, like Judith in Weeds, laments that she has no "place" because she is a girl—a fact Anna knows is true. Olsen makes it clear that Anna is a sensitive human being with an identity of her own no one in her family is aware of. Olsen has also made it clear that home and family are killing Anna. In the novel's conclusion, when the wind changes again and cools the air, Anna hopes it means life will at least become more tolerable, but the reader knows that for her it never will. Still, Olsen's concern is to reveal Anna's courage and determination. Even in the face of extreme poverty, illness, death, disease, and brutality, Anna continually struggles back from the cruelest setbacks to try again. The survival instinct in Anna is what makes her a heroine and what gives some hope to her daughter, who, having had a glimpse of the
strong, creative woman under the maternal trappings, may have gained some understanding of her mother and also have been given an alternative vision for her own life so that she may eventually make a place for herself.

Olsen has shown the reader the tragedy of their existence—two creative, imaginative females locked into their assigned identities by their economic class and gender roles prescribed by capitalist patriarchy. Through her depiction of mothering, she writes "about the complex, painful, and redemptive interactions between mother and child" and opens up for other feminist writers the possibilities of exploring motherhood as a creative, regenerative force in life and as a topic for serious consideration in literature. At the same time, however, Olsen recognizes the oppression of institutionalized motherhood and admits motherhood is distorted in the face of constant psychological, physical, and political constraints. Thus, there can be no "happy ending" for Anna and Mazie because such a resolution does not exist for working-class women as long as class and gender inequities dictate their fates.

In order to explore the oppression of women more fully, Olsen expands her focus on Anna as mother to
include her experiences as a wife. As I have dis-
cussed in earlier chapters, most socialists recognize
the proletarian marriage as the most directly oppres-
sive for women primarily because of the inherent
economic disadvantages. Feminists acknowledge the
truth of this position, but also insist that the poor
married woman is victimized by sexism as well as
classism. The proletarian man does not abuse his
wife simply because his poverty frustrates him, but
also because he views his wife as his inferior, his
property, subject to his whims and punishments. Just
as repeated pregnancy and arduous living kill the
working-class woman's spirit, so also does the sexism
in marriage. Mary Jacobus observes that "our mothers
were killed by the burden and complexity of womanhood."26
As I will show later, Olsen's plan for Anna, had she
completed Yonnondio, was to have her heroine finally
succumb to these pressures.

One of the most debilitating pressures the
working-class wife endures is the contempt of her
husband. Jim Holbrook cannot conceive of any other
role for women than as wives and mothers: "'what other
earthly use can a woman have, I'd like to know?'" (2).
He is irritated by what he calls "woman's blabbin."
He stays in evil moods for weeks at a time, comes home drunk to beat Anna and the children: "He had nothing but heavy blows for the children, and he struck Anna too often to remember." His brutality affects Anna, who also hits the children, "in a blind rage, as if it were some devil she was exorcising." Unlike Jim, she feels remorse later as she recalls their tear-stained faces: "'Twasn't them I was beatin up on. Somethin just seems to get into me when I have somethin to hit'" (8). Jim's rages leave her alone in the "cold, malignant" light of dusk, sitting with "her head bent over her sewing in the attitude of a woman weeping. ... Some horror, some sense of evil seemed on everything" (8-9).

Through Anna's experience with horror and evil, Olsen conveys a woman who so completely belongs to a man that she must endure beatings, watch her children being struck and in turn find herself indulging in the "heart of maternal darkness" Rich describes. She must also suffer Jim's condemnation. He claims she never helps; but Anna's proud rejoinder is, "'You get plenty. Kitchen help, farm help, milkin help, wash-woman help. And motherin too'" (55). Jim maintains that he never asked for her "goddam brats," as if they
are solely her creation. He blames her because the children are starving, yet it is he, not Anna, who deserts them.

Jim is a man "blinded with despair," which he solaces with liquor, demanding his right "'to spend two bits once in a while to make me feel good!" (77). Anna, though, has nothing to make her feel good. Jim bitterly regards his family as a woman with her brats hanging around his neck; he feels diminished: "'no man has any business having 'em that wants to stay a man. Not unless he knows he's goin' to hafta take crap'" (81). Instead of trying to help his children and understand that his wife is ill with her fifth pregnancy in eight years, he feels sorry for himself and becomes vindictive: "'Goddam woman--what's the matter with her anyhow? Don't even have a wife that's a wife anymore--just let her say one word to me and I'll bash her head in'" (81).

Jim's self-pity intensifies: he feels the dark walls of the house enclose him "like a smothering grave," never stopping to think what the house is doing to Anna (81). When he comes home, she no longer welcomes him; he is aware only of her "mistreatment" of him, the baby's squalling, the children's nagging, and
the odor of wet diapers—all of which he only endures for brief periods, but which Anna experiences every waking moment. Jim feels increasingly less a man and envious of younger men without his responsibilities. The tension building up within him and the fact that he blames his wife lead directly to his raping Anna.

I have previously discussed the rape from the perspective of the daughter's exposure to her mother's violation. Here I will analyze what Olsen portrays as the political causes and effects of marital rape. The law, since it regards a wife as her husband's property, has rarely acknowledged a woman's right to autonomy over her own body. As Susan Brownmiller shows, "rape, as the current law defines it, is the forcible perpetration of an act of sexual intercourse on the body of a woman not one's wife."

Jim not only wants his "rights" with his wife, he wants to "screw" her. He wants her to "hold still" while he violates her for not meeting his needs, for not measuring up to his expectations of a wife. He projects his own anger, self-hatred, and frustration on his wife, who becomes the cause of his problems; therefore, attacking her is his way of "getting back" at her and, by extension, at society. Kate Millett has
stated that "in rape, the emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt, and the desire to break or violate personality, take a form consummately appropriate to sexual politics." The act is a product of the "rape culture" which silently condones violent aggression against women. Olsen's narrative account of rape conceptualizes the feminist concern with sexual politics; as long as women can be victimized with impunity by their husbands, they continue to be victimized by society: "A woman regarded as her husband's physical property is a raped woman."

However, Olsen does not focus only on Anna as a victim; she also sees Jim as a victim of the patriarchal system. There are times when he is tender with his family—but he is a product of patriarchy and a victim of capitalism. His own frustration is the "cry from a million throats . . . the things in his mind so vast and formless, so terrible and bitter, cannot be spoken, will never be spoken—till the day that hands will find a way to speak this; hands" (103). After the rape and miscarriage, he gently tries to reconcile with Anna, "silently making old vows again, vows that life will never let him keep" (119). He works even harder and races home with "a nameless fear on him, and his hello . . . almost a sob of joy" (122). The effects of
the rape on Anna, however, cause her to be "addled, nervous, brutal, lost," a stranger to herself (122). When Jim clumsily asks if there is anything he can help her with, her repressed fury blazes at him: "'If you cant see what needs doing, just dont trouble to ask . . . why dont you go set like you always do . . . .'" (122). He finally gets work at the packing house and wants to celebrate his job and Independence Day; but Anna bitterly asks, "'What independence we got to celebrate?'" (139).

Anna's character is almost subsumed at this point by Olsen's own anger and rather heavy-handed expression of her heroine's hopelessness. The reader understands Anna's misery and rage; yet when Jim tries to make amends and finally thinks he has something going well for him, which he hopes will be good for Anna and the children, too, the reader finds it difficult to empathize with Anna's unrelenting bitterness, with her refusal to believe in any future for them. On the other hand, through Anna's outburst Olsen wants to stress the working class's real lack of independence. Jim and Anna do not participate in the freedom and promise of their country. Instead, capitalism has created the conditions for poverty and sexual violence,
driving a wedge between husband and wife and perpetuating the bondage of women. Rosenfelt points out that "the Holbrooks do not merely suffer—they are oppressed, in quite specific ways, as a working-class family in a capitalist system. The whole fabric of the book deals with how poverty, exploitation, and what today we would call sexism combine to extinguish gradually the very qualities Olsen values most." Those qualities, including individual human dignity, appreciation of beauty, realization of hopes and dreams, are crushed by the classism and sexism which infect the working class, leaving victims lost to one another and to history: "Something is lost in the passage of every soul from one eternity to the other," Olsen writes, "something pure and beautiful, which might have been and was not: a hope, a talent, a love, over which the soul mourns, like Esau deprived of his birthright."

In order to investigate the oppressive conditions which assault and exhaust the working class, Olsen constructs the framework of classism. She illustrates in the Wyoming coal town the misery of the working-class miner and his family: the men work for a pittance in the mines, which are potentially their tombs, while
the women and children listen for the whistle's screaming announcement of death. The worker's fate is to relinquish his dreams as he is suffocated by the demands of the privileged class: "Earth sucks you in, to spew out the coal, to make a few fat bellies fatter. Earth takes your dreams that a few may languidly lie on couches and trill 'How exquisite' to paid dreamers" (7). Olsen, like Smedley, demands social revolution: "Someday," she warns, "the bowels will grow monstrous and swollen with these tired old dreams, swell and break, and strong fists batter the fat bellies, and skeletons of starved children batter them" (7).

Olsen describes the dark side of nature to symbolize the lives of the working class. The air is cold and damp; the wind mocks the people, throws coal dust in their faces, and sounds like the "tired voice of dead people" (13). The nights are coal-black, and the days are "shaken with rain and restless wind," bringing "the sound of fear, undefinable, into the air" (22). The sky has the "look of an eyelid shut in death" (22).

In Rascoe, Wyoming, the Holbrooks live in a three-room shack, do laundry without soap in a washtub,
eat fatback and cornmeal, stuff newspapers in their worn shoes, and endure the nauseating stench of garbage piles. They try to find ways to "skimp off of everything that had long ago been skimped on, somehow to find more necessities the body can easiest do without" (21). In addition to the daily privations, they worry about mine explosions that cause instantaneous death, the victims "sealed in an open grave." Jim survives one of these explosions and promises Anna they will move to a farm, to a better life. In the meantime, the children do not have enough to eat; Anna must do housecleaning and laundry for others until her hands split; and Jim continues to risk his life restoring dilapidated shacks because pulling them down is unpaid labor.

Olsen provides a year-long hiatus for the Holbrooks on a Dakota tenant farm. Here, for the first time, the family can breathe. Husband and wife work together, and the children flourish with good food, fresh air, and opportunities to be children. Nature is more benevolent: the only sounds are birds' songs, the air is clean and smells of flowers rather than garbage, and the sky is filled with stars. The wind is now symbolic of "a great rush of freedom" (32);
it is laughter coming down from the open skies, "blowing something more than coal dust out of their hearts" (33). Their despair gone and hope restored, the Holbrooks look forward to a new life; but Olsen warns that the government is run by "vultures: it doesn't make any difference whether it's Republican or Democrat; the same hand pulls the strings" (44). Tenant farming is thankless because "the bank swallows everything up, and keeps you owin 'em" (39).

Despite the promise of a better life, the Holbrooks are doomed by a system that continues to oppress them. With summer's heat and fatigue comes the certain knowledge they will fail. Anna begins hitting the children again; Jim resumes his own abusive behavior, and the children are again fearful. The autumn air that follows is "sweet with mellow death" (47). Mazie tries to escape the tension, to follow one of the stars, but it sets behind the horizon, "something vanishing with it," leaving behind only darkness, "standing very tall and black about her" (48). This presages the winter months, Anna's withdrawal, and Jim's desertion. The respite for the Holbrook family can only be temporary because Olsen will not let her readers forget that they are the proletariat.
which is pursued and exploited throughout their lives. For them there can only be the coal mining town or the industrial city; and for them these places mean death.

When the Holbrooks reach the industrial city (possibly Chicago), where Jim hopes to find work in the packing houses, they are greeted by the stench and noise—a parallel with the conditions in Rascoe. Like Arnow, Olsen decries the effects of capitalism as a rape of the land, the air, and people's lives, producing a Dickensian nightmare:

Monster trucks shake by, streetcars plunge, machinery rasps and shrieks. Far underneath thinly quiver the human noises—weeping and scolding and tired words that slip out in monosyllables and are as if never spoken; sighs of lust, and guttural, the sighs of weariness; laughter sometimes, but this sound can scarcely be called human, not even in the mouths of children. A fog of stink smothers down over it all—so solid, so impenetrable, no other smell lives beside it. Human smells, crotch and underarm sweat, the smell of cooking or of burning, all are drowned under, merged into the vast unmoving stench. (63)

Olsen tells her readers the stench is a proclamation:
"'I rule here.'" It "speaks for the packing houses" which are the heart of the city, "pumping over the
artery of viaducts the men and women who are the streets' lifeblood" (64). This heart does not pump for the workers, but for the privileged: it pumps "to nourish a rare and cherished few in purest air where scents flower under glass and in hundred-dollar perfume bottles" while the working class sickens in the city's miasma (64). The effects of the city on the Holbrooks are immediate: Jim's face is heavy and swollen; Anna's face thins, the skin tightened over the cheekbones, her eyes becoming huge and dark "fading until the eyelids shut forever"; Mazie's face is marked by her "wondering dazed eyes"; Will's face is set in a scowl, and his eyes hurt "with the hurt of not understanding, then insane with anger"; the youngest children grow feverish and become silent (64).

Angrily comparing the human wreckage to the dump, which figures prominently in their lives, Olsen says the city is a human dump heap "where the nameless FrankLloydWrights of the proletariat have wrought their wondrous futuristic structures" from the refuse, but will never realize their imaginations and talents. The dump is the children's only playground:
Children—already stratified as dummies in school, condemned as unfit for the worlds of learning, art, imagination, invention—plan, measure, figure, design, invent, construct, costume themselves, stage dramas; endlessly—between tasks, errands, smaller children to be looked after, jobs, dailinesses—live in passionate absorbed activity, in rapt make-believe. (137)

Like Arnow, Olsen worries about the effects of cities on the lives and imaginations of children. In the city the children are divorced from one another and from their parents. At school Mazie and Will are singled out as country bumpkins. When the other children attack Mazie, she is punished for defending herself, while her brother furiously denies she is his sister. The three oldest children begin defying their parents, running away from the dilapidated house. Like Reuben in The Dollmaker, Will rebells and wants to return to the country. Jimmie pounds on the walls, screaming to be let out, and later Ben, too, becomes sullen and destructive. Mazie is knocked down by a drunk in the street and called a "stinking little bitch." The streetcar carries "set, intent faces" past her, "terrible faces, masked in weariness and hate and lust." The distorted buildings around her block
the sky, which becomes "only a slab of one draining color, vanishing into darkness." She learns that whites are jealous of blacks and foreigners who threaten their jobs. The street and people enter into Mazie "like death" as she sees "the shattered sun die in a city of bruises over the decayed line of houses and buildings" (92).

In the city, Anna is unable to keep the house clean, because the grime is everywhere and seeps back in. The sewer contractor spits in Jim's boot and calls the workers "women" who "suck titty." He increases their workload as he verbally degrades them. Olsen's outrage becomes inexorable as she describes the "God Job" that tyrannizes over these people's lives, yet when it is lost it deprives the workers of every necessity and every small pleasure, leaving them with the indignity of looking for jobs that do not exist. Like Smedley, Olsen wants the workers to organize, "till the day millions of fists clamped in yours, and you could wipe out the whole thing, the whole goddam thing, and a human could be a human for the first time on earth" (83-85).

Olsen also directly addresses her middle-class readers, demanding they look at the suffering of the
dispossessed in the nation's cities;

Perhaps it frightens you as you walk by, the travail of the trees against the dark crouched house, the weak tipsy light in the window, the man sitting on the porch, menacing weariness riding his flesh like despair. And you hurry along, afraid of the black forsaken streets, and look no more. But there are those who have looked too much through such windows, seeing the pain on everything, the darkening pain twisting and writhing over the faces, over and about the lamp like a wind to blow the flame out. (95)

Like Smedley, Olsen sees the lives of the working class as a "voiceless dream to be endured" and protests vehemently against their suffering. She knows the importance of exposing the oppression of the poor: "To set down the facts of insult and injury is an act of retaliation and self-discovery ... It can only be achieved by wrenching the ears and opening the reluctant eyes of privilege. . . ." 

Olsen, like Arnow, takes her readers into the heart of industry and reveals the conditions the workers must live--and die--under. Olsen and her father had both worked in meat-packing plants; consequently, she speaks from experience of the conditions she describes. Comparing the plant to Dante's Inferno ("abandon self,
all ye who enter here" (151)), she depicts a world of
the damned, of half-seen figures working on the Beedo
system (a process of accelerated production which
exhausts the workers and creates unnecessary dangers)
in the cloud vapor from scalding vats. The workers
are in a half-faint from the 112 degree heat, the
noise from the skull-crushing machines and the scream­
ing of the animals, the stench and slipperiness of
water and blood. Young girls and women work in casings
"where men will not work" (152). It is a place of
"death, dismemberment, and vanishing entire for harm­
less creatures meek and mild, frisky, wild--Hell" (153).

In describing the fate of the animals, Olsen
also describes the fate of the workers: "Indeed they
are in hell; indeed they are damned. Steamed boiled
broiled fried cooked. Geared, meshed" (164). A
worker drops from a heart attack, is carried away,
docked for his time, and charged for the company am­
bulance (165). A steam pipe breaks and live steam
hisses down on four women who "writhe in their crinkling
skins, their sudden juices" (165). Other women, in­
cluding one who is pregnant, run away, scalded. The
foreman accuses them of carelessness and threatens to
dock them if they do not return to work.
The meat-packing plant, like the coal mine, is Olsen's metaphor for the greed of capitalism which, in its lust for increased production, literally consumes the working class, without ever including it in its profits. Her depiction of capitalism's effects concentrates on the resultant corruption of human dignity and value, the decay of society. As Ernst Fischer wrote in 1959, "in a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it." Olsen's Yonnondio, using art as a political tool, examines classism and sexism and the lives these injustices smother. Olsen also calls for a change, a revolution which denies capitalism its privilege and demands equity for the oppressed. Like other socialist-feminist writers, Olsen uses her art as a vehicle for social protest against exploitation, thereby helping to foster change. In a talk given at Emerson College in 1974, Olsen expressed her artistic purpose and commitment to social change: "My vision is very different from that of most writers. . . . I don't think in terms of quests for identity to explain human motivation and behavior. I feel that in a world
where class, race, and sex are so determining, that that has little reality. What matters to me is the kind of soil out of which people have to grow, and the kind of climate around them . . . . I want to write what will help change that which is harmful for human beings in our time."

Had she finished Yonnondio, Olsen intended to expand on the aspect of sexual politics, but she did not feel she had the energy to grapple with the tensions of what she felt would be an eight-hundred page tome. She had planned to involve Jim in a strike at the packing house which would revive Anna's strength and politicize the older children. She also intended to portray the women at the plant as strike leaders. However, the strike would fail, and Jim would desert the family again. Anna would find herself pregnant a sixth time and would die from a self-induced abortion; but Mazie would grow up to become a writer and activist, her mother's memory part of her story. Significantly, Olsen's plan for finishing the novel would have continued her interest in the themes of mother-and-daughterhood, pregnancy, abandonment, and death. But it is also significant that Olsen did not complete Yonnondio. Her
own life as wife, mother, activist, and worker speaks to the problems of creativity and completion. The fact that Yonnondio is not finished is an implicit testimony to the incomplete lives of the working class, to the silences surrounding her characters as well as her own earlier life. She offers a commentary at the end of the novel which captures the problems of the working-class artist: "Only fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps remain--telling what might have been. Yonnondio! Yonnondio!--unlimn'd they disappear."

Olsen believes she was "destroyed" by the lost time in her own life, yet is fortunate "when so many like me have been denied the opportunity to come to any expression of their lives . . . How can I be bitter when I have been able to do what so few of my sex and class have had the chance to do . . . You see I am a survivor. Any woman who writes is a survivor." Yonnondio, by giving voice to social injustice, helps to fill in some of the empty spaces in women's history and insure that it will not disappear.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


2 Tillie Olsen, Yonnondio: From the Thirties (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974), p. viii. All further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

3 See Jane Flax, "Do Feminists Need Marxism?" Quest, 3, No. 1 (Summer 1976), 46-58.

4 Quoted in Boucher, p. 28.


12 Rosenfelt, pp. 389, 404.

13 Boucher, p. 29.


15 Rowbotham, p. 42.


18 Rosenfelt, p. 397.


20 Rosenfelt, p. 397.


25 Rosenfelt, p. 397.


27 Rich, chapter X.


29 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1970; rpt. New York: Ballantine, 1978), p. 61. "Among the poor," Millett further states, "the female is subject to greater indignities than anywhere else, as she is the only creature in the world over whom an exploited man can claim superiority and 'prove' it by crude force" (p. 141).

30 Rich, p. 269.

31 Rosenfelt, pp. 398-399.


33 Glastonbury, p. 181.


36 Quoted in Rosenfelt, p. 404.

37 Rosenfelt, pp. 390-394.

38 Quoted in Boucher, p. 30.
Harriette Arnow was born in 1908 in Wayne County, Kentucky, where her parents, Elias and Mollie Jane (Denney) Simpson were descendants of Kentucky settlers. After high school, she took correspondence courses in creative writing from the University of Kentucky and spent two years at Berea College before dropping out to teach school. Her experiences teaching "backwoods" children and boarding with a poor Kentucky family afforded much of the material for her first three novels, the Kentucky Trilogy. Eventually Arnow returned to college and finished her B.A. in 1930 at the University of Louisville.

In 1934 she moved to Cincinnati where she worked as a waitress, read widely (she was especially influenced by English, French, and Russian novelists), wrote short stories, and began *A Mountain Path*, her first novel and the first in her trilogy, published in 1936. Her second
novel, *Between the Flowers*, was never published. In 1938 she met Harold Arnow, a Chicago newspaperman who was looking for a job in Cincinnati. They married in 1939 and moved to the Cumberland region of southern Kentucky. They both wanted to write and felt their retreat to the country would provide them the necessary solitude to pursue their goals. But the tragedy of their first child's stillborn death and the need for money forced Arnow to return to teaching. In 1941 their daughter, Marcella, was born and they moved to Detroit, where Harold joined the staff of the *Detroit Times*. They lived in tenement housing during the war; that experience, including Arnow's closeness to her female neighbors and her efforts to garden in the city, found its way into *The Dollmaker*. In 1946 their son, Thomas, was born. In 1949 *Hunter's Horn*, the second novel in the trilogy, was published, became a best seller, and was well-received by the critics, many of whom commented favorably on its mythic presentation of a hunter's obsession with chasing a fox and have compared it with Ahab's obsession with Moby Dick. In 1950 the Arnows moved to a farm outside Ann Arbor. Despite the idyllic setting, Arnow had difficulty finding time to write because she was raising two children and tending
the farm while her husband commuted to his job in Detroit. It took her ten years to write The Dollmaker, the last novel in the trilogy. It was published in 1954, became a best seller, and was second to Faulkner's A Fable for the National Book Award. It won the Friends of American Literature Award and was voted the best novel of 1954 in a Saturday Review national critics poll. Paramount Pictures has purchased the film rights to The Dollmaker, which Jane Fonda plans to produce. The Dollmaker was followed in 1960 and 1963 by two social histories of Kentucky: Seedtime on the Cumberland, which won several awards, and Flowering of the Cumberland. Arnow has written two more novels, The Weedkiller's Daughter (1970) and The Kentucky Trace (1974). The Weedkiller's Daughter, set in suburban Detroit, includes a minor character dubbed "The Primitive," who is significant to The Dollmaker and about whom I will say more later.

Arnow once commented to her biographer, Wilton Eckley, that she did not "really consider herself a novelist or a historian, but a mere storyteller." Eckley agrees with her self-assessment. Arnow is not a great master, but a "quality writer who rejected the fads of experimentalism in favor of storytelling and characterization, with a particular emphasis on women characters, perhaps because she recognized the paucity
of substantial women characters in American literature." Hers is a simple style, though not simplistic, which "recognizes the conflicts, contradictions and overlaps of life." 3

Most of Arnow's contemporaries were equally impressed with the author and The Dollmaker, though some had reservations about her style. When it was published, it was hailed as "an unflinching and compassionate novel of contemporary America." A New York Times reviewer, Harnett Kane, averred that "if 1954 produces more than one or two other novels with the power and compassion of this superb novel, it will surely be a banner literary year." Kane further pronounced it "a masterwork" that is "a must, for all except readers of soap-opera epics." 5 However, not all of the early reviewers liked The Dollmaker. Some found it "a depressing picture of human defeat and bewilderment," and some even regarded it as a failure—"a surfeit of intensely drab reading," with a heroine so "capable of almost infinite suffering" that the novel is, in fact, nothing more than soap opera. 6

Nevertheless, most of Arnow's critics have praised The Dollmaker. Joyce Carol Oates calls it "... our most unpretentious American masterpiece," with a "vision of life as cyclical tragedy--as constant struggle." 7
Glenda Hobbs feels that The Dollmaker is "big and brilliant" and "dramatizes the frequently skirted conflict between a mother's attempt to be both true to her art and watchful of her children's welfare and happiness." Barbara Hill Rigney believes The Dollmaker "contest(s) the human condition and allows its heroic female protagonist to question both society and God, and to find them wanting." And Barbara L. Baer, along with many readers, says that The Dollmaker is Arnow's "finest work and deserves its growing reputation."

Arnow's major concerns in The Dollmaker are with poor women raising large families and trying to keep them together; with the difficulty of being a mother who also wants to create art—which she understood from personal experience; with the problems of poor people who migrate from the country to industrial cities, losing both their natural environment and their sense of community and personal identity; and with dreams that fade to wishes and finally vanish. She is also concerned about the effects of religious hypocrisy, ethnic prejudice, capitalism, and war—the last which Arnow herself said was "the real demon" in The Dollmaker.
In a large, complex work like *The Dollmaker*, every aspect of the novel impinges on every other aspect, serving as both refrain and progression to the terrible tragedy which serves as its climax and the melancholy, yet affirmative, moral decision which serves as its conclusion. Since Arnow uses the dichotomies of country versus city, nature versus technology, and the individual versus society as her pervasive themes, I will begin with a discussion of these dichotomies, then illustrate how they underscore other themes I will also explore.

Arnow is not as overtly angry as Smedley and Olsen, nor as ironic as Kelley, but her novel attains the same level of social protest and is the most successful of the four novels. Through her talents as a storyteller, her lyrical style, and her social conscience, Arnow creates a protest novel that maintains its aesthetic appeal even as it involves the reader in the working-class lives she wants us to understand. The focus of her work is the concern with a Kentucky woman's struggle to maintain her dignity and her identity against overwhelming social demands that she "adjust" to the external and mediocre standards imposed on her.
Like the best of the regionalists, Arnow emphasizes a particular setting and dialect and concentrates on characterization. She has a clear preference for the country setting of Ballew, Kentucky over the industrial setting of Detroit. Her focus on the Nevels family's migration from country to city during the last year of World War II is the archetypal journey from the pastoral—in this novel an Edenic atmosphere frequently envisioned as the Promised Land for Gertie—to the urban, where the migrants are trapped in a metaphor for Hell. Consonant with this archetype is the schism Arnow sets up among her primary characters. Gertie, Cassie Marie, and Reuben are connected to the land and to nature; conversely, Clovis, Clytie and Enoch are connected to the city and to technology. The first three are unable to "adjust" when they are uprooted; the latter three do adjust, but, as I will show later, Arnow believes the consequences of their adjustment are as tragic as the others' inability to conform.

Of Gertie Nevels, Bernard Kalb once wrote that here is "a splendid example of a character in search of a novel." Arnow told him that for ten years she
had "tried to shake her off" so she could tend to her children and farm chores, "but day in and day out Gertie awakened me at four in the morning—sometimes at three—and we worked until I had to wake my husband and children around seven." The tremendous pull Gertie exerted on Arnow is captured in her final realization in The Dollmaker. Gertie dominates the novel: she is a big, hulking woman, larger than most men, who is also possessed of strength of will and purpose. She is sensitive, yet courageous. Arnow does not give her readers the sun-bonneted, barefoot stereotype of a country woman that Homer Anderson envisions; nor does she offer the other stereotype of the attractive saint who presides cheerfully over her brood and accommodates herself to any change. Instead she creates a novel for her heroine that tells the truth about working-class women and becomes a "chronicle of their fight for survival against what one knows will ultimately prove to be overwhelming odds." In this novel she places Gertie, who is "a huge and ugly woman, flat-cheeked, straight-lipped, straggledy-headed, her face grayed with tiredness and coal dust, even her chapped lips gray," with "straight, almost bushy black brows below the bony forehead."
She is so homely that she made her mother weep when she was born and scares herself when her image rises before her in the mirror. But she is a woman who accepts her physical appearance and even smiles wryly when she recognizes the ugly visage in the mirror as herself.

Though Gertie is physically homely and seems uncomplicated, she is a woman of sensitivity and artistry. Though inarticulate—Clovis frequently reminds her that she has never had a way with words—she communicates her feelings through her detailed carvings. Furthermore, Gertie is sensitive to nature, with an inborn responsiveness to earth, sky, plants, and animals, as well as a gentle responsiveness to her five children. Arnow often portrays her comforting people, particularly children, wives and other mothers. Gertie is an earth mother, a Demeter figure who is married to a "tinkerer"—a man who is equated with machines and technology and who interprets her sensitivity as mindless wool gathering.

But Gertie is also a stoic. When the reader first sees her, she is riding Dock, a mule not fully trained to the saddle, in a pouring rain, desperately trying to get her sick child, four-year-old Amos,
to the doctor in town. She manages to steer the terrified mule into the path of an army car to stop it for help. When it is clear that Amos' condition is life-threatening (he has diphtheria and is choking), Gertie uses her whittling knife to perform an emergency tracheotomy that saves the child. In Gertie's hands, the knife represents both art and life, but it will later become an instrument of death when Clovis uses it to commit murder. After one of the soldiers watches her cut into her child's throat he admiringly says, "'Lady, you can't be afraid of nothing'" (28). In her own environment, and when she must act, Gertie is fearless; however, as we shall see, when she is forced out of her environment, she learns to know fear—and despair.

Arnow creates a heroine we can respect, but she does not make Gertie a superwoman. Gertie has faults, the most significant of which is her hoarding of money. For fifteen years she has secreted money in a hole in the lining of her coat pocket toward the day when she can buy a farm of her own. Even after she moves to Detroit, she continues to skimp on food and gifts for the children in the hope that she might
save enough money to return to Kentucky and the land. In Gertie's defense, Arnow stresses her belief in the importance of place—not necessarily "property," but space to grow and move around in. Gertie's frugality is not for herself alone, but also for her children. Saving to buy the Tipton Place represents a dream of freedom from the burden of tenant farming as well as a safe and pleasant place for her children. For her, it means independence for all of them. With the $315.00 she has carefully saved plus her brother's insurance money, she has enough to buy the farm: "She wouldn't have to wait. She wouldn't have to depend on Clovis. She wouldn't have to ask old Uncle John for credit. She wouldn't have to ask anybody for anything" (75). Arnow believes it is important for Gertie, and for all women, to have a space of their own that they have won outright and to be able to stand up for it and themselves without depending on or asking anyone else for help. "The owning of property," Oates writes of The Dollmaker, "has nothing to do with setting up boundaries...it is a declaration of personality, an expression of the profound human need for self-sufficiency and permanence." It is also important that
it be a place of her own choosing, with open spaces and growing things around it. Like Judith Pippinger in *Weeds*, Gertie needs room to breathe. A house is not enough. Arnow, like Kelley and Olsen, is concerned about the influences of houses on women. Gertie is especially affected by confinement: "Mrs. Hull's house, like her mother's and most houses, smothered her." (104). Significantly, when Gertie is forced to move to Detroit, her environment is reduced to that of a small house filled with mechanical contraptions that hem her in. She feels cramped partly because of her size, but more important because she has lost nature and finds herself crowded out by technological advances.

To explain what happens to Gertie and her family in Detroit, Arnow emphasizes the impact of social pressure, both from within the family and from society. Gertie is "shamed" by her mother into giving up the Tipton Place. Here Arnow concentrates on the effects of a poisoned mother-daughter relationship, wherein the mother uses her psychological power to force her daughter to conform to her own standards. Like Judith, Gertie has a loving relationship with a father who adores her; but Gertie's mother
is the bane of her life. Of the four novelists in this study, Arnow is the only one to discuss the psychological cruelty of mothers. Gertie's mother is a self-induced invalid (her most telling ailment is constipation), who uses illness to manipulate other people and to avoid responsibility. She is a complainer who makes her daughter feel guilty for her very birth, because Gertie almost "killed" her, a fact she never lets her daughter forget.

Neither woman can bear the touch of the other: the mother shrinks from Gertie, and the daughter stands "like a stone woman, only her hands clenching and unclenching with the effort not to shiver at her mother's kiss" (61, 63). Furthermore, the two women have contrasting attitudes toward religion. Gertie imagines a laughing Christ who is a laborer and who is sympathetic to people—a Christ of life and joy. Her mother, on the other hand, is a fundamentalist who believes in a God of vengeance. She almost relishes the image of her dead son in hell, for it gives her more opportunity to gain self-pity: "'How could God do this to me?'" she wails; but Gertie sardonically comments that "'it was Henley he done it to, Mom'" (63). Her mother turns on her with "a flame
of something close to hatred brightening her tear-wet eyes. 'Maybe if'n it hadn't been fer you, Henley would ha give hisself to God'" (63). She blames Gertie for the fact that Henley died unsaved:
Gertie did not set a good example for him because she indulged in the "sin" of dancing and stood "'stiff-necked an stubborn in the face uv th Almighty God'" (63).

Interestingly, though she is a Christian, the mother does not appreciate Gertie's quoting from the Bible and the Constitution. Like Joe Daly in Detroit, she thinks such "spouten" is unpatriotic during war (65). Gertie's mother is contrasted with Aunt Kate, Clovis' mother, who, though worried about her son, Jesse, missing in action in Europe, still has time to be kind to Gertie and to help her with her children. But Gertie's mother is portrayed as a selfish, judgmental, hypocritical woman who is finally her daughter's worst enemy. When she gives Henley's insurance money to Gertie, she recalls that he had said if Gertie had not worked so hard, the family would have lost its farm. Gertie weeps over "her mother's unexpected gratitude, never mentioned through all these years. Maybe her mother had
loved her" (74). But the "maybe" is an important qualifier, for it is Gertie's mother who pressures her to give up her dreams and follow Clovis to Detroit. She uses Gertie's father to shame her: "'He's lived to see his own flesh and blood bring disgrace to his bowed gray head'" (141). She prefers Gertie's sister, Meg, who is "'a decent woman. She ain't a sneaken an a slippen around a conniven to leave her man an make her children fatherless. Fatherless. Fatherless'" (141). Her mother reminds Gertie of her marital and social obligation to "'leave all else an cleave to thy husband.'" She succeeds in forcing Gertie to follow Clovis to Detroit, to do what he wants to do, without "'holding him back.'" She accomplishes her goal with "something like satisfaction in her face" as she implies Gertie is ruining her children, for they are only safe from sin as long as Clovis is around to protect them (142).

Throughout her mother's harangue, Gertie stands before her looking like Cassie "when somebody caught her in a piece of meanness" (142). It is because her mother is able to make her feel small and mean that Gertie finally gives in, much to the dismay of Reuben
and Cassie. She even convinces herself that somehow she had always known that the Tipton Place would never be hers, just as "Christ would never come out of the cherry wood" she has been carving for years (145). The social pressures become ineluctable when John Ballew—who had earlier criticized Clovis and understood her desire for her own land, sides with her mother: "'I can't let a piece a land come atween a woman an her man an her people. . . . Clovis wouldn't like it down in a holler away frum th highway. . . . A body's got tu give in tu reason. . . . Th right's on her side. Yer youngens does need schools, an when Clovis is a maken you a good liven you ought to go to him if he wants it that away'" (145, 146).

No one asks Gertie what she wants or what she thinks would be best for her children. The pressures to conform have already begun; even before she reaches Detroit, society sends its urgings for "adjustment" into the backwoods of Kentucky and into Gertie's long-held dreams. Significantly, all preparations for the move are taken from Gertie. Her mother even buys the new clothes, with Henley's insurance money. Afterwards, Gertie's mother appears only in letters, but they capture her voice and her dominance in Gertie's life as
she continues to chide, condemn, and blame her daughter while she herself sells her husband's beloved farm and lives off her dead son's insurance. Through Gertie's faint-hearted acquiescence to her mother, Arnow demonstrates the power both of maternal control and social duty over the individual. Alone and unable to stand her ground, Gertie is swept into a fate she senses and abhors, but is unable to prevent. The dream of the country, and the memory of the Tipton Place, will continue to haunt Gertie as she struggles with the ugliness she encounters in the city. Arnow uses the past association with nature, and with lost hopes, to underscore the effects of the city on Gertie and her family, and to protest the conditions they must endure. Arnow has carefully set up The Dollmaker as a novel that "details the effects of war and economics on women, who also feel most acutely the disintegration of their families."

With the transition from Kentucky to Detroit, Arnow delineates the dichotomy between country and city, nature and technology, which is felt immediately and is to be continued throughout the novel, further imaged in the added dichotomy between the individual and society. Everything else in the novel is explored in terms of these dichotomies, the physical aspects of which
encroach on all emotional, artistic, and inter-social aspects of the characters' existences. The juxtaposition of Kentucky and Detroit objectifies the contrast between beauty and ugliness, simplicity and needless complexity, life and death. For Arnow, the country is the lost ideal, Gertie's forsaken Promised Land, replaced by the hellish nightmare world of the city. Like Olsen, Arnow uses the stench of the city as the first omen of the bleak life to come: "the air... was like a stinking rough dough pushed up (Gertie's) nose and down her throat" (148). It is clear that the odor is that of putrefaction and death. When a black woman Gertie meets on the train tells her that her new home is called Paradise Valley, reminding her of Christ's promise to the thief, "'this day thou shalt be with me in paradise,'" Gertie defiantly replies, "'I'll allus think that a body oughtn't tu have tu die first to git it—that is, at least a little—a paradise on earth'" (152).

The part of her that had been Gertie Nevels in Kentucky dies as she enters the city. She transforms from a strong, resilient woman to a fearful, timid person as the city people glare meanly at her and call her a hillbilly, "spitting the words out as if they
shaped a vile thing to be spewed out quickly" (156).
Her first experience with regional prejudice will continue to escalate when she later meets other people, particularly religious hypocrites. She is further affected by the unexpected cold of the city, symbolic of its cold heart and the cold of technology (the refrigerator Clovis buys is an "Icy Heart").

The climate is matched by the physical dreariness of the city. There is no open sky or cheerful community; instead, there are only "a few gray wind-battered shapes hurrying down dirty streets past dead-faced buildings" (167). Gertie had thought they would at least have a better home, but when she sees their ugly housing project, ironically called Merry Hill, which is in the middle of Detroit's war plants, she is appalled by the buildings she "had never thought of . . . as homes" (169). The images of the plane and the train that figure so prominently in the novel, appear immediately as symbols of technology and eventual death. The sounds of the city make Gertie "think of some many-voiced beast out there, hungry, waiting for them all" (577).

Inside their small, dingy home, Gertie finds appliances bought on time, for Clovis has traded
Kentucky poverty for the tyranny of the installment plan. A radio blares into the rooms, drawing the children into its fantasy world; and a clock, ticking monotonously and inevitably, becomes "the voice . . . that had jerked Henley from the land, put Clovis in Detroit, and now pushed her through days where all her work, her meals, and her sleep were bossed by the ticking voice" (210). The house itself is surrounded by "telephone poles and wires, smoke, steel-mill light, and steam." The "hill" is "a great pile of coal." The water is suspiciously brown and smelly (171). The children's school, which was supposed to be a benefit of the city, is treeless and surrounded by a fence. It has no gym, no library, and no activities. To Gertie it seems more like a prison or a humming machine. The world of the working class, as opposed to that of the upper class in Grosse Pointe, is a physical landscape that reflects the dreary hopelessness of their lives. Arnow's description of the world the Nevels family has entered prepares the way for the deleterious effects it will have on her characters, most notably the children.

In *The Dollmaker*, Arnow describes a major feminist concern: the rights of children to healthy lives and to their individual identities. She has a particular
sympathy for working-class children, especially those who have been uprooted and transported to a place that is unhealthy for them. Reuben and Cassie are afraid of the city and can never adjust to it. Clytie and Enoch, through the auspices of the radio, movies, and especially peer pressure, learn to be competent capitalists and to conform, while at the same time learning to be ashamed of their mother and their heritage. The principal at the new school tells Gertie the children will adjust: "'they all--most--adjust . . . learn to get along, like it--be like the others--learn to want to be like the others.'" Gertie replies that she only wants them to be happy; she emphatically does not want her children to adjust to this new world. The principal sympathetically tells her there is some hope that one or two children will resist, but most "'will, I fear, adjust better than their mother'" (207).

The fact that Gertie will have difficulty conforming to the social pressures of urban life will have a direct bearing on the children closest to her. Reuben and Cassie are Gertie's kindred spirits and, like their mother, are horrified by what they encounter in Detroit. Reuben loves the country, farming, and hunting. He cannot adjust to school or to the neighborhood, and he
is personally hurt by the prejudices of people like Joe Daly. When Gertie does not defend him against Daly, yet tries to talk with his teacher (ironically named Mrs. Whittle because she wants to whittle the children to her standards), Reuben incurs only more humiliation and pain. To Mrs. Whittle—a teacher who is bigoted against "hillbillies" like Gertie—Reuben's problem is that he will not cooperate: "'That is the most important thing, to learn to live with others, to get along, to adapt one's self to one's surroundings . . . . It is for children—especially children like yours—the most important thing—to learn to adjust'" (335). Arnow clearly questions the whole process of such conformity: it lulls people into accepting anything that happens and can have dangerous consequences for society, as evidenced in her reference to Nazi Germany.

Arnow pities Reuben: "'he was reviled and persecuted, but not for Jesus. His sin was that he was Reuben. . . . He was the poor" (339, 340). Despite his courageous defiance of the city and its prejudices against him, Reuben is destined to misery unless he learns to conform to its demands on him. Gertie knows this and urges Reuben to try to get along for his own sake. Inevitably and ironically, Gertie pressures her
son just as her own mother had pressured her. To Reuben this is the ultimate betrayal. Gertie tries to convince him that "'it won't allus be like this,'" but she knows she has "taken his hope away. A body couldn't live without hope of something" (340). Reuben rejects both the city and his mother and returns home to Kentucky, leaving Gertie feeling the guilt and despair of a mother who has betrayed her child: "she could born a fine and laughing boy baby and make him grow big and strong, but inside him his laughter died" (350). Gertie feels like Judas who betrayed innocent blood. Reuben's problem, as his teacher and Clovis told her, and she now realizes, was herself: "her never kept promises, her slowness to hide her hatred of Detroit. . . . Her love had ever been a burden, laying on him false hopes that, dead, weighed down still more the burden of his misery" (368-369).

Gertie betrays her son by not defending her right to the Tipton Place and by making mistakes in judgment that directly affect him in Detroit. Her weakness and ignorance cause his contempt for and rejection of her. At the same time, however, I think Arnow wants us to understand the plight of the
individual who is caught by societal pressures she is not equipped to handle. Reuben has always admired his mother and does not understand the confusion she is laboring under in the city. Finally, Arnow indicates, it is the city with its demands on the individual, its refusal to allow for differences, that causes the rift between mother and son. Its potential for causing dissension and chaos continues to ripple through the Nevels family until it touches the relationship between Gertie and Cassie.

Five-year-old Cassie is her mother's favorite child. Mother and daughter share a special bond: they are both most at home in the country, where their close relationship is a nurturing one. Cassie is a fey child who invents an imaginary playmate named Callie Lou, who is a metaphor for Cassie's free spirit and imagination. Callie Lou is as important to Cassie's identity as the cherry block (to be fully discussed later) is to Gertie's. In the country, where Cassie is free to be herself, Gertie is indulgent of her daughter's fantasy, even entering pleasantly into the games with Callie Lou. Her kindness, love, and acceptance prompt Cassie to say, "'I see little girls in your eyes, little bitty girls,'" to which Gertie warmly responds, "'They're little Cassies'" (54). But
in the city, the love between mother and daughter is threatened by social pressures that insist Cassie give up Callie Lou because "talking to herself" is crazy. Since she believes she failed Reuben, Gertie determines to save Cassie by giving in to the demands of her family and the alley: she firmly tells the shocked Cassie that "'there ain't no Callie Lou'" (379). Even as she forces her daughter to go outside and play, she wants to "tell her that Cassie wasn't killed by this killing of Callie Lou" (380). But, as Arnow insists, killing Callie Lou is death to Cassie, who becomes a defeated, lost child who will now become the city's next victim because she has lost the protective shield of her imagination and has been estranged from her mother. On the last day of Cassie's life, Gertie sympathetically rocks her daughter, wanting "nothing except the privilege of holding her" (399).

The death scene is preceded by an important irony. Before Cassie disappears, Gertie notices that the other children have accepted Callie Lou, inviting Cassie to include the witch child in their games, but Cassie mimics Gertie's own words: "'There ain't no Callie Lou'" (401). Gertie suddenly realizes "all this business of doing away with Callie Lou had been a mistake" and
goes outside to tell her daughter she can keep her fantasy. What follows is one of the most heart-rending scenes in literature. Arnow does not spare her readers the graphic, horrifying details of a child's death. Cassie has not given up Callie Lou, but has "hidden" her in the nearby train-switching yard, where she slips away to play with her creation. When Gertie finally locates her, she sees the danger immediately. Technology interferes as she tries desperately to warn Cassie: the noise of an airplane overhead and of the train backing toward Cassie drown out her screams, and a fence prevents her from reaching her daughter. As she helplessly watches, she wonders why she had not known "that sooner or later (Cassie would) go away with Callie Lou" (404). When Cassie sees the danger, she holds Callie Lou in her arms, trying to protect her as Gertie had earlier held and protected Cassie. The train backs over her legs, amputating them, and the child bleeds to death in her mother's arms as Gertie tries to find the words that will save her.

Cassie's horrible death expresses Arnow's hatred of the city and its technology, which she regards as fatal to the imagination. Its society and its machines are instruments of death that work
together to create a hell that snuffs out individualism, even in a child. It is a place where Cassie is no longer free to run and play with her imaginative creation, but must die because she does not fit in: "Callie Lou and Cassie's deaths are analogous to the ultimate destruction of Gertie's cherrywood by the urban processes of standardization. All are externalizations of psychic torture as the procrustean bed of society tailors its inhabitants to 'fit'—killing, of course, in the process."

Arnow compels the reader to look on the pitiful death of an innocent child and on the nervous breakdown which her mother suffers, demanding that the reader see and feel the tragic consequences of forced adjustment and almost satanic technology. Gertie's days become "a long gray thing sliding past--tight like a funnel, but she must somehow squeeze through" (421). On phenobarbital given her by a neighbor, she hallucinates about chasing Callie Lou and about trying to reach Cassie through the fence, her arms never quite long enough. She knows that if she had remained in Kentucky, Cassie would still be alive. Her guilt intensifies when Clovis tells her he wishes he had known she had the money. Clearly, if Gertie had been honest with him, he would have told her to buy the farm and wait for him to return after the war. While Arnow empathizes with her heroine
and blames Detroit, she also finds Gertie culpable
for the tragedies which befall her and her family.

Reuben's flight from the city and Cassie's
needless death are Arnow's most damning indictments
of social pressure on children; but she also describes
the more subtle, insidious effects of Detroit on
Gertie's remaining children. Enoch learns to solve
his problems with the bullies in the alley by be­
coming a street fighter on whom the other children
look as though he were a god. Clytie becomes en­
raptured with radio soap operas and takes sensual
pride in her body and the attention it gets from
men. Watching her, Gertie thinks of "Eve listening
to the serpent, looking at her own body, becoming
aware of the forbidden fruit" (326). With her new
interests in movies, school, Girl Scouts, and baby­
sitting for money to spend on entertainment and
clothes, Clytie moves farther away from Gertie:
"a lonesomeness for the Clytie who used to be rose,
sharp as a fresh sorrow. In this new life of hers
she didn't need a mother" (326). Even little Amos
is already taking an increasing interest in the
activities of the alley. Of these children Oates
writes, "The basic split in the American imagination
between an honoring of the individual and a vicious demand for 'adjustment' and conformity is dramatized by the gradual metamorphosis of the surviving Nevels children." Arnow sees the city as hell, with the beguiling voices of the radio and the movies as the continual urgings of mediocrity. She frequently writes of "lost children" continually drifting by Gertie's door; and she sees the Nevels children as lost, far away from home, forever unable to return. The scent of lilacs—the symbol of remembrance—fills Gertie's home and keeps her thoughts on Cassie and the past. She tries to tear her thoughts away from death and loss but cannot: "If she tore herself from Cassie, there was Reuben waiting, and if from Reuben, the lost land called, and then became a lost life with lost children" (459). Gertie is like the biblical Rachel crying in the wilderness for her lost children.

The effects of the city on Gertie and her children are matched by its devastating impact on the Nevels' marriage; but the seeds for their problems already existed in Kentucky. Gertie does not appreciate Clovis' mechanical skills, calling them "tinkeren," which insults him; and Clovis does not appreciate her
artistry, which seems to him idle "whittlen":
"'if'n you must waste elbow grease on whittlen,'
he tells her, "'couldn't you make a ax handle er
somethen somebody could use?'" (40). He also
accuses her of being "'jealous of machinery like
it was another woman'" (83). Gertie hates what
machinery represents--exploitation--thus there
is an inherent schism between them which explodes
later in Detroit.

Gertie seems more concerned about money than
about Clovis' needs, but also feels guilty about
keeping her savings a secret. She is afraid he
would spend it on another truck if he knew about it.
There is precedent for her misgivings since Clovis
had earlier sold her heifer to buy tires; and, of
course, he does spend her money on appliances later
in Detroit. Gertie can also be cruel. She refuses
to let Clovis wake the children to say goodbye, and
turns her head away from his kiss before he leaves
for his army examination. Understandably, Clovis is
not at all sure if Gertie loves him. On the other
hand, there are moments of genuine tenderness between
the couple. Gertie is often seen comforting Clovis;
and Clovis clearly only wants a better life for his
family, which he believes exists in Detroit. The
problem is that Gertie wants to make a better life for them all in the country, where she knows she can "manage" quite well. But Clovis does not want her "'doen work fitten fer a mule--an the youngens grown up knownen nothen but work!'" (85). Gertie's hatred of the city and of technology is disclosed when she tells Clytie that her father would be "'better off in th war than in one a them factories'" (97). Gertie and Clovis are clearly at an impasse: "Why couldn't Clovis and she have wanted the same things? He'd wanted Detroit since the beginning of the war" (126).

Of course, because under patriarchy the wife must accede to the husband's wishes, what Clovis wants prevails. Social pressure forces Gertie to abandon the Tipton Place and follow her husband to the city. The changes in the marriage resultant from this migration are immediate and are foreshadowed in the attitudes of the children toward their parents and in the experiences of other married women. Gertie realizes that her children sometimes seem to prefer Clovis, especially Clytie and Enoch who are most like him, but also because Gertie has "always been the one to give them work and scoldings. Clovis had brought the fun. . . . She'd never had the time" since she was always working the
farm and finding ways to scrimp (186). In the city, as Gertie's strength ebbs, the children move still farther away from her.

Arnow uses the attitudes of other women toward their husbands to shed light on the disintegration of the Nevels marriage. Max—who despises her husband and is miserable in marriage—is frequently heard crying on the other side of Gertie's wall: "Hopeless it had been ... filled also with sorrow, lostness, aloneness, the aloneness more than anything." Gertie tries to comfort her: "'Don't cry, honey; don't cry. It won't allus be like this . . . 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.'" But Gertie does not understand the real cause of Max's sorrow. Apologetically, hopelessly, she softly replies, "'But I don't wanta nest'" (214). Later, Max humorously says, "'Who in hell . . . wants to try to make pies like Mother makes when it's so much simpler to let Mother make um inu first place?'" (428). Arnow creates Max to explore the misery of a woman who finds that she does not like marriage and does not want to be a wife. Interestingly, Gertie's phrase, "'it won't allus be like this,'" is the same one she later uses with Reuben. Arnow's point is that as long
as Max is unhappy in marriage and Reuben is unhappy in Detroit, it will always be the same for them. It is significant that both Max and Reuben solve their problems by escaping them.

Max's predicament, met early in the Detroit move, underscores Gertie's own growing marital problems. When Gertie and the children first arrive in Detroit, Clovis does not meet them at the train station, and they must find their own way to Merry Hill. Gertie must try to understand how all the new contraptions work by herself. When Clovis finally gets home the first thing he does is ask for supper. Clovis is working so hard on the night shift at the factory that the couple rarely see one another anymore. The fact he has to sleep during the day disrupts Gertie's and the children's lives at home and causes resentment. Clovis will not let her take a factory job to help out, using as an excuse the fact that she is "'too big for the factory machinery,'" and is "'so given to wool gathering she might get a hand or her head smashed the first day'" (253). His criticism of her eventually becomes ridicule. He begins issuing commands to her, talking to her as though she were a child, criticizing her cooking, housekeeping and mothering. In turn, Gertie blames him
for making her stingy and for forcing her to live in a housing project: "it was he who made her live like this" (267). She continually dreams of Kentucky and still scrimps money for the return. But Clovis "borrows" her money to pay his car debts, then spends it on an Icy Heart refrigerator that ruins their food. Clovis has become the selfish, demanding husband of the traditional marriage, and like the women of the other three novels in this study, Gertie as a working-class wife becomes the victim of patriarchy.

Of necessity, Gertie eventually finds herself conforming. She takes in Lena Anderson's laundry and carves pieces for extra money—until Clovis manipulates even that aspect of her life. He feels that her carvings are ugly, so he sets up a jigsaw with patterns and proceeds to create a "factory" to automate her talents in the form of identical, uninspired, painted jumping-jack dolls, "smoothing" out the roughness from her carvings. He reduces her talent to the mediocrity suitable to the city.

Gertie resigns herself to her role as Clovis' wife: "'It's what a woman's got to do, I reckon . . . Foller—take on a man's kind of life like Ruth,'" but she is never fully convinced. As Clovis berates her,
she stands "tongue-tied . . . by him as by her mother. Would she in time feel toward him as toward her mother? She couldn't live with him and feel that way" (571). Clovis' changed behavior is largely the result of his own frustrations and disappointment in the city; but it is also due to the fact that he has become, like Gertie's mother, part of the vast machinery of social pressure and conformity, condemning the individual and prostituting art to ugly hack work. Finally, he has also become the husband in a working-class family, the patriarch who oppresses his wife and children.

In The Dollmaker there is not one happy marriage. Though Arnow sympathizes with working-class men, her major concern is for the women, who are most affected psychologically by the problems inherent in marriage. Arnow discusses their lives in terms of holes: "we've all got holes--an they all gotta be stuffed with something," Max says (429). Gertie, taken out of her natural environment, must conform and sacrifice to her husband's goals. She eventually fills the hole in her life with gardening, bringing flowers into the alley and regaining some of her association with nature. Sophronie Meanwell's solace is in liquor, Kathy Daly's in religion and her daughter's trousseau (ironically,
Maggie becomes a nun), Lena Anderson's in drugs:
"Everybody had holes, but a body had to live with holes, fill them" (436).

Later, when Lena bitterly says that Homer
"'never sold his birthright--he thinks he's found it. But he stole mine,'" Gertie replies, "'I guess . . . we all sell our own--but allus it's easier to say somebody stole it'" (440). While Arnow empathizes with her women characters, at the same time she does not absolve them from complicity in their own fates. The women have made choices to stay in their marriages and to keep their families together. To blame their husbands alone, or even society, for all their problems is too easy. The women, too, are responsible for their lives. Arnow clearly believes women have the option to leave—as Max does; but it is important to note that Max has no children, so the option is possible to her in a way it is not to the other women.

Arnow also believes in trying to keep families together while struggling to maintain one's identity and artistry. She criticizes the pseudo-intellectual Lena who constantly bemoans her inability to paint because she is so busy with her husband and baby. Arnow
juxtaposes her with Gertie, who, with five children, still manages to find time to carve. From her own experiences trying to juggle marriage, motherhood, and writing, Arnow understands the difficulties for women who try to combine careers. Adrienne Rich has observed that

\[
\text{to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding back, a putting-aside of that imaginative ability, and demands a kind of conservatism.} \ldots \text{to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination.}
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Arnow, who had the advantage of being able to write in the country, but who had lived in Detroit, demonstrates what happens to the female imagination in the city. Gertie's roles as wife and mother, the demands on her to help keep her family alive when Clovis loses his job, result in her finally making her carvings "useful" to earn money. In one sense, this is an artistic tragedy, but in a more important sense, as I will show later, Gertie's decision becomes an affirmation of life—for Arnow the highest artistic achievement.
Another major theme in *The Dollmaker* is religious hypocrisy. Once again the experiences in the city are pre-figured in the country. Gertie's mother is a fundamentalist whose chief sorrow over the death of her son centers on his lack of salvation. She believes in "a terrible God" of retribution and takes satisfaction in the cruel image of Henley's damnation. Gertie bitterly thinks to herself that her mother "could backslide and go to hell if she's so certain Henley'll be there" (36). Gertie cannot comprehend the unfairness of a belief that "Henley . . . had died with no sin but no salvation" (127). Clytie, like her grandmother, believes Henley's death "was God's will," but Reuben, like his mother, is bitter: "'That they took Henley off an killed him? If he'd been a bigger, richer farmer--'" (43). Like Kelley and Smedley, Arnow sees the god of damnation in league with the wealthy and with retributive violence. Battle John Brand is a fire and brimstone preacher, "stampeding the souls of his flock to Christ with his twin whips of Hell and God" (68). He is contrasted with the gentle Samuel, another neighbor in Kentucky, who, Gertie feels, is closer to God: "He worked with his hands like Jesus, but better yet she'd never heard him try to scare the souls of the people loose and herd them
up to God like driving stampeding sheep in a barn" (104). This gentle soul is taken by the army to work at Oak Ridge.

Gertie envisions a Christ of the people—the one she had wanted for Henley—one who is "ready to come singing down the hill, a laughing Christ uncrowned by thorns and with the scars of the nail holes in his hands all healed away; a Christ who loved people, had liked to mingle with them and laugh and sing ...." (64). Her Christ wears "overalls like a carpenter" (77). To Cassie she says, "'A body don't have to go to Jesus. He'e right down here on earth all th time.'" She tells Cassie that seeing Christ is "'kind a like you sean Callie Lou'" (76).

But in Detroit, Gertie's faith is tested by personal tragedies and by the religious hypocrisy she witnesses. The Daly's are Arnow's fully realized epitome of the viciousness to which religious hypocrisy can descend. They are Catholics who have no use for other faiths or for other ethnic groups. Kathy Daly attacks a gentle "gospel woman" who comes to her door. She and her husband objectify total religious intolerance: they accuse everyone not of their beliefs of
being Communists and are particularly acerbic about Jews: "'Hitler knows how t'handle u likes a youse along wit u Jews,'" Kathy screams at the gospel woman (223). The ever clear-sighted Max sardonically observes, "'If Christ come knocken on her door, an he couldn't say his beads with a Irish brogue, she wouldn't let him in. If he told her about the man with two coats, she'd call him a communist, and if his beard wasn't blond like the images she'd call him a dirty Jew'" (228-229). Max herself hates Catholics because she thinks her Catholic husband and mother-in-law killed her baby by baptizing it (the child was actually stillborn). She sees them as hate-mongerers: "'their hate fer niggers an Jews an Russians an Protestants holds um together'" (231). Arnow makes it clear, however, that Protestants, too, are filled with hatred and invective: they do not like the Catholics because they see them as heathens who worship idols and the Pope, while hating everyone else. The Protestants are filled with resentment because the Catholics seem to run the town and sneer at them as hillbillies.

In the middle of this religious standoff, Arnow places Gertie, who quietly expresses Arnow's own concerns
with religious icons. In the country, Christ had been a man among his people. In Detroit Christ is for sale on Christmas cards, punch boards, rosaries, books, and pamphlets. In Detroit there are crucifixes everywhere—dead Christs. Of the crucifix on Victor's rosary, Gertie observes, "here was a Christ . . . her mother would have liked: the head drawn back in agony, the thorns, the nails, each with a drop of crimson below it, a great splash of scarlet from the wounded side, the face bearing many wrinkles to indicate agony" (235-236). When Maggie shows Gertie a Christmas card with the Madonna on the cover, Gertie explains her own impression of Mary, and, by extension, of herself and all mothers:

'. . . she couldn't ha been beautiful--at least not much beautiful. . . . She never could ha done her work in a long-tailed dress like that. She was a worken woman an allus goen here an yonder . . . . She seen too much trouble to look that way. . . . Mary would look like--like your mother. . . . They both seen a lot a trouble, had a heap a youngens, an worked hard.' (262).

Through the juxtapositions of the laughing Christ of the country and the crucified Christ of the city, as well as the concept of Mary as a working mother with that of the idealized Madonna, Arnow stresses the contrast
between Gertie's conception of Christ and Mary as working-class people--like herself--and the images she finds in the city. Arnow suggests that organized religion has killed the spirit of Christianity, replacing it with a dead man and an abstraction of femininity. Since the Christ Gertie had imagined in the country does not exist in Detroit, she is left only with the urban icon--a Christ perpetually in his death throes, a Christ for sale, as the people sell themselves. This discovery, along with the loss of Reuben and Cassie, brings Gertie to the point of questioning God, which is captured in an exchange with a young soldier who peddles religion at her door. He asks her what we must do to be saved, to which Gertie automatically answers: "'Believe.'" However, she follows her conditioned response with the first articulation of her doubt: "'But what if a body can't believe? . . . God gave us a mind that can or can't believe. . . . but not even God can make us believe.'" (518-519). When the soldier suggest that she pray, Gertie sadly rejoinders, "'But you have tu believe first before you can pray'" (519). Arnow implies that in a world where God's name can be used to persecute other people, where children can be destroyed by prejudice, where adults are consumed by the machinery of the profit
motive, God ceases to exist. Even if he lives, he cannot force the people he has betrayed to believe in his proclaimed, but invisible, love. Arnow challenges the authenticity of religion in a world gone mad with hatred and violence. However, as we shall later see, she offers an alternative conception of the spiritual which both satisfies the human need to believe in something and contributes positively to the struggle for survival among the working class.

Arnow's rejection of orthodox religion is paralleled by her repudiation of war, which she, like Smedley and Kelley, sees as a tool used by the advantaged to exploit the disadvantaged. Early in the novel, when the young soldier in the army car asks Gertie what crops they grow in Ballew, she bitterly replies, "'Youngens fer th wars an them factories'" (25). The city has invaded the country, destroying its sense of community: "... the empty road... once so fine and new, tying their settlement to the outside world, seemed now only a thing that took people away" to wars and factories (51). The war has stolen all the doctors and teachers as well as the young men from the community, which is
why Gertie must travel by mule to get her sick child
to a doctor in town and why she must teach her children
at home. Oak Ridge— one of the sites of the Manhattan
Project—is mentioned from the beginning of The
Dollmaker and realized at the end with the bombings
of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the last year of the
war which the novel comprises, the effects of the war
pervade everyone's life. Henley is dead, but Gertie
refuses to believe dying was his "patriotic duty" or
"God's will." Instead she blames the government for
a needless death: "'God didn't give Henley his life to
give away; an he didn't give his life. They took him
. . .'" (66). The war affects even young Cassie, who
hears the neighbors' gossip and is deeply hurt by her
uncle's death:

'They've took your man to th wars,
Miz Callie Lou, clean acrost th
waters, but they'll send him back
to you--nailed down in a box with
nickels on his eyes he'll mebbe be,
but they'll send him back to you.' (92)

Like Smedley and Kelley, Arnow sees no glory in
war. It is waged by capitalists who rob the working
class of their hopes and dreams-- finally their very
lives-- in the cause of the profit motive. Its real
purpose is disguised in propaganda that appeals to patriotic duty while keeping the people ignorant of the brutal truth. Mrs. Hull thinks that "'in this war th Italians and th Germans treat our boys good, real good, like we treat their prisoners in this country'" (120). Through subtle irony, Arnow reminds her readers that no one is treated "real good" in war; and, in a single stroke she also reminds her readers that, in fact, German soldiers and Americans of German descent were mistreated by this country and that American soldiers died in Nazi concentration and P.O.W. camps.

Arnow captures the fears of the poor people of Kentucky in a detailed account of a car coming up the mountain road to deliver a message—which they all believe is another death notice (113-118). Fortunately, the news is good, for Jesse has been located in a P.O.W. camp. This scene is paralleled almost exactly, and with some wry humor, by the sound of the mail wagon ambling up the mountain. This time the message is for Gertie--the war will transport her to Detroit's factories. Earlier, with her savings and Henley's insurance money, Gertie had thought the war had ironically benefited her: "It was as if the war
and Henley's death had been a plan to help set her and her children free so that she might live and be beholden to no man, not even to Clovis" (139). Instead, the war reaches into her life, as it has into her neighbors', killing her own dreams and making her more dependent than she had ever been.

In Detroit the factory owners make millions on the machinery of war. Max recalls that her father used to say, "'Blood's the cheapest thing on earth, but they's money in it'" (218). News of the war constantly emanates from the radio. The voice describing the carnage is "drooly with horror. . . . happy over the fine dish of news to be served tonight, loving it like old Battle John Brand loved the hell he made flame in the meeting house" (265). In the only scene in which she hits one of her children, Gertie slaps Enoch for his callous attitude toward the war news: "'It's a war with men a dyen, not a circus'" (266). In this simple comment, Arnow expresses the real horror of war. While the blood lust runs rampant back home, she reminds her readers that husbands, lovers, sons, and brothers are dying.

Arnow is sympathetic toward the women who will lose their factory jobs when the surviving men come home
after the war ends. As the film "Rosie the Riveter" has shown, millions of women were told by the government that it was their patriotic duty to help keep the factories running while the men were overseas; when the men returned, these same women were told it was their patriotic duty to give up their jobs. Arnow discloses the effects of war on these women and the predicament they find themselves in: they do not believe that "a woman can find a job now"; consequently, there is no "rejoicing, no lifting of the heart that all the planned killing and wounding of men were finished. Rather, it was as if the people had lived on blood, and now that the bleeding was ended, they were worried about their future food" (495). Because "working class reality is a survival reality," the women can only worry about what will become of them and their families, what will be their "future food." No one has won in this war: people lose their jobs, men come home sick and wounded, children make up games about the A-bomb as they had made up games about job-hunting. The war has caused such moral dissolution that people who claim to be patriotic regard the wounded and shellshocked returning soldiers with suspicion and revulsion (495-496). Tony, a young
veteran, observes the hatred, prejudice, and fighting between factory owners and union men and sadly asks, "... why have they gotta make us hate each other so? ... I had nothing personal against the Japs. See? Somebody told um to try an kill me. Somebody give me a gun and told me to try to kill them. Now, I'm home--peace. An it's allasame!'" (534).

As I pointed out earlier, Arnow commented that war, rather than capitalism, is the real villain in The Pollmaker. Yet it seems clear that the cause of war, oppression, poverty, and needless death in The Pollmaker is capitalism, symbolized by Detroit. The city robs Gertie of her hopes, talents and two of her children. It turns Clovis into a brutish husband and finally into a murderer. Here money saved for an independent life is spent on getting more in debt—and to bury a loved child. Here there are holes to be filled, tragedies to overcome, and fences, planes, trains that keep a mother from rescuing her child. Here there is religious and ethnic prejudice that turns people against one another. Here supervisors know their employees only by identification numbers and regard them as inferiors. Like the factory workers in Yonnondio, Arnow's workers are exploited by the "Beedo"
system and innumerable horrible injuries and deaths.

Arnow offers a litany of the ways working-class people suffer and die in the factories:

- burned, crushed, skinned alive, smothered, gassed, electrocuted, chopped to bits, blown to pieces.
- (Gertie) heard tales of the ways of loose bolts or old bolts with human arms, legs, and heads. She listened to stories of machines on a speed-up that, unable to bear the speed as did the men, flew with no warning into flying pieces of steel that blinded and crippled when they didn't kill.
- A fast turning wheel or mill-machine wasn't like a man; it wouldn't just fall down on the floor peaceable-like when it passed out the way a man would. Even worse . . . were Miller's stories of white-hot steel, but worse than anything were the foreman's fists and his iron-toed shoes in a man's behind. (318-319)

The workers' efforts to unionize are met with beatings from thugs hired by the factory owners. Both Gertie and Clovis at first hate the unions, but Clovis eventually becomes pro-union and Gertie begins questioning her own reservations; however, she still believes "a body's got a right to be free. They oughtn't to have to belong to nuthen, not even a union" (530).

Arnow seems to empathize with the union cause, but at the same time she abhors conformity and violence even
in the unions. She sees the conflict between the owners and union members as a war that is as pointless as the one overseas, particularly since the owners "'made so damn' much money outa the war they can do anything'" as the tool-and-die man remarks (319). She offers no solutions, but indicts the whole system of oppression, exploitation, and violence that breeds a climate of hatred in the city. Natives of Detroit hate the migrants for invading the city and for taking the factory jobs. Through Nancy Miller, Arnow attacks the hypocrisy of the natives:

'You never did see them ads an signs an letters beggen all th people back home to come up here an save democracy fer you all. They done it ina last war, too. Now you can git along without us, so's you cain't git shet a us quick enough. Want us to go back home an raise another crop a youngens at no cost to you an Detroit, so's they'll be all ready to save you when you start another war--huh? We been comen up here to save Detroit ever since th War a 1812' (509)

Nancy, though prejudiced herself against Catholics, sees the Detroit natives as especially guilty: "'they're allus talked about Klan-loven, nigger-haten Southerners,'" she fumes, "'but I'm tellen the truth, they're more nigger haters an Klan lovers up here than ever I did
know about back home" (540). Though admitting the small meannesses and big failures of southern culture, Arnow also wants to explode the myth of enlightened conditions in northern cities. Not only is there racial and ethnic bigotry in Detroit, but the city is also infected by police on the take and unionized doctors who may or may not treat the sick poor if they have money. Gertie remains apolitical throughout The Dollmaker, but she serves as a filter for the experiences and opinions of more vocal people like Nancy, Max, Lena, and the tool-and-die man, all of whom express Arnow's contempt for industrialization and urban blight.

However, Arnow is not completely negative about the city, for she also sketches some touching relationships amid all the hatred and invective. Something we find in The Dollmaker which is rare in literature is a sense of community among women. The women of Merry Hill see what needs to be done to help one another and quietly, efficiently take charge. When Gertie moves to the project, it is the women who help her learn how to cope. The first day of school, Sophronie hustles Amos into her house so Gertie can concentrate on the older children. In turn, when Sophronie's two boys have tonsillectomies
and she is terrified to leave them, Gertie takes care
of them so Sophronie can go to work. When Max "needs
a dream," Gertie always obliges. In return, after
Cassie's death, Max convinces her to stop taking the
phenobarbital and begin living again. Gertie, Max,
and Lena come to the aid of the gospel woman when
Kathy beats her, and to the aid of Sophronie when she
is drunk and naked in the alley. Even Kathy particip­
ates in the sisterhood: she takes care of Sophronie's
Wheateye and makes sure the other children will "keep
shut" about the incident. When Kathy goes to the
hospital to have her ninth child, the women set up a
schedule to care for her other children. After VJ day
they sympathize with Mrs. Saito and take flowers to her.
Among the women there are petty jealousies and outbursts
of anger, and they all have a good time at Lena's ex­
pense. Arnow does not try to depict an ideal community
of women, but one in which the caring and helping are
extended in spite of individual failings and weaknesses.
Her focus on the women provides the basis for her
determination of the real value and art in life, which
she sees as the respect for individual human dignity
and the maintenance of nurturing relationships between
people.
All of the central themes in The Dollmaker—the effects of migration from country to city, prejudice, hypocrisy, lost dreams, religious doubt, death, and eventual resolution in the enduring faith in people—are objectified in Gertie's block of cherry wood. Gertie has always used her talent at whittling to make others happy: she carves a doll for Cassie, which the child prefers over the store-bought doll Clovis buys her in Detroit. Her talents are appreciated by people in the city, but sometimes are crassly manipulated as when Homer wants her to carve a "folk art" country woman so he can advance himself in the wealthy Mrs. McKeckeran's eyes. Gertie is constantly amazed that anyone would pay for her gift; she regards it as "whittlen foolishness" because Clovis and her mother sneer at it (155). Like Judith Pippinger, Gertie has clear artistic ability but cannot do "fancy work." Hers are finely detailed works of art, left natural and rough hewn. She always wants to give them away, but her art is eventually prostituted to capitalism at her husband's insistence. She ends up mass-producing parodies of art in order to help earn money for her family during the factory strike.
Arnow regards Gertie's primitive carvings with the same appreciation her friends do; and she equates their eventual decline into mediocrity with the same effects of the city we have seen on other aspects of people's lives. Arnow believes this is a tragedy, but not a complete failure, for there is another artistry and comprehension Gertie is capable of that is symbolized in the cherry block. It is the central image for Gertie and for the novel; it represents art, religion, doubt, and finally the people Gertie cares about. It is the dominant correlative for all that Gertie is, believes in, and does not believe in. It is her own Callie Lou (interestingly, Cassie sees Callie Lou in the amorphous figure). It is also symbolic of the difficulties of being an artist, a mother, and a human being. In the block of wood, Gertie "is as much creating and discovering her destiny as she is demonstrating and assessing her talent."

When we first see the cherry block, we share Gertie's concern that she is unable to find the right face. She wants it to be Christ's face, "'but somehow his face ain't never clear er somethen'" (23). She also thinks the face could belong to one of the Old Testament patriarchs—or even to Judas, but "'not Judas
with his mouth all drooly, his hand held out fer th silver, but Judas given th thirty pieces away. I figger... they's many a one does meanness fer money--like Judas... But they's not many like him gives th money away an feels sorry onct they've got it!" (23). Her vacillation between the faces of Christ and Judas appears throughout the novel. She knows there is "plainly someone there, crouching, a secret being hidden in the wood, waiting to rise and shed the wood and be done with hiding" (48), but she is not sure who will finally make his (or her) face known. When she has the Tipton Place for a short while, it seems that the face is plainly that of Christ: "It was Christ in the block of wood after all. Soon he would rise up out of his long hiding place into the firelight, the laughing Christ with hair long and black like Callie Lou's, but not so curly" (127). She feels wicked to see Judas in the wood, even more wicked to pity him. But she is content that with land and time she can now bring Christ out of the wood, not because she is religious, but because she now believes she is free: "Her foundation was not God but what God had promised Moses--land... what more, oh, Lord, what more could a woman ask?" (127-128). At the Tipton Place
the artist-mother would be able to finish releasing the figure: "Nights up here in the firelight, she'd bring the head out of the wood. She could do fine work when the youngens were asleep and Clovis wasn't around to talk, and now with her own land, she'd never have to feel guilty about wasting time" (134).

But Gertie is unable to achieve this promise, and with her defeat, her efforts with the wood are also defeated. Still, she insists on bringing it to Detroit "in spite of her mother's scorn and Clytie's gentle objections. Only Cassie had begged for the wood, hugged it as if it had been human" (150). Gertie, because she has betrayed her dreams and her children's hopes, sees Judas in the wood again: "Judas wood it seemed now. Jesus would never come from it. But there were faces in Detroit" (150).

There are times when Gertie has renewed hope that she can bring out Christ's face--"Christ coming down through the October field with red leaves in one hand, an ax in the other" (226). When Johala asks Gertie if the figure is Christ, Gertie tells her, "'I've allus kind a hoped so--but I can't seem tu find a face.'" Johala smiles, "'Maybe . . . you'll find it in Detroit. In Detroit there are many Christs.'"
Gertie at first does not understand what she means, because she has been so disappointed in the crucifixes: "'Seems like they're all dead an hung on crosses.'" Johala answers, "'I guess it's easier to live with a dead Christ!" (238). Once again Arnow contrasts the Christ of the country with the dead Christ of the city and finds conventional religion lacking. Yet, in the core of this exchange is also the intimation of the spiritual epiphany Gertie experiences at the end of the novel.

Before that epiphany, though, Gertie must endure tragedies, which are reflected in the cherry block. She longs to take it home, with its face finally brought out: "It must be a happy, laughing face even though she'd lost the Christ with the red leaves in his hands" (327). But this Christ is replaced by Reuben's "hurt and angry eyes" accusing her of betrayal (327). After his escape, she turns to the cherry block for comfort, but finds her religious sentiment fading. She can no longer see Christ in the wood: "So many faces--a million faces she had seen in Detroit, but no face for Christ--not Victor's Christ or any Christ. The face of the Christ with the red sweet gum leaves was dim now, changed like a tree from which the leaves have fallen" (361).
After Cassie's death, there is a dramatic change in the figure. At first Gertie turns to the wood to assuage her grief, "smothering with the man in the wood the trains and the dangling boot and all the other things that came behind her eyes when she tried to sleep. She touched the top of the head, gently, as if it had been some human to whom she would show gratitude" (438). Lena Anderson, recognizing Gertie's talent and the importance of the cherry block, urges her to finish it, "as if the finishing of it were a job that could be done only with great sacrifice and determination" (438). But Gertie sadly wishes she had taken the time to finish it for Cassie—the only person who had loved the cherry block as much as she has. Her anguish is transmitted into the figure: "gradually her own torture became instead the agony of the bowed head in the block of wood... the hands would not be reaching out, but holding—holding lightly a thing they could not keep. The head was drooped in sorrow, looking once at the thing it had to give away" (444). Lena believes "that he won't keep still and hold it. He'll give it back"; but Gertie sadly tells her that "'a body cain't allus give back--things'" (585). The cupped hand is an enigma: is it taking away or giving
back? What does it hold? Judas' silver? Cassie's life? The lost dreams? I believe the figure has become both Judas and the agonized Christ of Detroit, but it has also become Gertie herself, who has had to sacrifice—"give back" the most precious things to her. Ironically, it is now Wheateye—another fey child, who as "adopted" Callie Lou—who, like Cassie, insists that Gertie finish the sculpture.

But Gertie has reached a turning point during which she recognizes both the futility and the needlessness of finding the "right" face. First she rejects the idea of Judas, then finally even Christ. The figure becomes a sympathetic kin: "It had seemed a being who understood that the dancing, the never joining the church, had been less sinful than the pretending that she believed..." (584).

When Mrs. McKeckeran, the wife of a Flint Plant vice-president, wants more carvings made of "good wood," Gertie keeps the $50.00 for her family and sacrifices the cherry block. She carries it to the wagon "as if it had been a child" and urges the children in the alley not to "be hurt'en him now" (597). As she pulls the wagon to the scrapwood lot. On her way, various people see in the figure what they want to see: a man, a woman, the
Virgin, a Saint. However, the scrapwood man immediately sees Christ. Gertie, though, says it is just "cherry wood" (598). He persists: "'Christ yu meant it tu be--butcha couldn't find no face fu him'" (599). As Gertie chops up the cherry block she answers, "'No. They was so many would ha done; they's millions and millions a faces plenty fine enough--fer him.'" Finally, Gertie looks up from the wood and, in wonder and pain, says, "'Why, some a my neighbors down there in the alley--they would ha done'" (599).

It is important that the figure remains faceless, for it finally comes to represent both men and women—all the people in pain Gertie has learned to sympathize with. She has begun to understand, through her own experiences and those of her neighbors, the tragedy and triumph in each human being. Earlier, Lena had commented of the hypocritical Mr. Turbi that he would have to "'make his own Christ in his own image. Isn't that what we all do?'" (303). Her cynical comment becomes the theme of Gertie's battle with the wood. The figure had been herself: the laughing Christ transformed into the sorrowful Christ and Judas, then into the spirit of love and compassion. Many readers find The Dollmaker a depressing novel with a defeatist conclusion. But one can also see
it as a triumph. Though Gertie has sacrificed her farm to a tenement project, her artistic talent to hack work, and two of her children to despair and death, she has also grown into an understanding of the importance of other people.

Arnow herself believed that Gertie is triumphant at the end and would eventually achieve her dream. She revives Gertie in The Weedkiller's Daughter. Here Gertie is referred to as "The Primitive," a Mrs. Nevels who has bought a farm outside Detroit. The Primitive is called "that old hillbilly," "that lawless old woman" by jealous neighbors because she is defiant and proud. She now has white hair, but the face is unmistakably Gertie's. She makes wine in her cellar, guards her property, defies her neighbors, and is unfailingly kind to young people.

It seems clear that Arnow intended for her readers to see the conclusion of The Dollmaker as the beginning for Gertie. It also seems clear that she believes Gertie was right all along. After Cassie's death and after he is beaten up and becomes a murderer in the union cause, Clovis waxes nostalgic for the Kentucky they can never return to and admits Gertie's plan to buy the Tipton Place would have saved them all. The tragedy of The
Dollmaker, then, is the needless sacrifices made when a woman is denied her own voice. Its triumph is that this woman—though uprooted, tested, hurt—manages to "adjust" in her own way, making her own decisions about what matters to her, and determining to take the responsibility for her failures as she begins a new life. The sacrifice of the cherry block is made in the interest of supporting her family; thus it is not as unfortunate as it appears. What Gertie learns, and what Arnow wants her readers to comprehend, is that "no individual face can encompass the complexity of human suffering, whether a man's or a woman's, a relative's or a stranger's, a friend's or an enemy's." She further recognizes "that there is no room for art in her world and that tragedy is the human condition itself. But she also knows that there is energy for survival and for empathy with others who also suffer."

In The Dollmaker, Arnow offers a resolution for many of the problems raised in the previous three protest novels of this study. Survival—even amid sexual and economic exploitation, even amid the most agonizing pain—is achieved through sisterhood, community, integrity, moral choices, and sacrifice when necessary. Ultimately, chopping up the cherry block does not destroy the figure
hidden in the wood, but releases it at last—and sets Gertie free. Where Kelley has Judith acquiesce to her fate, Smedley has Marie flee the constraints of capitalist patriarchy, and Olsen leaves Anna hoping her life will change, Arnow allows Gertie spiritual growth and the will power to make decisions that will directly influence her life, even if only briefly. But all four novelists, though they indict the system for its oppression of women and the poor, intimate the possibilities for women as well as the tragedies. All of the heroines are intelligent, sensitive, creative women who are thwarted by the socioeconomic conditions in which they find themselves. The authors suggest that with education, skills, and economic-sexual equality, women can surmount their difficulties—however, they cannot do it alone. Society must, as the authors all insist, change dramatically for the benefit of all oppressed peoples, not only to release the dispossessed from their bondage, but also to allow their skills and talents to be actualized in a safer, healthier world, thus benefiting all humankind.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


2 Eckley, p. 44.

3 Eckley, pp. 124-125, 126.

4 Walter Havighurst, "Hillbilly D.P.'s" Rev. of The Dollmaker, by Harriette Arnow, Saturday Review, 37, April 24, 1954, p. 12.


6 Anthony West, Rev. of The Dollmaker, by Harriette Arnow, The New Yorker, 30, May 1, 1954, p. 119.

7 Jean Holzauer, "Valiant Woman," Rev. of The Dollmaker by Harriette Arnow, Commonweal, 60, July 9, 1954, pp. 349-350.


9 Hobbs, pp. 851, 854.

10 Barbara Hill Rigney, "Feminine Heroism in Harriette Arnow's The Dollmaker," Frontiers, 1, No. 1 (Fall 1975), 81.

12 Harriette Arnow, Letter to Barbara Rigney, Frontiers, 1, No. 2 (Spring 1976), 147.


16 Oates, p. 604.


19 Oates, p. 606.


22 Hobbs, p. 855.


24 Baer, p. 119

25 Rigney, p. 84.


____________. Letter to Barbara Rigney. *Frontiers*, 1, No. 2 (Spring 1976), 147.


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