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Nice Girls, Wild Women: The Call of the American Wilderness and Feminine Rejection of the American Dream

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NICE GIRLS, WILD WOMEN: THE CALL OF THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS &
FEMININE REJECTION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

by

ALICE PAIGE DILLARD

(Under the Direction of Olivia Carr Edenfield)

ABSTRACT

Reflecting the inherently patriarchal nature of the colonization that birthed America as a nation, the American landscape English settlers sought to subjugate became connotated with the female gender through English colonial writing. American westward expansion gained greater allure than the overt appeal of conquest and agrarian industry when her untamed western landscape was likened to images of an unspent virginal bride or the breast of a nurturing mother. Thomas Morton likens the colonies of Maryland and Virginia to the Biblical figures of Leah and Rachel in his poem “New English Canaan” to demonstrate their equal worth as English colonies, though his allegory to the two faithfully subservient wives of Abraham does more to highlight the American landscape as something female-gendered, explicitly domestic, and vulnerable to domination. Even America herself is not free from the bonds of typical gender roles, envisioned not only as wife and mother but a both woman virginally untouched and sexually fertile. This simultaneous romanticization and feminine gendering of the land being subjugated by the English appealed colonization itself to the male gaze; as a result, the society built on top of this landscape came with a predetermined set of gender roles for women woven into the tapestry of the nation’s history. In turn, acceptable gender roles for women remained the same under the American Dream in being primarily domestic roles like wife or mother, amid less culturally acceptable roles for women, like the unmarried or the prostitute. The confining nature of these

roles leads to a disconnect between the self and the gendered feminine self with which female characters throughout American literature grapple in individualistic ways. The women herein each reject the gendered roles that the American Dream provides; so too do these women—willingly or unwillingly—heed the call of a distinctly feminine wild, seeking to find a female self capable of fully functioning outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles and its oppressive influence on female gender performance.

INDEX WORDS: Sarah Orne Jewett, J.D. Salinger, Adrian Tomine, Feminism, Gender roles, Gender performance, Identity, Isolation, Sex, Sex workers, Male gaze

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INTRODUCTION

Gendering the American Landscape

Since the colonization of the New World, the American landscape has through metaphor been made feminine. In Annette Kolodny's *Lay of the Land: Metaphor and Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, Kolodny details at length the perceived "Virgin Beauties" of this "new American 'Paradise'" (12) that drew colonizing European forces to the New World. This extended metaphor, or "fictive representation" (16) of the newly-christened American landscape, however, is contrary even to itself: simultaneously being "a countrey that hath yet her maidenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought" in warm, fertile Virginia and a "cold, barren, and inhospitable... 'wombe'" in the New England colonies (12). Even so early in the colonization of what we now know as America, patriarchal figures and forces alike began to instill the multifaceted, intensely gendered fictive interpretation of America's landscape as inherently female. Colonization in this way was "a bold exercise of masculine power over the feminine—a feminine, moreover, that was being experienced as at once Mother and Virgin, with all the confusions possible between the two" (22). This land-as-woman metaphor paved a winding and violent path through history—a path through which even the landscape itself suffered at the hands of patriarchal, violent influence, let alone the Native American women who personally suffered gendered violence at the hands of colonization itself.

Conception of the American Dream as we recognize it in the modern world began with a rape, both of Native culture and community and the landscape itself, turned inside-out for the sake of agrarian conquest and further industry. Nonetheless, the concept of being American and the related American Dream are something that have remained nebulous through history—with Henry Nash Smith opening his text *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* with

St. John de Crevecoeur's question of "What is an American?" Smith draws from multiple influences in his musing the question, from the "men of Thomas Jefferson's day" who "emphasized freedom and republicanism as the defining characteristics of American society" to "later thinkers" who "stressed the cosmopolitanism blending of a hundred peoples into one, or mechanical ingenuity or devotion to business enterprise... one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character," Smith elaborates, "is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward through the passes of the Alleghenies, across the Mississippi Valley, over the high plains and mountains of the Far West to the Pacific Coast" (3).

This symbol of the West, a particularly wild, untamed American West, is Nash's crux just as Kolodny's is the distinctly American image of a gendered landscape: with the way in which "the frontier and the West had dominated American development" being something that "concerns the image of themselves which many— perhaps most— Americans of the present day cherish, an image that defines what Americans think of their past, and therefore what they propose to make of themselves in the future" (4). Kolodny's extrapolation of the extended American metaphor of a gendered landscape and Nash's study into the mythos of the wild west come together, or perhaps connect like a circuit: Kolodny's gendered American landscape is wild and feminine, then eventually mastered by American industry and agrarianism into fulfilling an equally gendered role; Nash's symbol and myth of the Western wilderness is something equally gendered, however foreign, given the inherently patriarchal nature of conquest. These pieces fit together to craft the American Dream as we know it, evolving from conquest of the wild and foreign to— for women— an array of suitably feminine roles they can fit into: wife, mother, nurturer. For American women, namely the female characters in the American short fiction on

which my thesis is based, the concept of the American Dream is less an aspirational goal than it is a confining set of gendered expectations.

In this way it seems only natural that women might eventually reject the aforementioned nebulous concept of the American Dream, which focuses much more on role-playing for the female sex in contrast to the more masculine notions of financial success and obtaining capital. In “A View of Her Own: The Garden as Text,” Tamara Fritze details five “taxa” of her literary garden taxonomy: “gardens of domesticity, gardens of dominion, gardens of subversion, gardens of abundance, and gardens of abandonment” (146), which all metaphorically illustrate feminine connection with the landscape most connected to their domestic space. “The third taxon, the garden of subversion,” says Fritze, “is not just a garden that uses indigenous plants but is planted by a gardener who purposefully desires to subvert the culturally accepted dooryard. She is willing to struggle against the cultural hegemony in order to celebrate ‘wild’ nature and the natural landscape” (151). This subversion, however, “is nearly always in conflict.” Fritze presents both the garden and gardener as traditionally feminine, with the role of the gardener being to tend the garden; Fritze’s gardeners of subversion treasure the “wild flowers, grasses and herbs” that others might perceive as part of an “unkempt atmosphere” (152). Fritze’s relating of the image of these various literary gardens and their respective gardeners to the nuclear family allows one to view the gardener as an extension of traditional feminine domestic roles; the garden is an extension of the domestic space, here made something explicitly feminine. While embracing the wilder, less culturally appropriate untended garden is indeed subversive, Fritze goes on to detail the garden’s place as the potential backdrop for ruin and the way in which oftentimes “attempts to accept wild nature can... only be seen as ominous and destructive.” Fritze illustrates the cultural cost of subversion of feminine gender roles through this image of

the untended garden, in which her subversive garden portends doom rather than liberates. This literary through-line of female rejection of the typical, traditional nature of the American Dream and its related roles for the female sex feed into a pull, or push, towards wilderness that is literal, perceived, or metaphorical. Subversion of appropriate gender roles in this way, however, has its toll: the dictated gender roles and the wild desire to subvert them can find characters of the female sex in literature caught in a liminal space between appearances and the true self, creating a stark divide between the inside and outside of a female character. This literary tether of women grappling with their identity, caught between more tamed gender roles and an unknown call of the wild, is a dominant theme of regional nature authors such as Sarah Orne Jewett in *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), leading into the postwar modern in J.D. Salinger's *Nine Stories* (1953) and beyond, to the postmodern in the graphic works of Adrian Tomine's 2015 short-story cycle *Killing and Dying*. Against the gendered expectations of the American Dream, these female characters are juxtaposed against images of a literal, perceived, or metaphorical West or wilderness—this contrast creating a dichotomy of identity in the American woman between her perceived social identity and appearances with the true self.

In each of these narratives, female characters grapple with finding both place and identity in relation to the so-called American Dream; in each of these, female characters eventually rally and reject such a concept in their own unique ways. Being a patriarchally-crafted, industry-based concept, the American Dream has no place for these women who cannot find their role in it— or rather reject the roles offered to them— seeming to recognize the inherent misogyny in some of the extended concepts of the American Dream, such as the need for feminine community, the nuclear family, and stigmatization of the sex worker. Some, like the supposedly pitiful “Poor Joanna” as she is referred to by the citizens of Dunnet Landing, disengage from American

community for the comfort of solitude in a wilder, more untamed part of the world that others find to be uncanny. Others, like Eloise, struggle to maintain the facade of an appropriate female role in the American Dream in the midst of a perceived wilderness, like her suburb; in turn focusing so greatly on acceptable appearances that she becomes emotionally neglectful to the herself and those around her. With *Killing and Dying*'s "Amber Sweet" being the most postmodern work of those selected, entirely taking place in an urban environment, the narrator reckons with the internet as a metaphorical, digital jungle so vast and inescapable that she must rewrite her own narrative to erase the part of her identity born in this digital wilderness.

Each of these women experience significant difficulty in finding her place, in reconciling her stigmatized sex with newfound gender independence, confined by the lingering shape of female roles a patriarchal world has pressured her to fulfill. Joanna disengages from society to find peace in the solitude of a more literal wilderness and is forced to bear the weight of needless pity for her supposedly "poor" situation; Eloise fails to fit into the role of mother, wife and homemaker, instead rejecting it totally, likening her otherwise perfectly normal suburban life to life in the wilderness. Amber Sweet, under the weight of sex-work stigma, heavily disassociates from herself, depersonalizing her past so much so that she becomes convinced that she has simply found her "porn double," or sex-worker doppelganger. Amber's reality is that she has lost her identity to the Wild West of the internet and internet sex work; there is no "porn double," only the part of herself from which she has disassociated. Each of these women find significant difficulty in reconciling expectations of American life with the brutal reality of it.

The inherently patriarchal nature of American living divides the true female self from feminine appearances. Joanna defies typical feminine appearances in her rejection of the distinctly feminine community of Dunnet Landing, in a more literal wilderness; Eloise feels

trapped between facadelike, culturally acceptable feminine appearances and unprocessed grief and trauma, her icy suburb leaving her feeling lost in the woods. Amber Sweet struggles to reconcile her feminine gender performance with the way in which sex work has commodified it, unable to separate her sense of self from the digital jungle of online pornography that perhaps she once entered willingly. All of these women reject the proposed roles the American Dream seemingly provides for them, instead rejecting them in their individual, characteristic ways—whether it be physical rejection and the associated social displacement of Poor Joanna, emotional rejection and a clinging to nostalgia and perceived innocence in Eloise, or complete dissociation of the self through a falsified narrative in Amber Sweet. The Wild West, or perceived wilderness, seems to draw some towards it, such as Joanna and, at one point, Amber Sweet; others like Eloise and Amber as she appears in the story seem to be surrounded or followed by this wilderness. Noteworthy, though, in both Eloise and Amber is the role they play in their own kind of gendered American suffering: Eloise chooses, or perhaps felt like she had to choose, marrying Lew, and later having her daughter, Ramona, while still keeping hold of her significant grief over Walt Glass, which she allows to haunt her house. Amber chooses to walk into the wilderness, as it were, to perform online sex work, likely knowing the danger and stigma; this same stigma is something she herself perpetuates through the false narrative she presents, likening being mistaken for a sex worker to the victimization of sex work itself. Joanna seems to be so intensely burdened by a perceived notion of sin that solitude is her only comfort, while Eloise and Amber reject reality for fantasy. A mindset grounded in patriarchal society, one purposefully kept vague in each, seems to puppeteer these women. Eloise, prior to “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut,” took up the mantle of the nuclear family’s center— wife and mother— in a way that was not entirely unwilling, but is later resented to an extreme degree when contrasted with her nostalgic

memories of Walt Glass and their brief romance. While “Amber Sweet” is also kept purposefully vague, likely due to her own repression and dissociation of herself from her sex-worker self, something still called her to enter the wild and begin her career in sex work, using her falsified narrative as protection or a coping mechanism from those who might discover what she cannot erase from the internet. “Poor Joanna,” in a similar manner, cites what she believes is a sin she committed as her reason for leaving Dunnet Landing and living in solitude on the Shell-Heap. In the liminal space between cultural expectations of the feminine self and the women on which these expectations are placed, each of these women grapple with identity, social expectation, and the juxtaposition of American societal norms to the concept of the West, a place outside of these norms represented by a wilderness or wasteland— be it literal, perceived, or totally metaphorical.

CHAPTER ONE

Solitude, the Shell-Heap, and “Poor Joanna” Todd

Sarah Orne Jewett’s 1896 *Country of the Pointed Firs* is a narrative built around the motifs of the natural world found therein— with these images from the natural world serving to offer further insight into the relatively private characters of the people of Dunnet Landing. While imagery from the natural world at the beginning of *Country of the Pointed Firs* is more focused on images from the mainland like Mrs. Todd’s herb garden, the second half of Jewett’s narrative begins to focus on the New English seaside imagery there, beginning with a voyage by boat to the mystic Shell-Heap Island that Poor Joanna Todd calls home and ending with the special coral pin the narrator receives as a gift. The natural motif of shells in *Country of the Pointed Firs* takes readers along the path less taken in Dunnet Landing, with shells, the Shell-Heap, and the coral pin becoming emblematic of a unique sense of personal isolation—an otherness shared by Poor Joanna, Almira Todd, and the narrator, made explicit through the shell motif. Coby Dowdell illustrates the clear divide between Littlepage’s “arctic community” and the “rural fishing village” of Dunnet Landing; figures like Joanna, the narrator, and at times Mrs. Todd become instead “ghostly figures” with markedly more liminal relationships to Dunnet Landing at large, showing the “narrative distance between individual and community” found in all three (210). In visiting the Shell-Heap and receiving the coral pin as a gift, the narrator begins to nurture her desire for the unknown that Joanna inspires, with the shell imagery representing the unique kinship these characters share in their own separate types of isolation at what Dowdell calls “the margins of Dunnet Landing” (211) as a community.

Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is an intimate look into the lives of primarily feminine subjects before it is a short-story cycle. Though publishers may be eager to

call *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a novel, Jewett's self-described "sketches" are something to be celebrated as such. Willa Cather, an editor of Jewett, reports that she exclusively called them "sketches" and not "stories" (Lessard). James Nagel cites the sketch as a "work of expository prose describing a scene or characters. Sketches were widely admired, but contained little by way of plot, usually had no conflict, and thus concluded without resolution" (pg). The clarification of the sketch being a type of short story cements *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as a collection of short stories, not a novel, while also emphasizing the importance of the detail-oriented character studies found within. Jewett's usage of the sketch as a format also focuses in even further on the natural landscape that Jewett makes a touchstone for her characters; elevating the prose to something almost visual in nature. The relationship between strong imagery and literary visuals with the intimate struggle of the characters with appropriate social appearances is clear, with the contrast of the literal or metaphorical wilderness providing the contrast on which my thesis hinges. Jewett's sketches are brief, but filled with key natural imagery and intimate character exploration. Stories like "Mrs. Todd," "At the Schoolhouse Window," and "Poor Joanna" fix a close lens on the women at their heart: Almira Todd, the narrator, and "Poor Joanna" Todd, a cousin to Mrs. Todd. Through the course of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as a series of sketches, Jewett provides a glimpse into the community of Dunnet Landing and the women at its fringe, inhabiting a liminal space of extremes with regard to deeply personal, conflicting feelings of grief, guilt, and isolation. Poor Joanna acts as an emotional conduit between the narrator and Dunnet Landing, working metaphorically to illustrate that the narrator's feelings of otheredness are not related to her feelings of being a foreigner to the fishing village. Poor Joanna is another woman who chose her personal peace over the guilt that living in Dunnet Landing seemed to inflict upon her. This peace comes in the

form of solitude on one of Dunnet Landing's Outer Islands referred to as the Shell-Heap Island, the place that Joanna chooses over the expectation of the juxtaposed feminine community of mothers and wives and the masculine industry that divides the gendered landscape. Joanna's choice to live in solitude allows her to avoid being labeled a spinster, but being pitied for her place outside of acceptable feminine gender roles is seemingly something inescapable.

One of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*' key themes involves a juxtaposition between the comforts of a feminine community with a necessary solitude. While Coby Dowdell's article defines *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as a short-story cycle "punctuated by a pattern of withdrawals during which the narrator repeatedly retreats to the fringes of community," it is not always so. The narrator does not seem to mesh well with the would-be "harmonious consolidation of community" (1) with which Dunnet Landing might welcome her in the first sketch "Mrs. Todd;" it is not long before she realizes "the seclusion and uninterrupted days which had been looked forward to proved to be very rare in this otherwise delightful corner of the world" (5), explicitly stating her own desire for solitude long before Joanna— a character defined by her solitude— appears. The narrator's stay with Mrs. Todd has been brief, but this first sketch, "Mrs. Todd," serves to set the tone for Dunnet Landing's bustling community— and the important roles of even the women who live in the fringe of it. From the short-story cycle's outset, the narrator seems to worry about belonging in Dunnet Landing; the call to the liminal edge of Dunnet Landing to be outlined in "Captain Littlepage" is already foreshadowed by the narrator's disappointment in not finding her desired solitude in the heart of the community alongside Mrs. Todd.

Mrs. Todd might be the pillar of the community with which Jewett chooses to introduce us to Dunnet Landing, but the character of Mrs. Todd plays a dual role in *The Country of the*

Pointed Firs as a narrative: she is both the pillar of community entrusted with the narrator's care that we see in "Mrs. Todd" as well as the "learned herbalist" at which the "village doctor... makes suggestive jokes" at the expense of her craft (4). However, Dunnet Landing's medical doctor and its top herbalist "were upon the best of terms;" Mrs. Todd in this way becomes a figure deeply rooted in Dunnet Landing as well as unique within it. This exchange between the two does not immediately pin Mrs. Todd as another of Dunnet Landing's uniquely othered women, but does foreshadow that Mrs. Todd may not be all she seems. Almira Todd showcases a noteworthy social mobility in and around Dunnet Landing as a community, having an acceptably feminine place in her community as well as a vocation while also being capable of navigating the seascape most frequented by male seafarers. Through the wisdom of maturity and experience that Jewett later expands on in "Where Pennyroyal Grew," Mrs. Todd has achieved an adequate balance between her social role as one of Dunnet Landing's most important women with her distinct differences.

While appreciative of her time with Mrs. Todd and its pleasures, what still finds a way to push the narrator toward the fringe of Dunnet Landing's community is the monopolizing of her time. The narrator informs us on the first page of "Mrs. Todd" that their arrangement was perfect save for one thing: the "one fault to find" was "its complete lack of seclusion" (3). Again the narrator voices her desire for solitude, even surrounded by feminine community. This, on top of the uncanny connection Mrs. Todd shares with the narrator through the teaching of her herbal craft, is ultimately what pushes the narrative forward from the sketch "Mrs. Todd" to "At the Schoolhouse Window." Though Mrs. Todd's spruce beer is "cooling and refreshing" in a way the narrator likens to "wonderful perfection," it is also something that "had won immense local fame" and as such "the supplies for its manufacture were always giving out and having to be

replenished" (7); living in Mrs. Todd's company seems to provide just as much joy to the narrator as it does to tax her, without the desired solitude to replenish her ability to perform the exhausting, extroverted work.

The narrator's move to Dunnet Landing "late in June" has made her indispensable to Mrs. Todd given that the "busy herb-gathering season was just beginning" upon her arrival (5). The narrator's immediate enmeshing with one of Dunnet Landing's pillars of community has thrust her totally into engagement with the said community, leaving her personal matters— in this case, the narrator's art of writing— sorely neglected. With the summer flying by, the narrator is forced to "renounce it all and withdraw from these pleasant successes" (6), which she only does on account of her artistic conscience— the conscience that deems her writing, something she notes is "sadly belated now," as something she is still "bound to do" (5). The narrator is hardly bitter about the community of Dunnet Landing keeping her from her "literary employments" (6), however, having already grown so enmeshed with Dunnet Landing and Mrs. Todd that to renounce "the pleasure of 'seein' folks'" is something the narrator considers "cruel to the whole neighborhood" (6). The narrator and Mrs. Todd have something special in what the narrator calls their "shrewd business agreement" (5), but the narrator as artist is bound to her craft. So too is Mrs. Todd to her own, but the narrator is not alone in feeling isolated even in the midst of Dunnet Landing's community, as Mrs. Todd will soon reveal through the intimate, isolating nature of her inner feelings of grief and loss.

On a pebble beach that foreshadows the coming story of Poor Joanna and her Shell-Heap Island, the narrator pushes off to isolate herself for her art— for better or worse— while Mrs. Todd steps into the fringe of Dunnet Landing's community, reminiscing her first love the "seafarin' man" (7). Dowdell also notes that as "Jewett's text focuses on the isolation of the

citizen from his/her community," so does Mrs. Todd's grief isolate her from both Dunnet Landing and her family. (1) The narrator blames a certain mysterious, powerful "herb of the night," saying that she and Mrs. Todd "both fell under a spell.... then Mrs. Todd would feel that she must talk to somebody, and I was only too glad to listen" (6). Through the use of further nature imagery as well as the unspoken kinship between the narrator and Mrs. Todd, Jewett illustrates another side of Almira Todd that was previously obscured by her outward-facing appearance in Dunnet Landing's community— a side of herself she feels comfortable sharing only through the kinship she shares with the narrator. Similar to the way in which the narrator identifies with Joanna's differences, so too does Mrs. Todd see herself in the narrator; in her, she finds a person with whom she feels enough personal kinship to share some of the burden of her unspoken grief.

With the narrator off to find her desired seclusion in "the Schoolhouse" and "At the Schoolhouse Window," Mrs. Todd is left without the friend with whom she seems to feel an intimate enough connection to voice her grief. While Mrs. Todd might represent one extreme in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* when it comes to her undeniable connection to the community of Dunnet Landing, she simultaneously represents the othered, isolated extreme of someone who feels that she has been pushed to the fringe of someone's understanding— hence her secrecy— by the weight of her grief. This pushing off from the pebble beach into isolation for Mrs. Todd and the narrator both looks ahead to Poor Joanna and Shell-Heap Island, another of the extremes in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* when it comes to feelings of isolation, a secrecy that stems from said isolation and a perceived lack of understanding, and being a part of the community only on its fringe.

Even though the narrator and Mrs. Todd are both simultaneously included in the community of Dunnet Landing as well as kept on the fringe of its boundaries, the narrator

explains that her search for seclusion has an unexpected return: “on the contrary, a deeper intimacy seemed to begin” between herself and Almira Todd (6). Searching for the isolation she believes to be in need of only seems to tie together the narrator and Mrs. Todd as fringe members of Dunnet Landing’s community; Mrs. Todd’s house is “the last house on the way inland,” and the narrator’s schoolhouse is even more on the boundary of the community, being a part of the “higher inland country” where the schoolhouse itself sits “on the brink of the hill” (9). Even before the appearance of Captain Littlepage outright, the schoolhouse— “much wind-blown and weather-beaten” and “a landmark to seagoing folk” as it was— removes the narrator from the heart of Dunnet Landing and pushes her closer to a new world entirely. With these early sketches, Jewett begins to foreshadow the explicit appearance of the other world to which Dunnet Landing’s fringe community gives way: the “strange sort of country” with its “strange sort of people” (22) about which Captain Littlepage tells the narrator. This liminal space, the one detailed in “Captain Littlepage,” is where poor Joanna and the narrator reside, being both apart while also belonging. The narrator’s transient place in Dunnet Island and Joanna’s choice to set herself apart from the town create the in-between place that Captain Littlepage’s vision of “shadow people” makes more literal, becoming more of another world than just an uncanny feeling.

Dunnet Landing’s unique nature as a seaport town with inlets that characters must navigate makes nautical motifs recurrent through *Country of the Pointed Firs*, beginning more broadly with seafaring and later narrowing focus onto individual shells. With the introduction of Captain Littlepage and the navigation in and around Dunnet Landing being primarily by boat, Jewett begins to intertwine the stereotypically masculine role of the seafarer with the dangerous and sublime associated with what Littlepage calls “a waitin’ place between this world and the

next” (24). *Country of the Pointed Firs* is predominantly a short-story cycle focusing on the lives of women on the fringe— of their communities, their relationships, and the world of “fog and cobwebs” (27) that lay outside of Dunnet Landing’s safe harbor. Captain Littlepage’s story of the wreck of the *Minerva* works doubly to fascinate the narrator with her newfound place at the fringe of their community, closer to the “shadow world” than to home, as well as to foreshadow its dangers and display the ocean’s place in the narrative as wilderness. Seafaring itself is presented as a journey into this liminal space, the wreck of the *Minerva* presenting both the narrator and the reader with the real danger these men faced when at sea, with whether or not they might return obscured in this liminal wilderness. With Captain Littlepage’s ship sharing a name with Greek mythology’s goddess of wisdom, the wreck of the *Minerva* is an ill omen for the narrator’s newfound fascination with the place in Dunnet Landing’s liminal spaces that seem to welcome deeper the part of her that feels disconnected from the Dunnet Landing community.

While the narrator feels empowered in her art through her newfound seclusion at the little white schoolhouse, “I sat at the teacher’s desk as if I were that great authority,” the truth of the matter is different— the narrator still simultaneously feels like a “small scholar” (9), torn between feeling empowered by the seclusion from her newfound community as well as feeling both uncomfortable and uncertain. What keeps the narrator tethered to Dunnet Landing even as she draws closer to the edge and into the liminal space just outside it is, in fact, that community. Even in her searching for solitude at the schoolhouse, its distance from the heart of Dunnet Landing means Mrs. Todd’s customers constantly “came and went” with “loud and cheerful voices” outside the schoolhouse window, and the narrator says that it was “impossible not to listen, with cottonless ears... and an idle pen” (8). Unfortunately, the narrator’s newfound isolation proves pointless even amongst the comfort of solitude, and “the sentences failed to

catch these lovely summer cadences” of a nearby sheep-bell. Finally, and perhaps most painfully, the narrator watches Mrs. Begg’s funeral procession go by without her— as she “hurried away at the end of the services”— and realizes her place at the fringe of Dunnet Landing, a place that she “did not really belong to” (13). The narrator fights the urge to return to Dunnet Landing’s call, even as the natural imagery works to distract her from the reason she sought out the schoolhouse; however, this time at the schoolhouse only further convinces the narrator of the ways in which she does not natively belong to the seaside community, as much as its natives welcome her. Despite the feeling of otherness that the funeral procession awakes in the narrator, the death of Mrs. Begg recalls the narrator to the way in which she “professed great dissatisfaction with town life” and, though she lived close to a strong figure of support like Mrs. Todd just as the narrator does, Mrs. Begg “could not get used to the sounds of the sea” (11). This disconnect between Mrs. Begg and Dunnet Landing’s community, as well as the manner in which she “had lived to lament three husbands” and her home being “decorated with West Indian curiosities, specimens of fine coral and conch shells” are what tie this otherwise minor character to Jewett’s unique liminal women. Most noteworthy is how Jewett makes use of the narrator to define Mrs. Begg with both her grief and the images of coral and seashells that foreshadow “Poor Joanna.”

Coby Dowdell focuses on the ascetic practices of characters in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, tying the “process of isolation and withdrawal” seen in “the narrator’s own movement (alongside Joanna)” to regionalism and local colour as a genre. Dowdell cites Geoffrey Galt Harpham in defining the meaning of asceticism, referring to the practice as “in a tight sense... a product of early Christian ethics; in the loose sense it refers to any act of self-denial undertaken as a strategy of empowerment or gratification (xiii).” (213) Regarding the narrator’s “pattern of withdrawals” (210) in *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Dowdell references

Sarah Way Sherman's explanation of the narrator's struggle with her art: "to be happy in Dunnet Landing, she must achieve connection. If she wants to write, she must achieve separation. Moreover, if she wants to write about Dunnet Landing, she must achieve both" (204). Even with solitude and Dunnet Landing's idyllic natural images all around her, "At the Schoolhouse Window" still only ends with "a half-written page" (13). Dowdell continues by noting how Dunnet Landing itself "embodies a far more complex relation between community and observer... there is no clear-cut division between becoming a member of the community and remaining a stranger because the narrator requires a certain proximity in order to insure the comparative representation of the region" about which she is writing (212). The narrative told throughout the sketches that comprise *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is "unique because it pays attention to the formal generic demands placed on the narrator, demands that require her to be conversant with both 'worlds'" (212). In this way, the narrator mirrors those fully immersed in the fringe like Joanna and Mrs. Begg through isolation from the community; despite what Dowdell notes as her pattern of withdrawal, she also must navigate Dunnet Landing's spheres of community in the way that Mrs. Todd has seemingly mastered literally and figuratively.

Equally familiar with their place on the fringe of Dunnet Landing's community are the inhabitants of Green Island, Mrs. Todd's family. Aside from Joanna and the narrator, Coby Dowdell also notes Mrs. Todd's mother, Mrs. Blackett, in the characters whose ascetic practices he finds most noteworthy (211). Following her time in solitude at the schoolhouse, the narrator seems eager to return to engaging with kindred spirit Mrs. Todd— though the way the "sunshine struck" the Outer Islands keeps the narrator aware of "the world beyond this which some believe to be so near" (29), unable to forget Littlepage's "mysterious arctic community" (Dowdell 210). Their journey by boat from Green Island shakes the expectation of a more masculine mariner.

The narrator notes the way in which she has “become well acquainted with Mrs. Todd as land-lady, herb-gatherer, and rustic philosopher...” but “was yet to become acquainted with her as a mariner” (32). The narrator’s first thought is to “speak to the Captain and the Bowden boy” regarding their trip to Green Island, but Mrs. Todd quickly insists “we’ll man it ourselves.” Johnny Bowden is still present, but he and the narrator do equal work rowing while Mrs. Todd becomes the captain of their vessel as she “sat aft, a stern and unbending law-giver” (32). Anita Duneer notes how this vignette is “more than a simple reversal of expected gender roles” and how it instead “elevates Mrs. Todd as a character whose harmonious relationship with the sea symbolizes the humanistic values of the coastal community” (223). Mrs. Todd is just as capable of navigating Dunnet Landing’s “worlds,” both socially and literally, as any sailor. Her unique position in Dunnet Landing’s community, being both a pillar of it and a member of its fringe, allows her to disregard gendered expectations with regard to seafaring and to be quite literally the captain of her own ship—just as she was when she chose to leave her family home in the Outer Islands for Dunnet Landing, a coming towards the community from its outer limits.

This attitude—the rather natural subversion of gender roles seen in Jewett’s seafaring women—is something that has clearly passed matrilineally from Mrs. Todd’s mother, Mrs. Blackett, to her daughter, Mrs. Todd. Blackett playfully criticizes her seafaring from the shore, saying “Your bo’t ain’t trimmed proper, Mrs. Todd!” and exclaiming she “won’t never get out to Green Island that way” (32). In response to her mother’s criticism about her seamanship, Mrs. Todd takes the comment in stride, inquiring “When you’d git back from up country?” of her mother. This irony confirms their shared place as Dunnet Landing outcasts; as such, the narrator remarks that the “irony was not lost on the rest of the company,” but the “cackle of laughter” (33) that follows is something special for Mrs. Todd and her mother to share. Duneer continues

by arguing that Jewett “reshapes the masculine tradition of maritime romance within literary realism” through these women and their relationship to the sea (223). While Mrs. Todd’s family might be members of Dunnet Landing’s fringe— both literally out in the Outer Islands and figuratively as well— they are content, and eager to welcome the narrator into their little liminal family caught between Dunnet Landing and the great unknown.

Others having come from the fringe of Dunnet Landing’s seaport community have embraced the same solitude by which the narrator is initially allured, but later rejects— whether it be Mrs. Todd’s solitude as a widow or the titular “Poor Joanna,” a young woman related to Mrs. Todd through her marriage to her now-deceased husband, Nathan Todd. Joanna chooses isolation over the community’s readily-given support, leaving Dunnet Landing in favor of solitude on one of its Outer Islands for a reason purposefully kept vague. In contrast, Mrs. Todd’s intimate relationship with the narrator and deep nostalgia for her once-home Green Island bring the narrator through a series of touchstones of memory: songs sung by Mrs. Blackett and Mrs. Todd’s brother, William, such as “Sweet Home” as well as a photograph from her mother’s wedding, stored in a “worn case” that when opened gives way to the “full face of the cheerful child she looked like in spite of being past sixty” (47). Mrs. Todd’s relationship with the narrator has grown so close that she shares experiences with her that are distinctly familial, perhaps to target the discomfort and feeling of foreignness that she can sense in the narrator’s desire to isolate herself.

This same happy nostalgia for her former home and family becomes much more poignant in “Where Pennyroyal Grew,” in which Mrs. Todd confesses one of the most isolating types of solitude displayed in the lonely liminal spaces of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*: the isolating nature of a widow’s grief. Mrs. Todd finds herself in yet another liminal space, another of

Dunnet Landing's worlds—the past—in the pennyroyal garden. Memories of her deceased husband come to mind there, but memories of a more mysterious, long-lost love seem to weigh on Mrs. Todd in equal part. Mrs. Todd resides in a liminal space between loves, between a deceased husband who “made her real happy” even though the love they shared “was but a dream with us” and the cobweb-wrapped, fog-obscured “other one” (49) to which she alludes. Mrs. Todd relays these intimate stories to the narrator in a garden filled with pennyroyal; Ron Welburn explains pennyroyal's use in herbal medicine in his study of some of *Country of the Pointed Firs*' most powerful images, acknowledging its use for “relieving menstrual cramps” as well as “another, carefully acknowledged practical use... its ingestion in tea form could result in miscarriage—in other words, pennyroyal is by extension an agent for inducing abortion.” Mrs. Todd makes no explicit mention of an induced miscarriage by way of pennyroyal tea, but the way in which she grows nostalgic for both her deceased husband and the vaguely-referenced other lover is another way in which Jewett fixes Almira Todd as the “emotional core” (3) of her narrative. In “Where Pennyroyal Grew” the narrator bears witness to another type of isolation: the “absolute, archaic grief” that Mrs. Todd feels, especially in being a grief in which she has become isolated. The narrator describes Mrs. Todd's return to the fringe of Dunnet Landing on Green Island and the relaying of the true depth of her grief to the narrator in “Where Pennyroyal Grew” as “a renewal of some historic soul, with her sorrows and the remoteness of a daily life busied with rustic simplicities and primeval herbs” (49). Though Mrs. Todd plays several roles in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*—fringe member of Dunnet Landing who found the niche that strengthened her place in the community, and a former habitant of the even further fringe of the Outer Islands—Jewett still paints her into that same liminal space that we see in characters like the narrator and Poor Joanna who are both outcasts and not. All of these women are “historic

souls” as the narrator describes, but Mrs. Todd is perhaps the oldest, both a pillar of community as well as one of its most narratively mobile. Mrs. Todd has seemingly achieved what Fritze calls a “garden of dominion” (146), but the seemingly ancient grief she keeps isolated within, the image of pennyroyal, the ghost of Nathan Todd’s memory, and the related image of seashells connect her to a character that outwardly seems her complete opposite—the isolated, self-outcasted Joanna.

Joanna’s relationships with love; Dunnet Landing; and the most prominent liminal space of all, the Shell-Heap Island, are deeply complicated just as Mrs. Todd’s own relationship with these places are. Just after the narrator and Mrs. Todd arrive where Joanna has mysteriously isolated herself on one of Dunnet Landing’s Outer Islands, the first appearance of one of the short-story cycle’s most important images, a pin made of coral, occurs—and seems to portend Joanna’s arrival. Mrs. Todd “felt for poor Nathan’s little pin t’ see if it was safe in my dress pocket. All of a sudden Joanna came right to the fore door, not sayin’ a word” (72). Here, “while explaining the history of Poor Joanna’s home on Shell-Heap Island, Mrs. Todd refers to Littlepage’s arctic community;” by noting this, Jewett creates a great deal more of the “narrative distance” that the “text stresses the importance of... in relating the individual to community” (Dowdell 210). Connecting Poor Joanna Todd to Littlepage’s “land of fog and cobwebs” pushes her so far out on the fringe of Dunnet Landing that she is closer to the “shadow people” than the rest of their community. Joanna is living, but the appearance of the coral pin given to Mrs. Todd by her deceased husband and her reference to Littlepage’s shadow people seem to quantify the nature of Joanna’s disconnection from the community of Dunnet Landing as something not unlike death. “Both Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd, on the one hand, and the narrator, on the other, characterize Joanna as a nun of the ascetic order,” says Dowdell, “Mrs. Fosdick introduces Poor

Joanna as a ‘sort of nun or hermit person’ while Mrs. Todd describes her in relation to the ‘shut up convents’ of times past (52, 55).” (216) The narrator muses on Joanna’s chosen solitude on the Shell-Heap Island— though she “felt a warm sense of comfort in the evident resources of even so small a neighbourhood, but for the poor hermit Joanna there was no neighbor on a winter night” (73). While the narrator has previously yearned for a similar solitude in the bustle of Dunnet Landing’s active community, Joanna’s place on the Shell-Heap is uncomfortably extreme and even pitiable, even to the people who seem to feel the greatest kinship with her. Mrs. Todd notes that she expected Joanna to look strange after entering into a life of solitude on the Shell-Heap, “with her hair grown gray in a night or somethin’,” but is surprised to find the familial resemblance between Joanna and her mother with her “grim streak” has grown: “T’was the mother all over again” (74). While she notes the way in which Joanna now favors her mother, the sister of Mrs. Todd’s husband, Mrs. Todd does not elaborate on Joanna’s mother or her “grim streak” further. The story of Poor Joanna reveals more about the community from which she has isolated herself than it does her— with Mrs. Todd lamenting how Joanna’s home on the Shell-Heap looked “so lonely and poor.” In contrast to the eerie quiet regarding Joanna’s mother, Mrs. Todd longs for her mother’s guidance with regard to Joanna: “I said to myself, I must get mother to come over an’ see Joanna; the love in mother’s heart would warm her, an’ she might be able to advise” (74). Mrs. Todd seems to feel as if further introduction into the embrace of Dunnet Landing’s feminine community might heal the unseen ailment from which Joanna seems to suffer, but Joanna only seems pushed away by the help that Mrs. Todd and other members of Dunnet Landing’s community offer.

The place that Joanna chooses to live in solitude is just as contested as the topic of Joanna herself. Mrs. Fosdick describes Shell-Heap Island as a “holding station,” recounting a

self-proclaimed “queer story about Shell-Heap Island” in which natives “come down from up from up country... left a captive there without any bo’t, an’ ‘twas too far to swim across to Black Island... ‘an he lived there until he perished” (63). Littlepage describes his vision in the Arctic Circle as a “waitin’ place,” while Mrs. Fosdick refers to the Shell-Heap as a “holding station.” Through the story of Shell-Heap Island’s former captive and Mrs. Todd’s recollection of the “ghostly figures,” Poor Joanna becomes the “de facto successor” to the deceased captive from the island, showing how “Poor Joanna assumes a similar relationship to those who observe her, one predicated upon a withdrawn yet strangely connected relation to Dunnet Landing” (Dowdell 2). Vesna Kuiken also notes the juxtaposition between the societal norm and where Joanna chooses to live in solitude, detailing at length the “real-life model” of Shell-Heap Island, the Whaleback shell heap, a piece of what Kuiken cites as “deliberate geology,” a term coined by Branka Arsic (91). Kuiken continues by describing the way in which “Joanna’s lifestyle comes to be restructured by her proximity to the heap and its content: the pre-colonial, mythic, and other-than-human material relics that far surpass Joanna’s local contours of a spinsterly Christian resident of a village in Maine.” Kuiken describes the disconnect between Joanna and Dunnet Landing as an “interposition of Whaleback’s strange ecosystem” of Joanna with “worlds and temporalities that distort her normal identity, joining her with what at first may appear as distant, unrelated, or long gone.” Furthermore, Kuiken defines this temporal anomaly that influences not only Joanna and the narrator but Mrs. Todd as something called ““idiorrhhythmic regionality” —a constitutive trait or property that imbricates the local with what is not apparently proper to it and what is, strictly speaking, beyond it” (91). Returning again to a form of ascetic practice, Kuiken borrows the term “idiorrhhythmy” from Roland Barthes, “who in a lecture series on *How to Live Together* proposes an idiosyncratic form of communal habitation characterized as

living-alone-with-others.” In the way that these female characters simultaneously feel the pressure of traditional roles while finding unique ways to reject them through natural imagery, characters like Mrs. Todd, the narrator, and Poor Joanna practice a form of gender idiorrhymy that is not limited by their region, but heavily characterized by it in the form of Jewett’s most powerful regional images like the seaport town of Dunnet Landing and Joanna’s Shell-Heap Island. This idiorrhymy allows these characters to reject the expected— the “apparently proper” (91)— in favor of what lies beyond it, be that Joanna’s solitude on the precolonial, mystic shell heap, the narrator’s transient state as a welcomed foreigner, or Mrs. Todd, the effortlessly socially mobile and keeper of secrets. Rather than allow herself to be forced into the role of a spinster, Joanna chooses to defy both the gendered expectation as well as the regional one, choosing to enter the wild landscape that others define as uncanny or ominous for the chance to live in a way that is primarily self-sufficient.

Because of the time in which *Country of the Pointed Firs* takes place, it is impossible for Joanna to live in a way that is entirely self-sufficient; Joanna is both separate from and nonetheless connected to Dunnet Landing proper. Stephanie Foote references Susan Gillman in her reading of the text, who says “the point of constructing a more harmonious, ‘imaginary’ past is to look both away from and toward the disturbing present... which constructs region as both separate and engaged with nation (115).” In the same way, Joanna is both separate and engaged, as is the narrator— without these characters, *Country of the Pointed Firs* may have fallen prey to what Gillman references as a “harmonious” yet nonetheless “imaginary” past. Joanna would seemingly rather live in isolation than carry the social burden of being made a spinster by her unfaithful lover, of which Mrs. Fosdick details the story thoroughly; however, all Joanna herself will confess to her relative, Mrs. Todd, is the “unpardonable sin” which pushes her away from

Dunnet Landing, perhaps in reference to a potential loss of her virginity by way of the man who abandoned her to marry another woman. Through the purposefully vague nature of Joanna's reasoning for her hermitage on the Shell-Heap, equally as much is Joanna now separate from the gender roles she is expected to fulfill. Her distance from the seaport village and movement towards the most extreme area of its fringe represents of a greater rejection of society as well as its implications, such as the way said society interprets her personal identity. Joanna rejects Dunnet Landing's suitable gender roles for the Shell-Heap not out of rebellion, but as a result of the rejection she endured. The notion of sin and the related guilt that Joanna seems to suffer from is not an ailment that can be cured with the comforts of femininity, as much as the members of this community try to connect with and understand her; in her own words to Mrs. Todd, Joanna is convinced she will not understand her, choosing instead to save herself the further emotional difficulty of being misunderstood further. However, total separation from the community of Dunnet Landing is impossible, and the narrator's visit with Mrs. Todd to the Shell-Heap defies expectation: Joanna's hair has not "turned grey in a night" (74) or otherwise, and seemingly enjoys the small bit of company.

Footnote continues by saying *The Country of the Pointed Firs* itself "engages with historical and cultural issues" through its "representations of the exotic and the foreign" (38); perhaps most foreign to the community of Dunnet Landing is the place where Joanna isolates herself on the Shell-Heap Island, but Mrs. Fosdick pushes back against the more common colonial mindset in her descriptions of the place, noting how she has "heard myself that 't was one o' their cannibal places, but I never could believe it. There never was no cannibals on the coast 'o Maine. All the Indians 'o this region are tame-looking folks" (63). In another moment of Kuiken's idiorhythmic regionality, Mrs. Fosdick notes the existence of the harmful stereotype regarding "savage"

natives and opposes it. While Dunnet Landing is seemingly very nearly the “feminist utopia” Holly Jackson describes, the “nativist anxiety” she cites seems to be more a crisis of personal belonging rather than a fear of the foreign. The Shell-Heap Island is less haunted than it is hallowed; Joanna’s self-imposed burden of sin still creates enough guilt and anxiety that she prefers solitude in a sacred, wild place of idiorhythmic regionality as preferable to feminine community. It is this same feminine community that she withdraws from for lack of understanding, but Joanna’s withdrawal is not limited to her physical body in the way that she withdraws her emotions to protect herself. As she had previously “given... her whole heart” (65), it seems only natural that Joanna would in turn withdraw her whole heart for the natural world of the shell heap that seems untouched by time. Jewett’s subtle navigation of the historical and cultural issues Holly Jackson describes works along her distinctly realistic feminism— delicately depicting the isolating nature of feminine taboo through Mrs. Todd’s pennyroyal garden and Joanna’s penal colony on the Shell-Heap Island. Even support of Dunnet Landing’s feminine community is not enough to minimize the isolating guilt that Joanna feels— a guilt instilled in her by the framework of patriarchal society and purity culture that even Jewett’s “feminist utopia” cannot escape— to find reconciliation only in solitude.

Despite Joanna’s hermitage on the Shell-Heap, Mrs. Todd also notes how the woman “kept stealin’ glances at me as if she were glad I had come.” Joanna’s “forbiddin’” nature manages to put her on the fringe of the patriarchal hand of religion especially; in the odd encounter with the priest; when Joanna won’t answer questions about “if she felt to enjoy religion in her present situation” (75), Mrs. Todd refuses to close her eyes for prayer, seemingly in solidarity with another othered woman. Even as Mrs. Todd “entreated her” to come home, Joanna insists that the sins she has committed are “unpardonable” (76) even as they remain so

vague. In contrast, however, to “Poor Joanna” and her equally poor hermitage, is her flourishing relationship with the natural world described in her titular story while the narrator, Mrs. Todd, and Mrs. Fosdick gossip. Though Mrs. Todd begins by describing the Shell-Heap Island as “perhaps thirty acres, rocks and all” (66), she continues by noting the abundance of natural resources, like “driftwood... and a poor failin’ patch of spruces... so she always had something to burn.” Furthermore, Mrs. Todd details the way in which Joanna “tilled the little field out there and raised a nice parcel of potatoes,” as well as her ability to “fish, ‘o course, and there was all her clams and lobsters. You could always live well in any wild place by the sea when you’d starve to death up country” (68). Despite the apparent melancholy and clear pity members of Dunnet Landing have for “Poor” Joanna, the Shell-Heap both provides for her and cannot bestow judgement or pity. Having found her personal penal colony, Joanna acts as Jewett’s ultimate illustration of a liminal woman caught between solitude and a community eager to help with an issue they cannot seem to understand. Kuiken attributes Joanna’s position in this liminal space as an example of the aforementioned “idiorrhhythmic regionality” through her place on the Shell-Heap, “a conception of regionalism as transcultural, transnational, and irreducibly cosmopolitan regionality” that “juxtaposes fictional Shell-Heap Island with its real-life model... it figures as a unique archival mechanism that assembles in a single place seemingly incongruous temporalities and forms of life.” Kuiken describes the relationship of Poor Joanna to her hermitage on the Shell-Heap as a disruption of “historical linearity” (87). Furthermore, Kuiken describes the role Joanna plays in *Country of the Pointed Firs* as a “disturbingly flawless partnership of industrial demolition with ethnographic acquisition by placing one of her main characters... on a shell heap in Maine,” and “ushering” in the real-life “eponymous Whaleback heap and its frenzied history” regarding colonialism. Joanna’s choice of solitude on the

Shell-Heap Island is a purposeful rejection of community in Dunnet Landing in favor of a deeply personal and othered solitude that is both ahead of its time and ancient— as her “lifestyle is restructured by her proximity to the heap and its content” (90). Joanna is the most prominently present in the liminal place of idiorrhhythmic regionality, caught between a different time and the present, a feeling of belonging where perhaps you should not, or a feeling of otherness in your own home. Just as Captain Littlepage was called to the land of fog and cobwebs somewhere in the Arctic Circle, so too was Poor Joanna called to the solitude of the Shell-Heap Island, seeming to find peace in shadows and solitude where the guilt of the preconceived notion of sin made her former home in Dunnet Landing inhospitable.

Joanna, though isolated, leaves one thread of connection between herself and Dunnet Landing: the coral pin that she ultimately declines. Appearing first in “Poor Joanna,” Mrs. Todd feels for the gift from her deceased husband, Nathan, by whom she was related to Joanna, before she herself even appears in her retelling of the story. Even though Joanna’s face “did really light up for a minute, sort of bright and pleasant” (77) in contrast to the “dreadful stern” face described previously, Joanna declines Mrs. Todd’s gift that she might keep it for herself— both as a memento of herself and later of Nathan. The coral pin’s passage from Joanna’s almost-ownership to Mrs. Todd and finally the narrator ties together these three in-between women in their own niche community of understanding the various meanings of solitude, both physical and emotional. With the narrator drawn to the Shell-Heap Island just as she found herself drawn to solitude itself, it is clear that she feels a kind of kinship with the liminal space, or idiorrhhythmy, that Joanna inhabits between solitude and the community of Dunnet Landing. As such, it seems only right that the narrator is the one to receive the coral pin in the end; only in “The Backward View” can she recognize the unique niche of community that hosted her during

her time at Dunnet Landing. These characters inhabit a place between Dunnet Landing and Captain Littlepage's "shadow world"— but ultimately find their sense of self and belonging through their experiences as they are distinctly shaped by their region. At the fringe of Dunnet Landing is its own cabal of outcasts unique in their own ways. Though the narrator struggles with her nearing return to "the world in which she feared to find herself a foreigner" (127), her experiences in Dunnet Landing both as a foreigner to its close-knit community and a new inductee into Dunnet Landing's fringe community of outcasts social, emotional, and otherwise have given her the experiences needed to find her feelings of belonging in her newly-built sense of self— with the coral pin as a touchstone to connect her to the liminal spaces in Dunnet Landing that nurtured her unique talents.

The narrator may choose solitude over the social taxation of community and industry, but she is not alone in her desires and differences. Dunnet Landing and the women that live in the community's shadowy fringe are illustrative of a newfound, choice-based social mobility for women that transcends time as something found rather than overt. Figures like Joanna and the narrator exhibit a social and gender mobility, finding a way to free themselves from traditionally gendered expectations through Jewett's seashell motif— representing a partially-obscured, mystic otherness— and solitude. Jewett juxtaposes Almira Todd, the narrator, and Poor Joanna to one another, each connected by a rejection of typical gender roles and an internal desire for solitude that many fail to comprehend. Even the appeal of feminine community is foregone in favor of reconnection with the regional landscape, whether it be in search of the narrator's self or, for Joanna, peace.

CHAPTER TWO

Uncle Wiggily's Hibernation, or Eloise in Connecticut

J.D. Salinger's 1953 *Nine Stories* contains one of the most complicated and weblike relationships to the metaphorical American wilderness brought about by the feminine struggle to find a fitting place in the American Dream. Protagonist Eloise Wengler finds herself extremely disillusioned with the acceptable place as wife and mother that she chose to pursue in her marriage to Lew Wengler, father to their child, Ramona; this disenchantment causes her to struggle in the self-made bonds of the domestic role she resents deeply and seemingly begrudgingly fills. Feeling trapped in both the roles of homemaker and wife as well as more literally trapped in her home, John Wenke describes Eloise as having "consigned herself to an emotional penal colony" (39). Instead of separating herself literally from the frozen waste of her suburban Connecticut home, Eloise chooses to disassociate herself entirely from her home and family by way of emotional rejection. As Ruth Prigozy says in her book chapter in J. Gerald Kennedy's *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictions of Community*, *Nine Stories* as a cycle "heralds that period in our nation's history that has been characterized as frighteningly conformist, spiritually bankrupt, and intellectually adrift—the American 1950s" (118). "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" is no different: Eloise, both spiritually bankrupt as well as deeply focused on appearances and visual conformity, chooses to fixate on the feelings of entrapment imposed by her role in a nuclear family and to internalize her grief and resentment both, withdrawing herself and her related grieving emotions from anyone close enough to her to provide consistent support. Eloise's method of rejection of her newly realized place in the American Dream is perhaps the most collaterally damaging: a separation of self that manifests in the emotional rejection of others, chilling any form of genuine feeling in and around

Eloise and the Wengler home itself, effectively making any connection between mother and daughter impossible. Whether or not Eloise Wengler is genuinely trapped in her marriage, her role as Ramona's mother, or her icy Connecticut suburb, her choice to hold herself emotionally hostage by way of deception, emotional distance, and outsourcing Ramona's parenting is entirely her own.

Annette Kolodny cites Thomas Morton's poem "New English Canaan" as a prime example of gendering and sexualization of the American landscape amid colonization, while also noting the way in which it "countered the harsher reports of a cold, barren, and inhospitable New England... by insisting that any lack of abundance was the unfortunate result of the preset inhabitants' own reticence" (12). Eloise, by her own hand, has crafted her own "New English Canaan" in her Connecticut suburb; this "fruitless 'wombe'" may have borne Lew and Eloise one child, Ramona, but Eloise's emotional rejection and withdrawal of the role of mother keep the Wengler home a "glorious tombe/admired things producing which there dye/and ly fast bound in dark obscurity" (12). The story's deceptive, frozen-over Connecticut suburb setting becomes metaphorical for Eloise: appropriately typical in appearances in her place in suburbia, but fundamentally detached from her chosen place in life. Eloise in this way is both frozen still, incapable of performing in the roles of wife and mother, and frozen in time, finding the warmth of life only in the nostalgia of her past and the occasional outward burst of resentment or otherwise bitter remark. In "Zen and *Nine Stories*," Bernice and Sanford Goldstein describe the way in which "We discover Eloise is unable to solve the puzzle of her existence, the why of what she is, what she has become... we feel that Eloise, like so many of Salinger's psychologically disturbed characters, is almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown" (173). Eloise outwardly has moved beyond her grief—with her husband, child, and suburban home being hallmarks of this

forward movement— but it is due to her own reticence that these things have all simply become pieces in an otherwise greater facade. Eloise’s emotional penal colony, her New English Canaan, and her feelings of entrapment moreover all share the common denominator of being of her own making. This becomes especially apparent when contrasting Eloise to her friend, Mary Jane, who is both recently-divorced and currently employed; Mary Jane seems to take in stride the hand she is dealt, literally continuing to move forward despite her circumstances while Eloise remains fixed in her grief and her emotional detachment from reality.

“Uncle Wiggily’s Haunted House” by Olivia Carr Edenfield makes clear the relationship of “the home, typically a woman’s place...” and its being a “...bastion against the unknown and potentially dangerous wilderness” (230). At the story’s opening, Eloise “turned up the collar of her camel’s-hair coat, put her back to the wind, and waited” (17). Despite the dangerously icy state of the Connecticut suburb, the inclement weather being a driving force in the story itself, Eloise instead detaches herself from her supposed domestic bastion and reality itself, in which she finds herself by turning her back to the wild. Eloise is forced literally to face what Edenfield calls her “haunted house” (235), but refuses to engage with it by coming in from the cold. In the same way, Eloise’s friend and sole confidant, Mary Jane, notices dirty “grit” obscuring the windows of the edifice when she leans her wrist there, revealing only “filthy slush... turning to ice” (20) when she wipes the frame clean. Eloise finds no comfort in this seemingly wilder place in the world to which her marriage to Lew has brought her. The home itself, being everything that Eloise wishes to detach from, is even less preferable than the cold.

Within the home, Eloise’s navigation of the story’s landscape is limited by her borderline emotional state. Eloise avoids significant swaths of the floor plan, most notably the kitchen, which Edenfield notes is “typically the center of domestic life and representative of a place of

nourishment and warmth.” Furthermore, Eloise is so determined to reject her self-imposed “entrapment”— in the role of wife and mother, in her house itself— that she replaces herself in this role with hired help, her maid, Grace. Furthermore, Edenfield acknowledges the way in which Eloise “both dominates and is embarrassed by” Grace’s presence, “aware that her maid is a better caretaker of her daughter than she” (230). Both the outward landscape of frozen suburbia and Eloise’s home are metaphors for the multifaceted nature of her present state. She is frozen with long-held, denied grief for both a person and a time long past. Equally so, she is detached from reality, finding herself pigeonholed into the role of wife and mother by her own hand— seeing fit to avoid seemingly inescapable discomfort by any means necessary, whether it be the living room because she “hates the rug” (231) or hiring Grace so that she may stay away from the kitchen or perhaps her own child, whom she interacts with as if against her will.

Despite her clear desire for escape, it is impossible for Eloise to be alone in her house, even if she is not literally alone. Her daughter, Ramona, and maid, Grace, are both present, but equally rejected emotionally by Eloise, lashed out and belittled with bitter, sarcastic remarks. As a moving part in Eloise’s blend of nostalgia and grief, Mary Jane is the only person with whom Eloise will open up even a fraction. This, however, is not an example of feminine community; rather, Eloise’s attachment to Mary Jane is based in their shared past in New York, where they went to college. They almost exclusively talk about the past. When Eloise briefly acknowledges Ramona as she comes in from the cold, Mary Jane is “dying to see her” (21), so much so that she spills her drink. Rather than acknowledge her child, and bristling with their departure from Eloise’s preferred topic of the past, Eloise offers instead to get her another drink and provide another distraction. Mary Jane, now especially eager to see Ramona, insists she “still has half left;” trying again, Eloise inquires “Sure?” before asking for a cigarette in another attempt at

misdirection. Mary Jane promptly hands her a whole pack, effectively shutting down her attempts to steer the conversation away from Ramona (22). Many of Ramona's appearances in the story occur when she comes in from the cold after playing outside and into the kitchen; though she has clearly been socially stunted at least somewhat by her mother's emotional neglect, she exhibits a greater ability to navigate the landscape of the story itself, going out and coming in from the cold, running to and from the living room and kitchen. If the Connecticut suburb where the story takes place is another New English Canaan for anybody in the story, it is Ramona— she is isolated in this “emotional penal colony” with her mother and Grace only, given that there are “no little boys in the neighborhood. No children at all” save for Ramona and her imaginary counterparts (25). Goldstein and Goldstein cite Ramona's “childlike spontaneous imaginative power” (30) as the driving force behind Ramona's metaphorical mobility in, out, and around the suburb and Wengler home. These traits are starkly contrasted against her still, avoidant mother, as well as her mother's grief that fetters her imagination into only being capable of looking backward. Unlike her mother's fixation on her deceased partner, Walt Glass, Ramona is capable of simply creating another when she herself declares her imaginary “beau” (23) dead. By the time we learn of Jimmy Jimmereeno's rebellious death by being “runned over and killed” after Eloise commands Ramona not to play in the road, Ramona has already moved on by creating a new imaginary companion. As Mary Jane moves into the kitchen to see Ramona, Eloise tries in vain to pull her away from the place— the heart of the home, the kitchen— and the people she longs to detach from and avoid.

With no other way to avoid the topic of her daughter, Eloise's conversation about Ramona with Mary Jane devolves into bitter, belittling remarks. When Mary Jane asks “Who does she look like now?” (22), eager to see how her friend's child has grown, Eloise sarcastically

responds “Akim Tamiroff”— a movie star, of *The General Died at Dawn* and *Union Pacific* fame, another subtle way in which Salinger touches on Eloise’s rejection of the present and clinging to her past through mildly dated pop culture references. Throughout the story, Akim Tamiroff is Eloise’s go-to bitter remark towards inquiries from Mary Jane that follow a certain line of questioning such as “guess what?” or “guess who?”— perhaps to give the impression that she does not care about the answer to Mary Jane’s rhetorical questions. The first time Eloise makes this remark, Mary Jane is telling a story about a schoolmate she saw and what that schoolmate told her: “But you know what she told me, though? Dr. Whiting’s dead. She said she got a letter from Barbara Hill saying Whiting got cancer last summer and died and all.” When Mary Jane, seemingly rhetorically, inquires “Isn’t that terrible?” after detailing how this Dr. Whiting had wasted away to only sixty-two pounds, Eloise frankly remarks, “No” (21). Between her bitterly sarcastic remarks and her clear emotional detachment from Mary Jane’s briefly graphic story, Eloise seems equally as invested in the appearance of emotional detachment as she is her literal rejection and detachment of her reality, family, and home.

When Mary Jane presses Eloise past her sarcastic remark of “Akim Tamiroff” for an earnest answer about Ramona’s looks, Eloise does answer her honestly, but not without a twist that is both demeaning to her child and self-deprecating to herself: “‘Lew. She looks like Lew. When his mother comes over, the three of them look like triplets... what I need is a cocker spaniel or something,’ she said. ‘Somebody that looks like me’” (22). Not only is Eloise’s resentment of Ramona intertwined with her resentment of Lew as her husband, but Eloise’s supposed wisecracks truly reveal how isolated she feels from her own family, both by choice and out of grief. Simultaneously, Eloise’s snide remarks reveal a kind of self-hatred that subtly makes itself known throughout the story, both belittling herself in the comparison to a cocker spaniel as

well as her daughter, speaking about her as if she were a pet. Rejecting Ramona is another way in which Eloise cuts off feeling from another part of herself, growing cold toward and detached from her daughter, achieving another layer of self-imposed isolation.

In the same way, Eloise's previous frank remark about the death of Dr. Whiting reveals how active her efforts are in separating herself emotionally from the topic of death itself. Dr. Whiting's death is another piece of her past dying off, but Eloise exhibits no emotional response. Mary Jane comments that her friend is "getting hard as nails" (21), but the story reveals that to be untrue—Eloise is just that emotionally detached from the reality of time continuing to progress forward. Eloise is emotionally icy and quick to reject, deprecate, or self-deprecate with sarcastic quips, but all these traits seem to be ways in which she copes with grief, or the way in which she emotionally rejects her own feelings and the feelings of those around her. In truth, the frozen-solid, "hard as nails," wisecracking exterior is only another puzzle piece of Eloise's outward facing facade—being the way in which she outright rejects the emotional vulnerability that comes along with being a wife and mother. William Wiegand describes Eloise as "no mere victim of society... Eloise is a bitch, not only with her husband, but with her daughter and her maid as well. She takes the revenges of an invalid" (9). While the story regarding Dr. Whiting is brief, it also touches on what quickly becomes a recurring theme in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut:" a trend that shows Eloise's fixation on her own suffering, even when confronted with the suffering of others. Eloise rejects her chosen place in society and the reality of her life. In so doing, she rejects her own feelings and her sense of self to such a degree that she cannot see past her grief and self-made entrapment, let alone far enough outside of herself to perceive the suffering of those around her or her role in that suffering.

As expected, Ramona is awkward, given Eloise's detachment from house, home, and the small bit of family inside. For several moments, Eloise and Mary Jane talk about Ramona's eyesight as if she is not even in the room, with Mary Jane wondering "I mean, they're not any worse or anything, are they?" and Eloise rather exasperatedly exclaiming "God! Not that I know of," as if it is not a parental responsibility of hers. Eloise instead places the fault on Ramona herself, claiming "she won't tell anybody. She's lousy with secrets" (22). Eloise's misplaced blame and laissez-faire attitude regarding her daughter's sight again reveal more about Eloise and her parenting than it does about Ramona: detachment in lieu of attachment, deception over the truth. Furthermore, Eloise's careless nature towards Ramona belies her own emotional myopia—the way in which her emotional rejection of her home, marriage, and child causes much more harm than good and only continues to keep her isolated with her grief. Even if Ramona is "lousy with secrets" as Eloise describes, it is a learned pattern of behaviour.

Despite Eloise's emotional detachment from Ramona, Ramona still obeys her mother. After quipping icily, "Certainly she does. Who's the lady, Ramona?" Ramona obediently replies "Mary Jane," before anxiously scratching herself. Prigozy notes the way in which "Ramona is pitiable in her homeliness and need for love and companionship" (117), the primary way in which Eloise neglects her child. Perhaps, like her mother, Ramona has grown up a secret-keeper, but she is hardly stupid— Mary Jane tells Ramona just before that she would "bet you don't even remember me, Ramona," when Ramona does so immediately, and by name, at Eloise's command. Ramona even obeys her when it comes to her apparently nervous habit: "'Stop that,' Eloise said to Ramona. Ramona stopped scratching herself" (23). Even when Ramona— who is only described as a "small child" (21)— does something as infantile as picking her nose, she obeys her mother when she commands her to stop, as if she were training the "cocker spaniel"

referenced earlier (22). Eloise mostly talks about Ramona, rather than to her; when she does, Eloise cuts her down constantly with petty admonishments about her naturally childish behaviour or gives commands. She withholds any kind of meaningful, vulnerable emotion like kindness or care, icing out even her child with her frozen demeanor.

Instead, Eloise must be forced to parent her child in any kind of meaningful way, as in the scene involving Ramona's galoshes. Mary Jane attempts it herself but naturally defers to Eloise, Ramona's mother, when the little girl will not let her take off her shoes. Eloise, meanwhile, is "still lying on her back on the floor" after revealing the truth of Walt Glass's death, described as a "freak wartime accident" by Dominic Smith. When Ramona comes in from the cold, Eloise even attempts to avoid both the kitchen and Ramona through Mary Jane: "Do me a favor. Go out in the kitchen and tell whosis to give her her dinner early. Willya?" To this Mary Jane agrees, but not before Eloise notes that she does not feel like "going out to that damn kitchen right this minute" (31). All at once, Eloise avoids Grace— not even saying her name, calling her "whosis," as she does in a similar way with Ramona who is just "her." This effectively ties the two together, both on the page and in Eloise's consciousness, as well as the kitchen itself; Grace is the figure acting as homemaker in the Wengler home, as well as surrogate mother to Ramona. Both characters as a result are associated with the kitchen and Eloise's resulting avoidance of it. Grace and all her efforts in the Wengler home ultimately go to waste, seen most prominently in the story's outset when Eloise "cheerfully" informs Mary Jane that her late arrival resulted in "the whole damn lunch" being "burned— sweetbreads, everything" (17). Anything produced in the "fruitless wombe" of the Wengler kitchen is bound to go wasted, regardless of the ways in which housemaid Grace endeavors to please Eloise. A moment to use the "lavatory" cannot even be spared for Grace, as it is by her efforts that Edenfield asserts Eloise's facade is maintained:

“the maid, Grace, takes care of Ramona since Eloise lacks what the housekeeper’s name suggests: grace as a mother, grace towards the child she should love and protect rather than criticize and ignore” (242). Grace, being so aptly named, represents what Eloise is repeatedly offered and continues to reject. Being so fixated on her own self-pity, Eloise is incapable of showing her maid a modicum of what she is shown constantly: grace.

Eloise is visibly frustrated by the apparent intrusion of Grace and Ramona into her nostalgic, grieving reverie. Rather than speaking to Ramona herself, the narrator notes how Eloise “uses her handkerchief” and how she “speaks into it, addressing Ramona.” Eloise does not speak to Ramona; rather, she issues commands and critiques. Eloise orders Ramona “Go and get Grace to take your galoshes off” before turning to immediately criticize her, “you know you’re not supposed to come into the—” (31). Eloise seemingly almost orders Ramona to also stay out of the living room, perhaps because she previously caught her eavesdropping, or perhaps related to Eloise’s own avoidance of the emotional vulnerability she seems to now associate with the living room. Just prior, when Mary Jane comforts her grieving friend, Eloise only answers “Who’s crying?”, being detached enough from herself and her feelings of grief that she had not noticed. The living room, ironically, is one place where Mary Jane coaxes out feeling from her frozen friend; hence her resentment of, as Edenfield points out, “the room in her house where the majority of the action takes place” (231). Only during Grace’s brief absence is Eloise forced to put her handkerchief away and pull herself off the floor to parent her child, the way in which she “hoisted herself” implying significant exertion or effort.

This small moment of connection between Eloise and Ramona is, again, mostly commands: “gimme your foot,” “sit down, first, please...” Ramona is listening, actively obeying, but she still manages to do it wrong: “not there, *here*,” “other foot. *Other* foot” (31). Eloise has

rejected the role of parent so fervently that even getting her daughter's shoes off is a monumental task— as if fighting with her, as if she were an even younger child, both out of sync— and a task she sees as Grace's responsibility, not her own— one she vehemently resents. Referring to her galoshes, Eloise's last remark to Ramona before sending her to bed early is "take *these* with you" (32). Eloise is equally as detached from Ramona as a person as she is detached from herself; Prigozy details the way in which "Eloise never addresses Ramona by name, and she is consistently critical and irritable...Eloise censures and corrects; she is unresponsive, indeed blind, to her daughter's obvious loneliness and misery" (120). Just as Eloise's grief manifests in her nostalgic memories of Walt Glass, so too does Ramona's neglect manifest in a withdrawal from reality. Both mother and child reject the real world in favor of fantasy and memory. Edenfield refers to Eloise's memories of Walt as something "kinetic," referencing Eloise's memories of the two "in motion: running for a bus, riding on the train" (236). Unlike Eloise's memories that remain in perpetual motion against the contrast of her arrested development, Goldstein and Goldstein highlight the way in which "child Ramona with her childlike spontaneous imaginative power is on the verge of having these qualities eradicated by her mother" (83). Wiegand continues, describing the way "Eloise... resents her daughter's habit of inventing invisible playmates... to take to bed with her at night." However, "Unconsciously, Eloise knows that Walter, her lost lover, is as invisible as Ramona's boyfriends. She forces Ramona to move to the middle of the bed to prevent her daughter from lying with an invisible lover, as she has had to lie with one in the years since Walter's death" (Wiegand 10). In spite of her mother's hyper-critical, commanding behaviour towards Ramona's imaginary friends, Walt Glass is just as much an imaginary "beau" (23) to Eloise as Jimmy Jimmereeno is to Ramona.

In the first memory of Walt that Eloise recounts to Mary Jane, one in the series of nostalgic memories that she seems to perfunctorily repeat for her own comfort, Walt Glass gives her the pitying, comical nickname “Poor Uncle Wiggily!” This hearkens to the contemporary, but somewhat dated, childrens’ book character of the same name. In this way, “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut” gives *Nine Stories* a strange kind of popular-culture mascot: Uncle Wiggily, a character created by Howard R. Garis for his long-running series of bedtime stories published in the *Newark News*, is a coincidentally myopic, arthritic, storytelling rabbit that makes use of a cane. The humor—the sense of humor that Eloise touts so highly when contrasting Lew to Walt Glass, describing him as “the only boy that could ever make me laugh. I mean really laugh” (26)—in this moment comes from Walt’s overexaggerated pity for Eloise’s relatively minor injury. Eloise’s warped perception of her reality is revealed through this crucial memory: one in which she chases that pity, desperate for the comfort she can only find in her nostalgic imagination as she continues to push away and further neglect her living loved ones. Eloise, frozen solid and totally detached from time, place, and feeling, finds warmth from one place: nostalgia. In contrast to the icy Connecticut suburbanite Eloise is now, Edenfield describes how her “kinetic” memories seem to warm her, such as “riding on the train, yet snuggled like rabbits under her coat, his hand on her stomach. That he should find comfort there is a positive sign of their connection at the time, as her womb, a potential warren for their children, would have been beautiful to him” (237). Now, however, Eloise is frozen in place—feeling locked in, as if she can only look out of herself, disconnected from her home and family, from emotions and feeling, from the self. These memories of motion, the bus and train, Walt’s tragically explosive death are the only memories that seem even slightly to thaw Eloise from the place to which she is frozent; however, Eloise is so detached from her sense of self and her own emotions that any display of

emotional vulnerability is seen as negative, even when Mary Jane is actively there to support her while she grieves. Just as she opens up about the nature of Walt's death, Eloise is forced to interact with Ramona, struggling to do so, exclaiming "God!" in frustration as the reality of her life yet again interrupts her reverie, even if recounting Walt's mundane death is painful enough to make her cry. (31) Her emotionally-avoidant personality could be the result of her initial attempts to cope with grief through a similar forward motion experienced in her memories—moving too quickly with Lew, having a child, the move to Connecticut all distractions from the death of Walt Glass. Perhaps Eloise turned to action, staying kinetic to avoid the intensity of grief, but her naturally avoidant nature only allowed her to grind to a halt and freeze up when confronted with her misery and the following regret. Now, Eloise is "out of sync with her current life" and has "hunkered down within herself" (Edenfield 234), frozen in place. Eloise cannot allow herself to grieve fully, in the same way that she cannot allow herself to connect with her husband and child, being unable "to see outside herself" in the way that would allow her to do so (Edenfield 236). Eloise finds herself emotionally stalled— as Edenfield says, trapped in her haunted house, in herself, in the expectations of being a wife and mother, "the prescribed roles that she fails at playing" (233). Avoiding her grief only caused it to fill her house and the frozen suburb, inescapable, but repressed and minimized into something icy and bitter. Regarding this, Wiegand references Salinger's time in the war, arguing that "In the war, he learned that actions not only had social causes but also social consequences, so he must indicate that Eloise's unhappiness affects others" (10). Eloise personally holds the reality of her unprocessed grief against Lew, Ramona, and Grace, despite the way in which her own choices brought her to the reality she now tries desperately to reject.

Not only did Walt Glass make Eloise laugh, but he was intensely humble, with this memory of Eloise and Walt on the train both showing his nurturing, active commitment to his love for Eloise and the priority it takes even alongside his role in the military, even as important as it is: “Anyway, all of a sudden he said my stomach was so beautiful he wished some officer would come up and order him to stick his other hand through the window. He said he wanted to do what was fair. Then he took his hand away and told the conductor to throw his shoulders back. He told him if there was one thing he couldn’t stand it was a man who didn’t look proud in his uniform” (27, 28). In this memory, Eloise and Walt’s relationship is intertwined with his place in the military— both are seemingly of equal importance to him, hence the manner in which Eloise recounts the way in which “he said he wanted to do what was fair.” To Walt Glass, one hand out of the window of the train and one on Eloise’s stomach is what he considered appropriately “fair,” even if somewhat ridiculous.

This quirk of Walt Glass’ is what Eloise struggles to put into words just before retelling the “Poor Uncle Wiggily!” memory, mentioning a story from their shared college life in which “that crazy Louise Hermanson busted in the room wearing that black brassiere she bought in Chicago... he could make me laugh *that way*... he could do it when he talked to me. He could do it over the phone. He could even do it in a letter. And the best thing about it was he didn’t even try to be funny— he just *was* funny” (26). As opposed to images of a “wisecracking G.I.” that Eloise is fearful and even defensive of, enough to withhold the true nature of his death, as well as the memories that she recounts to Mary Jane, from her husband— these memories of Walt Glass highlight the way in which he was not just humorous in the way Eloise describes, but rather different entirely. It is this difference that Julie Ooms elaborates on, describing Walt Glass as “a difficult entity to fully describe through story.” Furthermore, Ooms argues the way “Eloise tries

to help Mary Jane get to know Walt, but is unable to, because Mary Jane— and later, Eloise’s husband Lew— both want stories of Walt the soldier, while Eloise’s stories are about not Walt’s soldiery, but his idiosyncrasies, the little personal things she loved him for” (3). Despite what she says to Mary Jane, Eloise’s love for Walt and resulting grief are not only founded in the way in which he could make her laugh with ease, but the ways in which he was one-of-a-kind. In this way, Eloise continues to try and elaborate on the nebulous quality that made him irreplaceable. Reminiscent of Eloise’s reaction to the death of Dr. Whiting and Mary Jane’s question “Isn’t that terrible?”, there is a disconnect in the flow of conversation between the two women— in the same way that Eloise did not react at all to the death of Dr. Whiting, Mary Jane does not find Eloise’s stories of Walt funny in the slightest, seeming instead perturbed, or as Ooms describes, giving “the impression that Mary Jane would rather not hear about Walt at all” (4). Perhaps most interesting is the way in which Eloise opens up to a friend who ultimately cannot connect with her or understand her rather than a family member. Instead, “Mary Jane does not comment on Eloise’s story at all... she does not understand Eloise’s need to have someone else know and remember Walt, and her lack of understanding becomes even clearer as the story progresses” (Ooms 4). While Eloise and Mary Jane may have had an emotional connection of more depth in college, the two women are now distant from one another, both in place and time as well as emotionally.

However, Eloise seems to find comfort in opening up to an outsider to her closed-off life, regardless of the way Mary Jane cannot understand her, and the way that Eloise seems to note this, asking to be shut up in another moment of pointed self-hatred— “such self-deprecation is evidence of her own self-loathing. She knows she is a bitter woman whose unhappiness makes her over-critical” (Edenfield 248). Wiegand echoes this sentiment, noting that “loss ought to be

overcome” and how Eloise “knows the consequences: her bitchiness” (10). The story of Walt’s reverse promotion is something Ooms interprets as talking about rank “on Salinger’s terms rather than the terms of the soldier hero... rather than giving Mary Jane and Lew the information they want about Walt’s rank, Eloise instead strips him of all rank, leaving only himself” (4). The question of Walt Glass’ rank is hardly as inappropriate as Eloise makes it out to be; however, Eloise does not want the idea of Walt being any kind of “soldier-hero” (Ooms 3) to persist in someone’s memory, finding it antithetical to who he was as an individual.

However briefly, Eloise can recognize the way in which she and Mary Jane fundamentally cannot connect with each other. Even in navigating the Wengler home does Mary Jane fail to connect with anything that might bring her closer to understanding her friend: “Mary Jane is more in tune with the conditions outside of the house, the slush turning to ice that will complicate her getting on down the road to her boss’s house where she is expected. She moves past the bookshelves without noticing the titles and instead picks up a mirror to study her teeth. This disinterestedness in the internal landscape of her friend’s home reflects her inability to comprehend Eloise’s depression” (Edenfield 236). Mary Jane is still an active, driving force in her own life, being simultaneously a recent divorcee as well as being currently employed. Eloise finds herself entrapped by the home and family that she chose, as well as the burden of unprocessed grief, frozen still while Mary Jane maintains the ability to remain in motion. In further contrast to Eloise’s entrapment, Mary Jane makes multiple attempts to leave the Wengler home, fearful of the highly metaphorical, yet nonetheless dangerous ice that surrounds the suburb; Mary Jane’s visit to Eloise was meant to be a stop on her way to Larchmont to visit Mr. Weyinburg, her boss, but Mary Jane is simultaneously late to the Wengler home and kept there, the freeze radiating from Eloise seeming to spread. Even when Mary Jane notes her need to get

to Larchmont to be with Mr. Weyinburg— both because of his hernia and how he is “*so sweet*”— Eloise pressures her to stay, her tone growing dark as she reverts to commands even with Mary Jane, telling her to “call up and say you were killed” (25). Even still, when Mary Jane mentions the “*terribly icy*” weather and having “hardly any anti-freeze in the car,” Eloise insists, doubling down instead of relenting to Mary Jane’s understandable concerns: “Let it freeze. Go phone. Say you’re dead” (26). Not only is Eloise trapped by her circumstances and surroundings; John Wenke describes the way in which she “imprisons herself and tortures others” (39), even Mary Jane, who appears to be her only friend and confidant.

Mary Jane’s concerns about the weather and her prior engagement with her boss are ultimately swallowed up by Eloise’s need for her presence; she is indeed forced to “let it freeze,” kept static against her protests. Eloise’s change in tone again belies the deep grief, the all-encompassing depression that holds her fast— “death, apparently, is desirable, an excuse that she can use to avoid obligations” (Edenfield 244). As opposed to her friend, who is actively overcoming similar, entrapping circumstances day by day through holding her own employment and being a divorcee, Eloise instead is “disappearing. She is most content in her memories, ghostlike, more connected to the dead than the living” (243) in a way that keeps her fundamentally disconnected from Mary Jane, even amid attempts at connection and opening up about Walt. Eloise rejects her family, being as Edenfield says “unwilling to make an authentic connection with her husband or child,” but cannot even connect with the one woman with whom she has shared “the real depth of her grief” (232)— they have quite literally grown apart, or Mary Jane has perhaps left her behind, continuing to pursue progress while Eloise remains frozen in her memories of Walt Glass.

As she recounts one of these memories, Eloise comments “God, he was nice” (27), a comment that Ooms notes is “a strange mix of intense, genuine emotion and shallow expression of it. Eloise punctuates the profundity of Walt’s effect on her with ‘God,’ but cannot find the words to adequately describe what he meant to her beyond the relatively general-sounding ‘nice’” (3). Mary Jane, as both a living memento of Eloise’s past and someone of a comfortable distance enough for Eloise, is the only one she opens up to about the nature of Walt’s death; this spark of potential connection is ultimately wasted on Mary Jane. In contrast, If Ramona is “lousy with secrets” (22), Eloise is totally lame with them; as such, Edenfield describes the way in which “the young Ramona comes much closer than Mary Jane does in connecting to Eloise’s pain” (236). Despite this, Eloise remains unreceptive. Ramona, unable to connect with her mother any other way, mimics her by withdrawing from reality— as “these imaginary males provide an escape for the females who suffer from loneliness and isolation.” Even amidst Eloise’s “emotionally lazy” lack of outward perception regarding her daughter, both “mother and daughter are trapped, in contrast to the images they concoct.” (Edenfield 236) Ramona may be able to navigate and perceive the domestic landscape that both her mother fails to comprehend, but the young girl is just as trapped by her mother’s emotional neglect, leading her to seek comfort in “imaginary males,” Jimmy Jimmereeno and Mickey Mickeranno.

Ramona is not untouched by Eloise’s cold heart; perhaps she is not frozen-over entirely in the way that her mother is, but she is clearly affected by the way that Eloise treats her, becoming awkward and secretive. Creating imaginary friends such as Jimmy Jimmereeno that die suddenly and tragically, Ramona seems to mirror Eloise’s experiences when crafting her imaginary ones, with one male imaginary friend— his identifying traits being “no mommy and no daddy,” “a sword,” and her correction that “he has boots” when Mary Jane asks if Jimmy would also want

his galoshes removed (24); Jimmy Jimmereeno dies in a way as mundane as war, being hit by a car despite wielding something as fantastical as a sword. Being kept at arm's length only seems to empower Ramona's imaginative capabilities, disobeying her mother in subtle ways like eavesdropping and, more overtly, having her imaginary friend disobey her also, to his grievous bodily harm not unlike the death of Walt Glass. Ramona, too, withdraws into her own imagination, similar to her mother with her memories. When Mary Jane tells Eloise of Ramona's humorous account of Jimmy Jimmereeno being hit by a car, or rather "runned over and killed," Eloise lies about Ramona feeling "a little feverish" in order to send her to bed. In this way Eloise also avoids the subject of her daughter's eerie imagination; even when Mary Jane remarks outwardly, "What an imagination!" Eloise simply sends her back out into the living room, declaring "I don't wanna go out there" (32). Eloise continues to avoid the living kitchen and refuses to confront her grief further, let alone how far her emotional neglect of her daughter has progressed.

Eloise is fixed upon being the same "Poor Uncle Wiggily" that Walt Glass teased her for being—a figure defined by a distinct lack of autonomy that is ultimately pathetic. In so doing, Eloise keeps her memory of Walt from truly dying, despite the irony: her daughter's childhood is fundamentally crippled by her mother's trauma, molding her into an equally as secretive child, with just as much of a proclivity for unreality as her mother. Eloise is blinded by the feelings of entrapment in her own life, burdened greatly with self-pity; other emotions are effectively iced out by her detachment from them, and from reality. Mary Jane works to support herself and quickly divorced her husband after he stabbed another man. Eloise's own self-pity pales in comparison to the challenges Mary Jane has already overcome; in contrast to her daughter, well and truly trapped in the Wengler home with a maid instead of a mother and no friends who are

not imaginary, Ramona's suffering is far greater than the suffering her mother is feeling and continues to use to inflict suffering upon others. Ramona is the story's true "Poor Uncle Wiggily," having inherited the title through her mother's neglectful rejection of motherhood itself. As tragic as the death of Walt Glass might be, especially to Eloise, the immediate concern lies in those who are forced to live with her trend of impregnable self-pity.

Grace simultaneously does the most for Eloise and endures some of the most suffering at her hand. Grace endures Eloise's frankly racist remarks, the purposeful depersonalization, and her clearly ungrateful attitude. And yet, Grace's small moment of humility and vulnerability towards the end of the story is ignored by Eloise, resentful of her relationship with her husband. Without care for the wellbeing of Grace's husband, her employer's reply is that she is "not running a hotel" (33). Eloise insisted that her own friend, who only meant to stay for lunch, cross out her plans to remain at the Wengler home, saying "Let it freeze" with regard to the weather; now that it has, Eloise continues to refuse to show her maid a shred of the grace that is her namesake by allowing her husband to stay.

Eloise is confronted with the extent of her harm in the story's climax. In the scene in Ramona's bedroom, Eloise forced to visualize the ways in which her emotional— and now physical— neglect of her child has escalated. Now "staggering" drunk, Eloise does not hesitate to pick up and throw her child's shoes "with as much force as possible" over the banister of the staircase, where it lands with a "violent thump" (34). When she finds Ramona sleeping on one side of her bed to allow space for her imaginary companion, Eloise "raised her voice to a shriek" in commanding her to lay in the center, before forcefully dragging her daughter by the ankles into the center of the bed, openly resentful of the care her child has allotted for even an imaginary friend. In response, "Ramona, extremely frightened, just looked up at Eloise;" when

Eloise forcibly moves her into the center of the bed, Ramona “neither struggled nor cried; she let herself be moved without actually submitting to it” (35). Eloise has previously commanded her daughter to “close her eyes... close them,” the narrator goes on to detail that “Ramona was awake” to see this behaviour from her mother, as well as the way in which she “was crying and had been crying” (35). Eloise has seemingly reached the “nervous breakdown” (173) that Goldstein and Goldstein present as the lynchpin of many Salinger characters upon seeing how frightened her daughter truly is of her behaviour— or perhaps just how abusive she herself has become— clinging to her glasses and openly weeping for “Poor Uncle Wiggily... over and over again” (35). Forced into seeing the collateral damage of her emotional rejection of everything around her, Eloise holds Ramona’s glasses— the source of her precious spiritual sight, what Eloise has lacked— to her cheek and cries, seemingly pushed past her breaking point. In contrast to this extremely emotional turnaround in Eloise’s behaviour, enough damage has been done to Ramona through Eloise’s emotional neglect that she is incapable of being receptive to her comfort: “Now her mother attempts to comfort her by kissing her on the mouth while wiping the hair from her eyes, caressing her daughter who, from lack of habit, does not like to be hugged” (Edenfield 251). While Ramona may have been the closest figure in understanding Eloise’s specific, extremely isolating suffering, Eloise’s emotional neglect through the rejection of her daughter and the way it has escalated into more outright physical violence has pushed her further away. In another of what Ruth Prigozy refers to as the “linked mysteries” within *Nine Stories*, the definitive answer on whether or not Eloise is able to keep the spiritual sight that she recognizes in her daughter or if it is limited to this moment remains purposefully vague through her actions directly after the story’s climax.

After the emotional confrontation and Eloise's futile attempts to comfort her "extremely frightened" daughter, Eloise returns to Mary Jane, apparently needing to be pitied or reassured that she "was a nice girl" (35), a moment interpreted as both a recognition of responsibility for her actions as well as a step backward towards the comfort of her nostalgia. Despite her entire day being devoted to Eloise, even when she attempted to leave multiple times for justified reasons, Eloise feels the need to wake Mary Jane from sleep for the pity and assurance she has found she provides. Even after being confronted with how her actions have directly influenced her suffering—crying "Poor Uncle Wiggily!" for either herself or perhaps her daughter, the intensity of her emotions serves to further obscure her meaning. Eloise comes back to Mary Jane, seeming to struggle with the personal weight and responsibilities associated with the spiritual revelation she may be on the brink of reaching.

In the final moments of the story, Eloise is desperate to know that she "was a nice girl;" just as Eloise may or may not now be able to more properly realize the ways in which she has harmed her child, Eloise may be continuing to reject her present in favor of the past. Alternatively, Eloise's begging of Mary Jane to assure her "I was a nice girl, wasn't I?" could be her realization of how her festering grief has changed her—and how it threatens to make the nostalgic memories of her past even more painful. Here, Eloise gauges whether or not her perfect past, effectively her nostalgic fantasyland, has been tainted by who she is now, or who she has become in her emotional rejection of domestic, feminine gender roles. Mary Jane's presence in the Wengler home has quickly become load-bearing with regard to the emotional labor that Eloise requires and struggles to do herself. Eloise's return to Mary Jane, and in so doing the past in which she desperately wishes to remain, does not bode well for the two women. Eloise

effectively turns her back on Ramona by returning to Mary Jane; Mary Jane, waking from sleep, continues to fail to understand Eloise at all, both literally and on a deeper, more personal level.

Ramona is defiant toward her mother and her spiritual entrapment alongside her mother primarily in her imagination rather than real life. While others in the Wengler home are forced to play along with Eloise's self-imposed emotional entrapment and her resulting icy nature, Ramona seems instead molded by it, obeying commands and needing to be pressed for information she is used to withholding, such as her imaginary beau's appearance. Even a small amount of attention and validation from Mary Jane is enough to empower Ramona into pushing boundaries with her behaviour in a way that, unlike her childlike nose-picking and skin-scratching, seems more purposefully defiant—refusing to allow her shoes, which allow her to traverse the story's dynamic spiritual wasteland, to be taken off; allowing her beau to do what she has been advised against, playing in the road, as well as suffering the consequences of those actions. Even in these brief moments, Ramona is still given the gift of childhood innocence and, most importantly, choice, which her mother struggles to find for herself.

Even as she finds herself frozen with unprocessed grief, Salinger still offers Eloise choice: Brad McDuffie argues the climax of "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" as a spiritual epiphany, but Eloise's continued rejection of Ramona and physical return downstairs to Mary Jane are ways in which the author purposefully leaves "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" unresolved. Eloise's escalated behaviour, likely affected by the way in which she is now "staggering" from the amount of alcohol she and Mary Jane have shared, is an outburst of pure, previously suppressed feelings—emotions that reel between rage, grief, and guilt. Eloise seems to have lost the control that allowed her to remain icy and sarcastic, even if drinking is partially to blame for her heightened emotional state. Ramona is now "extremely frightened" of her

mother; in contrast to this eye-opening, frightening glimpse into her mother's true feelings, Eloise's turning of her daughter's glasses "lenses down" (34), along with her return to Mary Jane, suggest that Eloise may be attempting to reject the epiphany that McDuffie details. The story's finale is, above all, a clearing of frosted glass for the reader, allowing one to break free of Eloise's self pity to recognize Ramona as the pitiable center of the story, Eloise's real "Poor Uncle Wiggily," one entirely of her own making. Eloise wavers on the edge of a spiritual breakthrough, but the materialistic postwar world of appearances— "I was a nice girl, wasn't I?"— still seems to cloud her vision somewhat. Completely thawing her arrested, unprocessed grief and reconciling her nostalgic past with her present will be difficult for Eloise, but both her embracing of her fearful child and the purposefully vague ending allow Eloise choice. In the same way, the mystery of "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut's" ending allows the reader choice as well— the choice of whether or not to believe Eloise is capable of change.

CHAPTER THREE

Amber, “Amber Sweet,” and the Female Sex as Commodity

Adrian Tomine’s 2014 “Amber Sweet” is a graphic short story— one of six in his collection *Killing and Dying*— that makes use of several literary tools on which the story itself hinges: the unreliable narrator, the visual medium of the graphic work, and colour. “Amber Sweet” in its infancy was a two-page, black-and-white graphic short story entitled “My Porno Doppelganger,” though later publication in Tomine’s zine *Optic Nerve* and his 2015 collection *Killing and Dying* saw the story evolve from two pages to fourteen. At first glance, “Amber Sweet” is likely to read as a completely different story from what further investigation into its panels might suggest, primarily due to the control the unreliable narrator has over the story’s point of view. As the name of the story’s first incarnation might suggest, “Amber Sweet” details a story of mistaken identity that could only take place in the digital era; the story’s nameless narrator discovers her “porn double” and suffers the consequences of having one with regard to her feminine identity— catcalling, bullying, and finding said porn double’s endeavors on her boyfriend’s computer “in a folder discreetly labeled ‘drafts’” (40). On that same page, however, is where the narrative begins to unravel. The protagonist notes in the margins how she “couldn’t figure out how to get online” on her boyfriend’s computer, and continues to describe the way in which she “ended up stumbling upon something I wished I hadn’t.” Despite what she says, the graphic panel clearly depicts the narrator using the Find command, or more simply CTRL + F, to look for every instance of the porn star’s name, “Amber Sweet,” on her boyfriend’s device. Though a small detail, seeking out the adult star’s content is not akin to “stumbling upon” it, just as the narrator’s relationship with Amber Sweet is not just a case of mistaken identity. Rather,

“Amber Sweet” as a short story represents the false narrative of a young woman grappling with her feminine identity in the wake of entering into the world of sex work.

In the digital wilderness of online pornography, a woman’s sex and, in turn, femininity are distinctly packaged commodities based upon what Laura Mulvey defines as a woman’s “be-looked-at-ness” (11). Female gender performance, in this way, is described as “spectacle” (12) in the eyes of a distinctly male gaze. As the internet itself immortalizes and makes permanent, entrance into this distinctly digital realm of sex work is especially harrowing; furthermore, the likelihood of being able to erase the online footprint of someone current or previously involved with online adult entertainment is extremely slim. When reexamined as the false narrative of a young former-sex worker is trying to pitch to a third party in order to gauge its validity, “Amber Sweet’s” narrative inconsistencies instead become flaws that we are able to recognize not as plot holes, but as places where her given narrative do not line up with reality. Instead of a particularly painful case of mistaken identity, “Amber Sweet” instead becomes about the narrator and the facet of her past she has broken off from her greater identity and continues to try to obscure. In this given narrative, the narrator can easily deflect recognition from her past in pornography by way of her supposed “porn doppelgänger—” saving the narrator from shame, blame, or any other weapon in the arsenal of sexual stigma. By allowing Amber Sweet to fracture away from her greater self, to become a walking, talking manifestation of the commodification of her sexuality, the narrator can effectively write her out of the narrative. “Amber Sweet” as such is a narrative engineered by its protagonist to be sympathetic from any angle; in so being, the narrator unwittingly compares the hardships of being a sex worker to simply being mistaken for one, continuing to perpetuate an already harmful and pervasive stigma for the sake of her ego— or, perhaps, to shield what is left of it after enduring the effects of sex

work on her sense of identity as a woman. Rather than accepting her “porn double” as a part of herself that she has either moved beyond or left behind, “Amber Sweet’s” protagonist controls the narrative she is writing to paint this part of her as an entirely different person. Instead of a “porn doppelganger,” Amber Sweet herself is a part of the narrator that has grown too unmanageable to simply be an alter ego; the narrator must present her as a “doppelganger,” incapable of accepting the ways in which she was once Amber Sweet.

The concept of the male gaze is something explicitly grounded in the visual— female sexuality itself and the related femininity of the subject being something gauged by its “be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 11). Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze as a patriarchal force is not limited to the realm of cinema over which she studies, but is a fundamental, functioning part of patriarchal society. In this manner, “an active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure,” with “the male figure” unable to “bear the burden of sexual objectification,” and the female sex henceforth defined as “spectacle” (12) in almost every avenue that appeals to the visual sense. Literature predates cinema and graphic texts— both all-visual marathons of content— by a wide margin, appealing to the visual sense with the written word, making use of the innately commodifying minds’ eye that ultimately creates the male gaze. Male gaze and male sexual desire ultimately give rise to sex work, seen alongside the nomenclature of “prostitution,” through economic theory of supply and demand; as such, male demand for female sexual commodity gives rise to sex work moreover. Sanders et al. consider the place of the sex worker inside and separate from the male gaze as such: “currently women working as prostitutes are perceived as ‘bad girls,’ contravening norms of acceptable femininity and increasingly criminalized by state... ties of womens and mens lives in the broader context of poverty, globalization and capitalism in an understanding that, in consumer capitalism, ‘sex

sells” (2). The intensity of this discourse in the wake of the third wave of feminism leads to further consideration of the nature of the female sex worker— as well as her identity— against the backdrop of the American Dream. Though difficult to place amidst the whirlwind of commodity, objectification, and materialism seen in many images of the postcolonial American Dream, the place of the sex worker has simply evolved alongside these concepts rather than become obsolete. In what way does the identity of the sex worker suffer at the hands of sex work? How does one cope with the “conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies, and hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it is purportedly enjoyed by men” (Butler 21) in a realm focusing so heavily on said sexualization? Study of “Amber Sweet” from Adrian Tomine’s *Killing and Dying* reveals the complexities that arise in the juxtaposition of sexuality as a facet of personal identity with the commodification of said sexuality through sex work— in this case, pornography. The common thread of colour theory surrounding the colour pink and the related images of perception and reflection therein lead to the assertion that sex work stigma and the male gaze separate feminine identity from the sense of self through commodification and sexualization of both the female body and, in tandem, femininity.

In *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy, & Politics*, Sanders quotes McLeod on the nature of female entry into sex work, with “women’s entry into prostitution is characterised by an act of resistance to the experience of relative poverty or the threat of it” (3). Against the backdrop of a persistent purity culture, sex work simultaneously challenges supposed appropriate gender roles through the commodification of the female body while also appealing to it, creating a disassociation between the sex worker’s self and their commodified gender performance. Whether it be high risk, high reward or necessity that called the narrator into the metaphorical

wilderness of sex work is unknown, but the commodification of her gender performance into something marketably hyper-feminine and sexualized creates a divide in her sense of self through the self-objectification needed to succeed in adult entertainment. This is the part of the narrator that breaks off and becomes her “porn doppelganger,” who herself confesses to the narrator “I mean, if I told you my whole life story, you’d be like, ‘Of course she went into porn! Duh!’” (42). The origins of Amber Sweet are purposefully vague; that is, there is no right or wrong reason for a woman to enter the realm of adult entertainment, just as much as there is no right or wrong answer for a woman to give to absolve herself of stigma as we see through the “Amber Sweet” narrative. The fantastical story the narrator is weaving as a coping mechanism is still perpetuating harmful stereotypes— as well as doing nothing to relieve the narrator of her crisis of identity. This weighty burden is represented through the narrator’s multiple appearances with literal baggage, bags and suitcases carried from location to location within the story. Through what she carries, one piece of baggage stands out most prominently: a pink tote bag.

Adrian Tomine’s “Amber Sweet” from his graphic short-story collection *Killing and Dying* displays the clearest separation of gender presentation, commodified thoroughly by sex work, from a female self that is suffering. Tomine makes use of the visual medium of the graphic novel to represent the male gaze and its effects— able to recreate the male gaze on the page, to offer the reader a glimpse into said gaze regardless of their gender expression or performance. Jolie Sheffer describes the way in which Tomine showcases the commodification of female sexuality through the male protagonist’s penchant for “lesbian sorority-girl porn with titles like *Sapphic Sorority* and *All-Girl Action*” in his previous work, *Shortcomings*. While this fetishization of lesbian sexuality is problematic, but not uncommon, on its own, Tomine uses these otherwise offhanded titles of another visual medium— pornography— to describe the

relationship of his protagonist to the male gaze. In turn, the narrative told in “Amber Sweet” is one that through the graphic medium explicitly places us in the role of the viewer, framing the narrator herself in a perpetual state of Mulvey’s “be-looked-at-ness” with the reader perpetually enacting the gaze. Sheffer further argues how Tomine’s usage of the graphic novel in *Shortcomings*, *Summer Blonde*, and by extension “Amber Sweet” serves to “underscore how pornography as a medium shapes representations... of sexuality” (Sheffer 125). The presence of pornography as a sex work sphere is an especially integral part of “Amber Sweet.” This presence— and the related commodification— extends past pornography and into its mother domain of sex work, encapsulating the systematic nature of the male gaze and the severity of its affects on the men who act as unconscious viewers and the women who suffer as a result of such ingrained, patriarchal behaviour. The narrator’s own sexuality is visibly infringed on by the pornographic medium, apologizing to her boyfriend for being “so boring” after finding Amber Sweet hidden on his hard drive; pornography has shaped her sexuality so greatly that her porn persona has become her own separate person, leaving the narrator so disconnected from her own sexuality that she feels the need to apologize for normalcy. All of the narrator’s feminine traits, that which is commodified and packaged as spectacle in the realm of internet pornography, have become so ingrained and associated with her past in sex work that she attacks these feminine traits in an effort to further separate herself from the self she is eager to define as someone entirely different. Rather than personally accept the reality of her past, clearly struggling to reconcile her victimization inside pornography’s digital jungle with whatever reason may have lead her to pursue these exploits, the narrator essentially re-stigmatizes herself through both Tomine’s usage of visual storytelling and her controlled narrative. The Amber Sweet the narrator reconciles with on the final pages is only the facsimile of a perfectly well-adjusted porn star

distantly related to the narrator by way of their shared appearance. Through her doppelganger, the narrator allows the doppelganger instead to take responsibility for her suffering in a form of purposeful misdirection in which the seams only begin to show when more closely examined. If Amber Sweet were a real person and not simply the narrator's porn persona that has fractured away from her sense of self, the case of mistaken identity between Sweet and the narrator would make significantly less sense— not only because of the likelihood of it occurring but the way in which Sweet takes responsibility for the narrator's suffering, absolving her of the questions of why she may potentially face for choosing sex work if she were to claim personal responsibility by identifying herself as Amber Sweet. Conversely, when considering the reality of the Amber Sweet character, to have her exist in reality rather than remaining a fantasy of both the male gaze itself and the narrator would only further showcase how the narrator continues to focus on her own victimization rather than the stigmatized, systematic oppression and harm towards the supposedly-real-life Amber Sweet. The self-stigmatization the narrator enacts by depicting being mistaken for a porn star as something greater than or equally as painful as the reality of being one is what allows the unrealistically well-adjusted, exceedingly flat character of Amber Sweet to remain believable. The narrator's story of mistaken identity is a clear attempt at moving on from a painful part of her life, but falsifying her narrative only serves to further harm her fractured identity and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

Fully submerged in the postmodern world, Amber Sweet is called to the metaphorical wilderness of online pornography for reasons left intentionally vague— and is eventually forced to separate herself from her feminine gender presentation entirely, seemingly finding it tainted by the inescapable scope of the male gaze. In a radio interview with the author, the interviewer touches on Tomine's penchant for the way in which many of the endings to his stories are a “kind

of ambiguous moment— or maybe controversial, depending on the reader.” His response greatly expands on the often vague nature of the endings to his short stories:

The response to my endings caught me by surprise when I was younger because it wasn't anything I was doing intentionally... as I was sometimes accused of. There were definitely people who seemed to imply that I arbitrarily would remove the last bit of a complete story just to be frustrating or cool or something like that. But the truth is that there's no aspect of my work I agonize over more than the endings. None of them have ever been random, as if the curtain dropped and I just gave up. They're all deeply considered and perhaps overanalyzed. (Tomine, *The Paris Review*)

Though the intentionally vague nature of the story and its ending leave room for the reader to mentally grapple with whether or not the Amber Sweet the protagonist meets in person is real, the story itself endeavors to unite the split in this woman's identity, connecting the two not only with their outward appearances and gender performance but through the symbolic use of the colour pink which is present throughout. Amber rejects the now somewhat acceptable, yet still greatly stigmatized gender role of an online sex worker by rejecting this point in her life entirely, becoming convinced that Amber Sweet is simply her porn double, not a part of herself she hopes to abandon. In this way the narrator rejects her sense of self so greatly that only this conceived notion of a porn doppelganger can reconcile the two disassociated halves of her liminal relationship with her own gender.

“Amber Sweet,” given its nature as a graphic work, is especially noteworthy for studying colour in conjunction with the male gaze, female sexuality, and where the two intersect in these depictions of sex work in literature both written and graphic. The narrator's false narrative could be entirely unraveled simply on the basis of Tomine's metaphorical use of the colour pink in

“Amber Sweet’s” pages. Pink is immediately present on the title pages— with Amber Sweet and her reflection shown in pink and white, with the first pink page drawing the eye of the reader from left to right. At the opening of “Amber Sweet,” the narrator is recounting a strange experience to a confidante: being mistaken for a popular porn star. Through hushed whispers of fellow women and explicit “cat-calling” by men, the narrator comes face to face with her alleged “porn doppelganger,” the splash page of her website framed in pink, with hearts and her name in frilly font— Amber Sweet, who even shares the “square jaw that she hates so much” with the protagonist. Tomine’s illustration is a young woman, identical to the protagonist, dressed provocatively and surrounded by infantile stuffed animals. Amber Sweet naturally makes use of this commodification of the feminine seen in the colour pink in the composition of her webpage, given the nature of what she is advertising. While in modern, day-to-day advertising, separate from the sphere of sex work, the colour pink is used in an attempt to market to girls and women alike— from Barbies and bicycles to disposable razors— Amber Sweet makes use of this colour, and in truth a similarly framed mindset, to market her femininity itself with the colour pink and her related sexual performance. Following the colour pink’s introduction through the story’s title pages, readers are immediately presented with the narrator and her pink tote bag (33), the presence of which is a near-constant burden in her narrative— bookending her narrative as well as being present when she is catcalled, as well as when said harassment is enough to make her physically ill, nearby while Amber is bent over a toilet. Through the colour pink seeming to follow the narrator in the form of the pink bag, even encroaching into her most vulnerable, intimate spaces as she bathes against a pink backplash (34), Tomine’s insertion of the pink bag as a symbol and usage of the colour pink around the narrator allows the reader to infer the shared identity between the narrator, Amber, and her “porn identity” of Amber Sweet. The colour pink

also functions to present the visible juxtaposition of Amber's interpersonal identity from her gender performance and female sexuality, seen on the first two title pages in the reflection of the title, ultimately elevating Amber's fantasy of meeting her "porn double" to something doppelganger-like, connected and reflected with and by the colour pink alongside their uncanny appearances.

Aside from the colour pink being present on and around Amber and her doppelganger of Amber Sweet, their further gender performance— shared and separate— speaks volumes to the presence of the gaze and its effects on Amber's identity. The fourth page introduces both our narrator and her pink bag, as well as the characteristic shape of her amber-coloured hair— drawn with a feminine shape that implies the presence of curls, despite Tomine's minimalistic approach. Her clothing, however simple in its composition of a white shirt and close-fitting jeans, is still rather important; with feminine highlights seen in the v-neck of her tee shirt and the fit-and-flare style of her jeans, Amber's gender performance is feminine while keeping away from the hyper-femininity later seen in Amber Sweet's splash page. In contrast, doppelganger Amber Sweet wears a short pink skirt and wedge heels, as well as jewelry— the bag she carries, however, is a muted brown, further alluding to the reflection seen between Amber's pink bag and her own.

Though Amber herself is far from Amber Sweet's level of hyper-femininity, the effects of the male gaze seen upon her— such as cat-calling, rumours, and the incident with her boyfriend involving finding Amber Sweet's pornographic content on his computer— lead her to reflect on her own gender and sexual performance, rather than the inherently oppressive nature of the gaze. Following a moment of literal reflection with regard to her gender performance as she looks at herself in the mirror, the narrator makes the decision to attempt to "kill" the doppelganger of

Amber Sweet she has created through destroying her femininity, in both cutting off her “amber” hair and changing her style of dress to something more subdued, with a black top and wire-rimmed glasses. (40-42) Appearances, here, are everything; the narrator’s chance meeting with the “real” Amber Sweet would be much less impactful if she were not so comparatively homely— something she only achieves through a purposeful attack on the person she sees in the mirror, by way of a hack-job haircut and glasses. In turn, it would become exceedingly obvious that the two women are the same. If the narrator was only worried about being mistaken for her doppelganger, who allegedly is identical to her, why not alter her appearance and style of dress more significantly? In the same way that Amber Sweet on her internet splash page represents the essence of the performative nature of gender, the narrator’s alteration of her appearance is equally as performative. Given the nature of the gaze and the resulting stigma, the narrator’s apparent instinct is to blame her own gender performance; a reversal commonly seen in stigma-related conversation, with the very notion of feminine gender performance easily twisted into something explicitly sexual under the gaze. The narrator’s transformation in this way becomes much more about attacking her sense of feminine self— represented especially by cutting her hair— than looking unlike Amber Sweet. How can wire-rimmed glasses, purposefully illustrated by Tomine to be minimalistic, detract from the way in which their faces are clearly identical when shown mirrored to one another in alternating panels in the story’s final pages? However she may try to alter her femininity in the wake of its being commodified— or, perhaps, her self-commodification for the purposes of online pornography— the way in which she frames her false narrative only serves to further commodify the female sex through the supposed doppelganger of Amber Sweet. Much like the way in which Eloise returns to Mary Jane, so too does the narrator misplace her rejection; in her desire to reject the systematic

oppression that holds her, she attacks a fundamental part of her self. Just as Eloise struggles to reject the gender roles that her choices have chosen for her, these women grapple with finding their sense of self, a common thread being the manner in which they attack the self while struggling to understand where that self belongs. Though the narrator's falsified, appropriately recontextualized narrative may have been engineered to protect her sense of feminine self from further harm, commodifying her feminine sexuality— and the part of her feminine sexuality that suffered the greatest harm by way of online pornography— down into a greatly simplified doppelganger only serves to further make her sexual identity something controlled, perfected, and ultimately falsified.

The narrator's fantasy of Amber Sweet as a separate individual entirely allows these two facets of her personality— her interpersonal identity and her gender performance respectively— to dialogue with one another. The stigma surrounding her former life in sex work is something that persists in following her, despite her attempts to divorce herself from the feminine sexuality she connotes with it. This Amber Sweet, presented as liberated in her sexuality and ultimately unburdened by her identity in the symbolic nature of her unremarkable brown purse, is aware of the nature of the gaze and strong against its attempts to commodify her. This version of herself, uncompromising in her gender identity and accepting of her identity as a sex worker, could allow the narrator herself to lend further understanding to the complex nature of gender performance as it connects to the male gaze; unfortunately, the entire story the narrator is weaving is a fabrication intended to push Amber Sweet away, and with her the acceptance of the narrator's past and personal responsibility. This dialogue ultimately leads the two women to embrace; even in being a far-removed part of the self, or perhaps because of it, Amber Sweet comforts the struggling narrator, repeating "I'm so sorry" close to her ear (42). Here, the doppelganger Amber

Sweet is sacrificed to the narrator's falsified narrative: through apologizing, she accepts fault for the state the narrator is currently in. Rather than being representative of the reconciliation of the two halves of the narrator's self, the embrace and Amber's apologies are ways in which the narrator circles back around in her narrative to blame herself for her actions, albeit by fantastical doppelganger-proxy.

On the following pages, as the narrator discusses her false narrative with her confidante, her gender performance is seemingly restored. Her amber hair has been allowed to grow and her white tee shirt has returned. However, what also remains in the story's final page is the pink tote bag; the narrator and her companion are sitting, but the tote bag is still under her arm, ever-carried. Amber's false narrative is used to protect herself from the reality of her past, but she cannot entirely divorce her sense of self from her sexuality, sensuality, and her gender. Doing so has only cut Amber off from an integral part of her identity, for which Amber Sweet emotionally apologizes— giving her past in pornography a walking, talking doppelganger also allows it to take blame where the narrator seems otherwise incapable of personal reflection in a way not warped by stigma. Her narrative remains a false one, even when given to a confidante, even if it protects her, and even if she finds comfort in the way Amber Sweet's sacrifice absolves her of blame. Though the creation of her doppelganger began as a coping mechanism, Amber Sweet herself is flawed; that is, she is too perfect, a still picture painted by the male gaze and the narrator's stigmatization of herself as a former sex worker. The narrator herself describes the way in which she was "caught off guard by how friendly and open and self-aware she was" (42). Amber Sweet is the ideal, and as such her interactions are idealized: she eagerly accepts pictures with fans, in contrast to the narrator being catcalled, the narrator's horror of finding Amber Sweet's splash page is starkly different to the anecdote Amber tells of starring in a film entitled

“Barely Legally Blonde.” The systematic nature of the male gaze has commodified her, and will continue to do so, but Amber Sweet is open, confident, and distinctly aware of how her line of work is “a choice I made for myself.” However, the narrative of Amber Sweet being a doppelgänger simultaneously gives her the appearance of being too well-adjusted as well as makes her an unattainable ideal for the narrator. Through the way in which her narrative serves to protect her by way of avoidance and erasure, the narrator has essentially written herself into a corner. When she experiences a moment of connection with the part of herself she has cut off and made unreal with her story, it is profound, but ultimately fleeting. When the two embrace, Amber Sweet’s face is in the foreground with the narrator obscured— she is real, even as the narrator is readying herself to write her out of her story. Just as the narrator finishes, with the panels of the final page now showing only the back of her head, she makes it all the more clearer that this is a manufactured narrative, saying to her confidante “Anyway... sorry for talking your ear off, but I thought I should tell you about all that. I mean, just in case” (43). The entirety of “Amber Sweet” is the narrator’s “just in case.” The way in which Amber Sweet’s face seems to supercede the narrator in the final pages of the story acknowledges her as real, or once real. The obfuscation of the narrator’s face from that point until the end is the intended result of her narrative: she is now anonymous, but at the cost of an incomplete identity. Amber Sweet, the seemingly flat and too-perfect, was at once reality— what the narrator presents is the affectation. Even after weaving this detailed narrative, it seemingly goes wasted; her male confidante’s only answer to the narrator’s recollecting of the entire story is a simple “okay” (43).

Sex work has remained controversial in almost every applicable sphere, with the realm of feminism being no different, despite assumption. To the contrary, oppression of sex workers both on a stigmatization level and a legal scale remains— “yet with the opening up of sex markets and

growth in the commercial sex industry, especially in relation to the ‘adult entertainment’ industry, one would expect a loosening of regulation and control — however, this is not so... how then might we theorize prostitution and what do sociology and criminology offer?” (Sanders et. al 3) To Sanders, “some aspects of sex workers’ experiences are not so different from the experiences of prostitutes in earlier centuries.” How does this remain true in an era heralded for its sexual liberation? That is, “why it should be so that men demand sexual services and women supply them especially in so-called ‘liberated times’?” (2) This is attributed to the stigmatizing, systematically oppressive nature of the male gaze— something that has the capability to function on an unconscious level, “in the ideology of male sexual needs” (3). Furthermore, sex work remains a vulnerable space even in the wake of so-called sexual liberation, with “women working as prostitutes” still often “exploited by those who manage and organize the sex industry (mostly men). Moreover prostitution and the wider sex industry serve to underpin and reinforce prostitution as a patriarchal institution that affects all women and gendered relations” (5). Given this, alongside the wide berth of the literary timeline covered, one can begin to further understand the nature of the parallels seen between sex workers in literature. Regardless of Amber Sweet’s “liberated” state after the third wave feminist movement, the male gaze still functions on a level greater than awareness itself: subliminally, subconsciously, inborn in the patriarchal nature of modern living itself, a result of generation-upon-generation of stigmatizing behaviour. While Amber Sweet is apparently an outlier, well-adjusted to the constant sexual attention in a way that frankly seems false, the ending of the narrative the protagonist is weaving is simply too perfect. Outwardly, the ending of “Amber Sweet” offers its readers hope for the two women, both in the appearance of a perfectly normal day-to-day porn star and her reconciliation with the narrator, as well as the responsibility she takes for the harm she has

supposedly done to the stranger through her apology. However, the protagonist's narrative is just that— a narrative, which readers are able to see more clearly on the story's final page: the narrator and an unnamed, apparently male third party sit on a hill over the town as she recalls her story, seeming to gauge its believability to a masculine counterpart where she, herself, has grown convinced. The finale of the narrator's story, when viewed as a false narrative rather than being the reconciliation of identity that it appears to be on the page, is significantly transformed; the doppelganger places the blame for the narrator's suffering on herself by apologizing for what the narrator attributes as her actions, not that of the narrator. By doing so, the narrator has created the perfect exit strategy for the otherwise ridiculous character of her porn doppelganger: now that they have met, and now that her supposed porn clone has accepted responsibility for the harm the wildlands of pornography have done to the narrator, Amber Sweet is in a perfect place to be written out of the narrator's story entirely and forgotten, just as the narrator intended.

CONCLUSION

From the exploration of the feminine soul seen across the short stories that compose the cycle that is *Country of the Pointed Firs* to the obscured vision and spiritual waste seen in the women of *Nine Stories*, as well as the repression, denial, and self-harm wrapped in the stigma against sex workers in “Amber Sweet,” each of these female characters struggle to find a unified feminine self against the othered, liminal place caught between a feminine gendered landscape and the patriarchal society that inhabits it. Sex work simultaneously is an act of both resistance and conformity, criminalized even amidst personal necessity and the pressure of the male gaze and its’ demands; while less outwardly oriented in and around crime in the era of internet pornography, the distinctly American, materialistic wilderness of online pornography is just as dangerous to “Amber Sweet’s” narrator, both in the form of outward literal dangers and dangers to her sense of self. Each of these women, throughout the timeline of the literary canon leading up to Tomine’s graphic work, grapple with feminine gender presentation and the appropriate social roles that the American Dream provides for those of the female sex. Made distinctly American through the characterization and gendering of the New World landscape during colonization and the juxtaposition of this against an untamed, mythic concept of the West, the feminine gender bestowed onto the landscape itself clashes with the masculine force of colonization. This creates a diversely multicultural shared experience of feminine living against patriarchal forces that commodify the female gender into a specific role to be played accordingly. Each of these women struggle against the confines of a distinctly American playbook of appropriate femininity, and this dictated pattern of behaviour drives these women towards wildernesses both literal and metaphorical.

Following this thread, it is my argument that this commodification of the female sex or what is interpreted as female, like the American landscape, has not ceased; this concept has merely evolved, seen through the three selections of short fiction chosen. The American feminine identity is one founded in the culture upon which American colonialism itself is based, and as such integrated it— whether it be the American Dream as a more institutional force for the American woman comprised of acceptable roles or the way in which those acceptable roles contrast an idealized female appearance with more realized and dynamic characters who cannot achieve the American Dream as an impossible ideal. Regardless of the ways in which they try to engage with the Dream in ways dictated as acceptable for women, each of these women encounters conflict with their true and at least partially obscured identity. “Poor Joanna” Todd strove to achieve an acceptable place in the Dream, but the actions of the man intended to be her husband have forced her role in American society out of her hands; she can either live in solitude and be perceived as a spinster or live in solitude in a way partially disconnected from Dunnet Landing proper, making her an outcast in both ways. Eloise Wengler has everything the post-war American Dream can present as desirable for the idealized woman: a home, a husband, and a daughter— but it cannot help her progress in her grief, becoming what Eloise considers her confines rather than her social achievements. This separation between the idealized woman and reality is clearest in Amber Sweet, where the narrator’s commodification of her idealized, hyper-sexual self is now something immortalized on the internet and therefore inescapable; Amber Sweet finds her escape from this digitally immortalized relic of herself by engineering a narrative in which said persona can quietly disappear. In truth, “Poor Joanna” Todd and Amber Sweet are no different— Amber Sweet has simply evolved in her ability to rewrite the preconceived social notions with regard to her gender.

Just as the acceptable roles within the American Dream have evolved alongside literature itself— for instance, one acceptable role is now that of the online adult entertainer, being extremely lucrative but highly stigmatized— so too has what we consider to be this mythic west or wilderness that stands as contrast to the American Dream. In Jewett’s nature writing, Joanna’s Shell-Heap Island stands as monument to this concept’s connection to American colonization; the more normal, socially acceptable women of Dunnet Landing find the place mythic and other, but its connection to the indigenous peoples that at one time inhabited is hardly presented as negative. Rather, what the women of Dunnet Landing find to be so otherworldly with regard to Joanna is her willing entrance into solitude. Joanna left Dunnet Landing to avoid the perception of being a spinster, and to avoid the pity of her community, but said community pities her regardless because of their incapability to understand Joanna’s differences. The most literal example of wilderness is of course most connected to the roots of American colonialism that created this divide— the divide between the acceptably American level of society and what is perceived as untamed or untouched by American consumerism and industry.

In the postwar spiritual wasteland depicted in *Nine Stories*, the American landscape has clearly evolved: Eloise’s induction into the wild is not literal, but rather perceived. In the freezing slush of her empty suburb, the hollowed-out appearance of the American Dream without the pieces that keep it alive— the “family” in “nuclear family”— the concept of west or wilderness relies entirely on Eloise’s perception and background. While the suburb is heralded as an ideal of the American Dream, as well as a touchstone of the pre-and-postwar American Dream, Eloise’s glamorous college days in New York City as well as her personal grief and unhappiness allow her to perceive what should be a normal, albeit wintry, suburb as a wilderness

that entraps her between the social need to appear as a “nice girl,” the Eloise that is a halfhearted wife and mother, and the Eloise that has not emotionally matured, hindered by grief.

“Amber Sweet” has very little in the way of literal depictions of wilderness or a natural landscape, save for the spread of a blue sky and the hill looking over the city in which the story takes place— Los Angeles. With this trend having now evolved into the postmodern, Tomine sets this story in particular in an especially postmodern location; this locale and those around it depicted in *Killing and Dying* have been thoroughly industrialized, leaving Amber Sweet’s wilderness to appear much differently than the two women before her. While Eloise Wengler’s wilderness hinges on the ironic usage of the suburb as a wasteland or wild landscape as it reflects back on her own perception of it as such, “Amber Sweet” and the immersion into the postmodern leave one final, unchecked frontier: the internet. This ties in with the narrator’s engineering of her porno doppelganger narrative: perhaps she is not trying to write Amber Sweet out of her narrative, but to keep her trapped in the internet where she was born. Joanna’s Shell-Heap is historic, but hardly negative; Eloise’s perception of her suburb as wilderness or wasteland is what makes it something she longs to reject, just like her domestic space and family. In “Amber Sweet,” however, the wilderness present here is one entirely created by American society and industry— while making the rape-culture and stigmatization as pillars on which this concept has evolved especially clear. Both prostitution and online pornography come from a place of supply and demand as well as sexism, sexualization, and stigmatization; in “Amber Sweet,” the internet where the porno doppelganger herself is born represents the sum of all these parts. The internet that created “Amber Sweet” is not a last bastion of the wild left in a fully Americanized, industrialized consumer landscape, but the result of it— and the result of the manner in which

women are commodified into appropriate roles or instead literal commodity to be sold, like the porno doppelganger of Amber Sweet.

American femininity is intensely polarizing for the women this specific kind of femininity is placed upon. Attempts to assert identity and autonomy either invoke pity from those who do not understand, is impossible due to a perceived feeling of entrapment, or is later regretted when these women are faced with social consequences for their actions, like the narrator's sexual stigmatization for her online pornography persona, Amber Sweet. Against the gendered expectations of the American Dream, these female characters are juxtaposed against images of a literal, perceived, or metaphorical wilderness. The dichotomy this juxtaposition creates catches these female characters between perceived identity, rather their appearances as created by the institution of American society and what it presents as the feminine ideal, and the true self. On a greater scale, this represents a relationship between the American Dream as an institution with female gender roles, and how the institutional nature of the American Dream serves to reinforce female gender roles by presenting American women with acceptable roles within the American Dream for them to play. Beginning through the projection of the female gender onto the American landscape to create a stronger concept of Manifest Destiny through sexualization and patriarchal culture as it pertains to the colonization of the American landscape, this concept has continued to evolve in American literature, moving and shifting like the identities of these American women as they endeavor to find their true place and identity, unbowed by the insidious nature of American gender roles, the American Dream as a patriarchal institution, or any other specifically American patriarchal force that attempts to commodify women into appropriate roles or sexual objects.

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