

EXERCISING INFLUENCE, HOPING FOR CHANGE: SARAH ORNE JEWETT,
CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN, AND ZITKALA-ŠA NEGOTIATE FEMINISM
AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

By the mid 1800s, American feminism began gaining momentum. Politicians, scientists, and clergymen all responded to the evolving call for reforms. More and more people adopted the view that women were oppressed by a male-centered society, and most women were isolated within the home. Women writers belonged to a small group of women whose voices had cultural weight and they had to negotiate between the demands of their writing and audience and their involvement and interest in the women's movement. At the turn of the century, Sarah Orne Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman each had their respective audiences and expectations, and each woman had to balance her writing and her interest in the debate over women's role in society.

For each author, three years of her life and work are isolated in order to take an in-depth look at the influences of the women's movement. In order to fully appreciate the complexities affecting the writing and the changes that writers had to face, both privately and publicly, the writers' personal lives, the political atmosphere, and the writing produced are studied. Key questions are asked of each author: How did she respond to reform movements? How did she use her career to influence and change ideas about women in the United States? Spanning from the 1880s into the 1920s, Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Gilman each approached their work differently, and their work during this time highlights the complexity and connections of writing, politics, and life.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For most Americans, the word “feminism” brings to mind images from our culture’s recent memory—2nd wave feminists marching for birth control and equal pay, burning bras—images of the radical feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. While these feminists succeed in raising awareness and reforming policy and practice relevant to their time, they are only part of a very complex and long movement to rethink the role women play in our society. In the United States, a collective interest in the “woman question” began in the mid 1880s, when groups began to meet and argue for women’s suffrage. As the turn of the century approached, the debate grew larger and society questioned women’s public role, women’s rights in marriage, women’s right to work, and women’s suffrage. Feminist activists faced opposition from both religion and the sciences, as critics offered up proof that women were unequal to men. Religious leaders offered reasons why women should be confined to the home, referencing the Bible for models of submissive females. Scientists made observations of white men’s superior intelligence and found that women and minorities had limited abilities and chance for success in modern society. This opposition to the movement called for more research and dialogue between activists. Literature, periodicals, and books became inundated with writing by leading theorists. Issues became more complicated and the negotiations between radical and conservative approaches began. A number of conservatives revised their positions to allow for women’s education, but contended they must remain segregated from men;

some feminists argued for professionalizing housework. As the Progressive Era moved on, women began to play a more important role in society. Prohibition groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union encouraged activism and promoted women's suffrage and political roles. Various causes, seeing women's potential for power, used women's new enthusiasm for reform to their advantage. The reform movement of the 19th century infused activists with hope for change, and regardless of social position, all women, whether in private or an open community, considered their position on the arguments.

Published women writers at this time were privileged in that their voices, unlike so many American women, were sounding outside of their own homes and being heard by their reading audience. They were faced with a professional and personal question: lend their voice to reform and include in their writing their political views, or separate their writing from the controversy? For them, it was not always an easy choice, since often their personal opinions came with a professional cost.

Sarah Orne Jewett is best remembered now as a Northeastern regionalist, but was in fact a prolific author at the center of Boston's literary elite. Fortunate both personally and professionally, Jewett approached calls for improvement with an organic understanding of change. Jewett believed that women should be treated as individuals, and if they cultivated their own talents, their roles would naturally progress. While she did not dismiss feminist groups or activism, her writing shows her focus on self-determination. Jewett was well read and well traveled, which gave her access to a wide variety of opinions and knowledge. While responding to the limited understanding of

science, Jewett's writing also shows her keen awareness of her audience. Jewett wrote *to* her reader and was careful not to wholly disrupt her conservative base.

Like Jewett, Zitkala-Ša also had a sharp mind when it came to publishing and her audience. However, as a Sioux Indian, she stands apart in her commitment to Native American reforms and raising the status of her people. Born on a reservation and educated at a government boarding school, Zitkala-Ša was always aware of her position as a ward of the United States. When women's groups began to spring up, she called on them to help her educate Americans on issues relevant to her. Because of her dual identity as a woman and Indian, perhaps more than other women, Zitkala-Ša had to make calculating choices on what to publish and where. She advocated for citizenship, education, and pan-Indian relationships, and even more than white feminists, lived in a world which many times tried to leave her out.

Although part of a well-known family, Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived through much of the oppression women were struggling against. She divorced, gave up custody of her child, had financial burdens, received harmful medical advice and battled depression. In spite her personal hardships, Gilman was steadfast in pursuing independence. Professionally, she was committed to her liberal position and worked consistently to develop ideas that would help women. While her fiction is widely read today, at the turn of the century it was her non-fiction that garnered the most attention. Gilman connected scientific theories on evolution to women's oppression, providing insight into how our society developed and how we might change it. Like Zitkala-Ša,

Gilman hoped she could convince her readers and gather support for women's causes. She worked tirelessly to advance not just women's position, but American culture.

Sarah Orne Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman represent the range of approaches women writers took to the debates and ideas; while diverse, again, they demonstrate only a small part of a large movement. While that is true, current scholarship has not fully recognized the multifaceted and at times difficult tasks these women took on, fulfilling expectations as popular writers as well as satisfying their personal desires to influence readers and promote change. Since each of their deaths, critics have focused on only one or two texts, ignoring or marginalizing the bulk of their writing. Studying their personal lives alongside their writing shows how difficult it was, and still is, to separate one from the other. Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Gilman struggled to develop their activism and connect it to their audience. This struggle is seen in their writing, giving depth to work that has been otherwise shadowed by a lack of understanding. Likewise, it becomes clear that their feminism and activism builds over time. Each of these women garnered attention and success, and influenced other writers, perhaps each other, with ideas and approaches. These issues, writers, and texts highlight the fluidity of literature and social reform. Ideas build and change, and while definitions can become harder to solidify, we can value the subtle, significant differences in meaning.

By concentrating on three years of each writer's life, not only are their interests in politics and reform highlighted, but also the changes that occurred as the women's movement evolved. By studying just a short period of each writer's career, nuanced

tensions between politics and the role of an author become more focused. Beginning in 1882 and ending in 1921, this project illustrates the negotiating Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Gilman practiced. Each woman had her own priorities, her own biases and influences, and each woman was a part of a different group and social circle that further complicated their position. Jewett had a privileged upbringing and was fortunate enough to live during a small window of time that allowed her to successfully publish regional literature and maintain a happy Boston marriage among the literary giants of her time; Zitkala-Ša was born on a Sioux reservation, educated in government boarding schools, and saw herself as an activist for all Native Americans; Charlotte Perkins Gilman suffered from depression after her first marriage and motherhood proved too restricting and she dedicated her work to reforming women's personal freedoms. Each woman had multiple roles and found her values and goals needed to be negotiated. These negotiations, the compromises that had to be made, are what make it enlightening and revealing to study writing this way.

CHAPTER TWO

SARAH ORNE JEWETT 1882-1884: WRITING FOR INDIVIDUAL ACTION

As Thomas Edwards and Karen Kilcup point out in their book *Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon*, there have been four major critical movements regarding Sarah Orne Jewett. The first saw her as only a regionalist, most successful writing stories about her native New England and otherwise limited in her range (Edwards 5). The second, feminist stage, “affirmed Jewett’s value as a woman writing about women,” and found “positive, even utopian,” views of women culture in her writing (Edwards 2). The third stage tried to correct the idealization of Jewett by previous critics, and focused on the limitations of her work and her representation of the “other.” And finally, current criticism sees Jewett as a writer with cultural power and postmodern elements, who offers “new opportunities for criticism and appreciation” (Edwards 3). Still, each approach limits readers’ views of Jewett. Jewett is said to have “believed more in living than in writing” (Lingeman 113), and in many ways her writing serves as an expression of her own life. In her writing, readers can see her enthusiasm for independence and relationships, the country and the city, intellectual efforts and everyday work. Her life was a privileged one, which gave her the ability to separate choice from circumstance. She saw that individuals, especially women, needed to choose their own destinies. She believed in an individual’s rights, and by looking at her work from 1882 to 1884, her position on women’s issues becomes very clear. In her writing, Jewett combats

the opposing ideology of her time and carefully negotiates between her commitment as a writer to her audience, and her voice as a woman, wanting change.

In their book, *Intimate Matters*, John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman pinpoint 1880 as a key changing point in the lives of American women. Lower fertility rates gave women more time to themselves, and commercialized leisure, such as the department store and movie house, made pleasure an important part of life (D’Emilio 189). Also in the 1880s, cultural critics were speaking out for and against women’s suffrage and individual rights, and many women became involved politically through temperance organizations. The reform, and especially Francis Willard of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the “Home Protection” bill, emphasized the traditional role of women in domestic life, particularly their influence on the family’s morals, instead of focusing on women’s political equality. Adding to the debate, religious leaders spoke out against women moving beyond the private sector. However, had these debates not been taking place, Sarah Orne Jewett would have still lived an exceptional life. As Carol Schachinger writes, Jewett was very lucky:

She was beautiful, rich, and talented. [...] She enjoyed the advantages that Virginia Woolf found necessary for a woman writer [...] She had the good fortune to get in with the right crowd—editors, publishers, writers—who could inspire her and further her career [...] She was published almost immediately, establishing a reputation at a very young age. She found a love relationship that would sustain her all her life yet left her free to write. She had few responsibilities [...] She traveled widely and lived in beautiful places. (284)

With all her advantages, Jewett could have turned a blind eye to the day’s controversies.

But as an educated woman, Jewett saw the need for reforms. Her writing during these

years demonstrates how she took notice of the day's issues, and at times camouflaged her responses to the discussions in her writing.

In 1882, Sarah Orne Jewett was splitting her time between her native South Berwick, Maine, and Boston, where Jewett lived with Annie Fields. Although Fields was best known as "the premier hostess of Boston's golden age" (Lingeman 112), entertaining writers such as Dickens, Emerson, Longfellow, and James, she was also an educated woman who, like Jewett, balanced progressive ideas with eighteenth-century conservatism. "Impatient for women to gain the vote (in part so that they could exert a civilizing influence on the ruffianly male electorate), and working for them to gain access to higher education, she had no patience with the most radical feminists, whom she criticized for alienating the better sort of people from the cause" (Blanchard 128). Annie's husband, James Fields, who as an editor had read Jewett's work, first introduced Sarah and Annie. "James Fields had mentioned Sarah Orne Jewett to his wife as the friend he would choose for her above all others" (Blanchard 134). In the fall of 1881, Jewett had her first long stay at Fields' Charles Street home. James Fields had died that April, and Jewett was suffering herself, spending time consulting with Boston specialists over her painful rheumatism (Blanchard 135). The two women, both in need of friendship and support, found in each other a partner, and they remained committed to one another throughout their lives. This was not uncommon; a large proportion of college women, more than half, between 1889 and 1908, never married. These women did not need the economic insurance of a marriage, and many of them enjoyed passionate and committed relationships with other women. "In many, many cases they were every

bit as passionate, loving, and committed as our modern notions lead us to assume a heterosexual marriage would be” (D’Emilio 191). Jewett and Annie Fields enjoyed a “classic Boston marriage” (Blanchard 153), and Paula Blanchard highlights the reasons for their success in that they had interchangeable roles which did not limit them. They took turns caring for each other, Jewett frequently doctored Fields and eased her depression, and they defended one another. It is important to note that their relationship also was strong because they both believed the late James Fields and Theodore Jewett, Jewett’s father, were encouraging the relationship from beyond; they even visited a medium who assured them of this (Blanchard 157). It gave them comfort to know the most important men in their lives supported their relationship. While Jewett and Fields were considered a couple, “it was assumed by polite society that sex did not enter into the relationship, since having children was the only admitted reason for sex” (Lingeman 114). It was not until the end of the century that same-sex relationships developed a social stigma, causing partners to hide or deny their attachments (D’Emilio 123). It was in the 1880s that medical language began to refer to homosexuality as a “manifestation of a bodily or mental condition” (D’Emilio 122), and although Jewett and Field’s relationship was accepted by society, that acceptance was fleeting with the increase of educated, independent women. As Richard Lingeman explains, “The male-dominated society had become alarmed. [...] What would men do if women refused to cosset and comfort them and bear their posterity, and chose instead to live with other women?” (116). Jewett and Fields’ arrangement made this question obsolete for them, but Jewett’s

writing reveals that she was aware of the needs of other women and responded to the inequality between the sexes in her work.

This awareness is clearly seen in “Tom’s Husband,” written in 1882 and published in *Atlantic Monthly*. This story focuses on the Wilsons, who are first described as very much in love. However, after they get married, the magic that they felt during their courtship fades. Jewett’s narrator explains, “They understood suddenly that instead of dwelling in heaven they were still upon earth, and had made themselves slaves to new laws and limitations” (205). They fell into their roles of husband and wife, and felt limited. In short, the institution of marriage prevented them from being themselves. As a bachelor, Mr. Wilson took great pride in the upkeep of his home and joked that, due to a childhood injury, he had grown “very old-womanish” (206). On the other hand, Mrs. Wilson had a brilliant mind for business and her father “often said it had been a mistake that she was a girl instead of a boy” due to her keen business sense (206). In many ways, Mrs. Wilson shares traits with Jewett; when Jewett was once asked if she had ever been in love, “she replied she needed a wife, not a husband” (Lingeman 119), and Mrs. Wilson is described as “too independent and self-reliant for a wife; it would seem at first thought she needed a wife herself more than she did a husband” (206). It is Mrs. Wilson that notices the slump she and her husband have fallen into, and suggests they switch roles: She will start up her husband’s mill, acting as superintendent, and Mr. Wilson will take charge of the house. Mr. Wilson first doubts and denies the role reversal that his wife suggests, wondering what other people will think:

It seems to me that it is something like women’s smoking: it isn’t wicked, but it isn’t the custom of the country. And I don’t like the idea of your going among

business men. Of course I should be above going with you, and having people think I must be an idiot; they would say that you married a manufacturing interest, and I was thrown in. I can foresee that my pride is going to be humbled to the dust in every way. (209)

Mr. Wilson believes he has put an end to the discussion, but his wife, the freer spirit of the two, ultimately makes the decision to move ahead with her plan. Although Mr. Wilson thought “she would at least have waited for his formal permission,” he goes along with her. In an even more unconventional twist, instead of reverting back to traditional roles after the pressures from society lead them to doubt themselves, the community more or less accepts their change. “Sometimes business people came to the mill, and were amazed at having to confer with Mrs. Wilson, but they soon had to respect her talents and her success” (211). The maids do not mind working for Mr. Wilson, in fact they are happy at the change. The couple are both fulfilled with their new duties, and although Mr. Wilson “feared that his wife was growing successful as a business person at the risk of losing her womanliness,” “he found there was no fear of that” (211). Showing the Wilsons are successfully living so unconventionally, Jewett silences critics that contend such an arrangement would ruin a marriage. In this story, it is the marriage that risks ruining the partners.

Although Mrs. Wilson fends better emotionally, she becomes so tired after work she and her husband abandon the walks, reading, and talking that they both used to enjoy. They both become annoyed with each other: Mrs. Wilson finds her husband to be too fussy over house affairs, and of course, Mr. Wilson believes his wife thinks more of her chief executive than of him. These issues seem to be stereotypical of married couples, but the unexpected element occurs when Mr. Wilson realizes the oppression he suffers

from in his chosen role. Being the homemaker, he feels underappreciated. He realizes this when an old woman “kill[s] his dignity” by asking if she could borrow some yeast (212). It leads Mr. Wilson to question his own self-esteem and he realizes that “his had been almost exactly the experience of most women” (213). Mr. Wilson thinks to himself, “People think women are designed for such careers by nature, but I don’t know why I ever made such a fool of myself” (213). Mr. Wilson realizes that it is the confining role of “wife” that has made him so unhappy. Mr. Wilson comes to embody the frustrations of most women at this time. He once enjoyed running the house, but is now depressed by it. In the end of the story, he demands he and his wife spend the winter in Europe, and although Mrs. Wilson first protests, they leave, and the story ends with their departure. Although she was in the driver seat earlier, Mr. Wilson has taken over. Obviously, the confining roles of “husband” and “wife” do not lead to a balanced or happy marriage, even when those roles are reversed. Because Mr. Wilson is a man, he can revert to his gender’s authority and demand a vacation, a departure from the unfulfilling role he has been playing. Jewett is not making a statement on the idea of roles in a partnership, but instead on society’s restrictive view of roles within a marriage. Jewett shows that with the right resources, wealth, intelligence, and an open-minded husband, a woman can change her role within the home, although it may be hard to keep due to society’s influence. *Atlantic Monthly* probably landed in the homes of many independently wealthy and educated Americans, so while the Wilsons represent privileged society, they also represent Jewett’s readers. The narrator describes the Wilson’s post-marriage disillusionment as “true in many other cases” (205), and although almost every character

is independently wealthy, even Mr. Wilson's stepmother, Jewett focuses on the relationship, describing husband's and wife's emotional responses. This rhetoric helps readers see themselves in this couple and begin to question traditional gender roles.

Although "Tom's Husband" reveals a strong position on society's strict gender roles, not all of Jewett's writing during these years was concerned with politics. In the spring of 1882, Jewett and Fields left for Europe. Jewett wrote throughout their visit, and a short piece, "An Afternoon in Holland" appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in December 1882. It is a colorful illustration of Jewett and Fields' journey from Amsterdam to small Holland villages, noting the weather, language, and the dogs and cattle they observe from the road; however, critics note Jewett's "political conservatism" in her writing about their visit to Ireland: Jewett wrote about the green landscape and said little about the poor conditions of the people and the potato blight (Blanchard 139). After their return to the states, Jewett's short story "A Landless Farmer," was published in two parts in *Atlantic Monthly*, first in May and then in June 1883. The story, set in New England, shows another side of Jewett's writing. "A Landless Farmer" illustrates the colorful lives of country people, and, published as two parts, is plot-driven with bright characters. The story revolves around one man, Mr. Jenkins, who, in his old age and failing health, is being taken advantage of by his daughter, Sereny. With the help of her easily convinced husband and sister, she has her father sign away his property to their advantage, cutting her brother Parker, who is in Colorado finding his fortune mining, completely out. This story gives the reader a sense of what is valued in the country. The land, weather, and the well-being of neighbors are important. Men meet at the stream after church to discuss the

weather and health of friends. The women are meddling and, as Ezra's wife is described, two-faced: "She [...] could talk angrily about [Sereny], behind her back, at any time; but being a weak little soul, and anxious to avoid contention, when there was any danger of getting a blow herself, she was ready, being also a woman, to take her complaining visitor's part" (634). In order to survive, these women do whatever it takes, even if it means abandoning their roles as moral models for their families. This reveals a stark contrast to the model women were supposed to uphold. The only characters with truly admirable qualities and virtuous intentions are men. For example, it is only when Parker returns that the Jenkins family turmoil ends. "A Landless Farmer" is a take on the prodigal son story, and Jewett offers readers an entertaining view of country life. She ends the piece writing, "Stranger dramas than have ever been written belong to the dull-looking, quiet homes, that have seen generation after generation live and die" (768-9). This story focuses on "local color," something Jewett is known for. Although a departure from the more political "Tom's Husband," "A Landless Farmer" demonstrates that because of her privileged life, Jewett did not struggle against the circumstances of oppressed women who were denied the right to work outside the home or forced into an economically compatible marriage. "A Landless Farmer" shows readers that Jewett enjoyed enough distance from politics that she was able to produce regional literature not concerned with national headlines.

Just because politics were not Jewett's top priority does not mean she was not interested. Only one year after "A Landless Farmer," Jewett published her strongest statement on women's place in society. *A Country Doctor* demonstrates the ideology that

was holding women to traditional roles, as well as women's potential to change their own roles by growing naturally instead of being shaped by society. *A Country Doctor* was first published in 1884, and in it Jewett follows the life of Anna (Nan) Prince, an ambitious woman who is determined to become a country doctor. An orphan, Nan is raised by her grandmother in the country until, after her grandmother's death, she moves in with her legal guardian, Dr. Leslie. Jewett takes special care to describe Nan as part of the country landscape; she will not go to bed until she is tired, will not come inside until it is dark, is in all respects, a natural girl who "belongs with wild creatur's [...] just the same nature" (186). In fact, *A Country Doctor* "portrays nature [...] as a place where gender roles are not enforced and where women can 'evolve' into undomesticated creatures" (Alaimo 53). When she moves into the village with Dr. Leslie, he describes her by saying:

There is one thing quite remarkable. I believe she has grown up as naturally as a plant grows, not having been clipped back or forced in any unnatural direction. If ever a human being was untrammeled and left alone to see what will come of it, it is this child. And I will own I am very interested to see what will appear later. (212)

Jewett reveals that women have been "clipped back" unnaturally. Nan is described by her guardian as "more a child of the soil than any country child I know" (212), and it is because of this, the lack of guidance and social rules, that Nan is able to develop her own skills. "Nan's 'untrammeled' development suggests that other women's domestic confinement is, in fact, 'unnatural'" (Alaimo 54). By describing Nan's growth in this way, Jewett makes an evolutionary statement about the domestic expectations of women. Perhaps, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman explained in *Women and Economics* sixteen years

later, women's role as homemaker is not what nature intended, but what society has forced upon them. Dr. Leslie sees that Nan has an "unconscious" "talent for medical matters" (214), and with freedom, along with his example, Nan recognizes her skills and becomes Jewett's model for her argument: that every person, regardless of sex, has individual talents and is best suited for certain work.

In his article, "Eunice and the Jade Gods: Jewett's Religious Rhetoric in *A Country Doctor*," Terry Heller highlights the work of Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and Austin Phelps (1820-1890) as examples of "the nineteenth-century biblical absolutists, who insist the Bible narrowly defines woman's vocation" (158). Bushnell was a well-known Congregationalist clergyman who served in Hartford, Connecticut and Phelps was a prominent Massachusetts minister who taught at the conservative Andover Theological Seminary (Heller "Eunice" 161). Phelps' article, "Reform in the Political Status of Woman," published in *The Congregationalist* in 1881, argues that unlike men, women are called only to domestic vocations. He fears that if women are allowed to choose other professions, women will no longer fulfill their roles in the home. He writes:

Once fill a young woman's mind with the notion that it is a grander thing to be a speaker on the platform than to be a wife in a Christian home; that it is a nobler distinction to be a successful author than to be a happy mother of children; that it is more honorable to head a half-score of "committees" for public service than it is to be a loving daughter in a father's house, the model of refinement to younger brothers and sisters; and you can no longer find a place of honor in her thoughts of the mission of either daughter, wife or mother. These relationships become lost ideas. They must be superlatives or nothing. (Phelps)

In Bushnell's 1869 book, *Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature*, he argues that women should be allowed to attend college and pursue any profession, but also that the Bible specifically characterizes male and female roles. He describes the creation story

and the work of the apostles as showing man's dominance over women. "What now is the general result to which we are brought by this review of the Scripture, but that women are out of place in the governing of men" (Bushnell). As Heller explains, "Because these essential natures are divinely enforced absolutes, to rebel against them imperils not only marriage and the social and political orders but also the spiritual order" ("Eunice" 162). Therefore, women can practice any profession, as long as men remain in charge. Phelps and Bushnell, though both politically conservative and citing Christianity, offer two points of view, and their arguments are each distinct. Jewett, who as a well read woman living in Boston was most likely familiar with both Phelps and Bushnell and their ideology, counters their argument in *A Country Doctor*. Jewett compares Nan specifically with Eunice Fraley, a sixty-year old woman who, unmarried and living with her mother, provides a stark example of what can become of a woman who is not allowed to follow her heart. Eunice has given up on love and the happiness that would come with independence from her family. She is described as "a hindered little house-plant," with "roots" in a "familiar prison" (341). In her life, Eunice has yielded to her family and society's expectations; when she was young, she refused a proposal from a man she loved, and has lived reliant on her mother's money (338). While Eunice is an example of the wasted lives of women forbidden to truly live, Nan is Jewett's example of what can happen when women are allowed to venture into the world. She is describes her as "a flower:"

—some slender, wild thing, that has sprung up fearlessly under the great sky, with only the sunshine and the wind and summer rain to teach it, and help it fulfill its destiny,—a flower that has grown with no painful effort of its own, but because

God made it and kept it; that has bloomed because it has come in the course of its growth to the right time. (341)

As this description shows, Jewett sees that Nan has “naturally evolved” (Alaimo 56), contrasting her life with the unnatural lives women were supposed to live. Jewett is arguing for freedom, for women to realize what their talents are organically, whatever they may be, instead of being forced into a mold, and Jewett uses nature as a model for how this should take place.

As Stacy Alaimo points out, “The novel unites [the Romantic conception of nature] with the nature of evolution, allowing Jewett to refute the ‘scientific’ arguments about women’s inferiority and the rigidly determined role that prevailed during this period” (56). Jewett is not only writing in reaction to 19th century conservative ministers, but also the science of the time, which warned against women pursuing careers. In Judith Bryant Wittenberg’s essay, “Challenge and Compliance: Textual Strategies in *A Country Doctor* and Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Medical Autobiographies,” the author examines the so-called “scientific” writings at the time which warned against the education and professionalism of women. “A physician named Henry Smith asserted in 1875 that women should remain at home, that involvement in any ‘public matters’ was likely to make them ‘mannish’” (Wittenberg 126). Jewett was reacting specifically against Smith and reports that shared his sentiments. In *A Country Doctor*, Jewett writes, “[Nan] showed no sign of being [...] mannish” (249). Just this consciousness shows that Jewett had knowledge of current social, political, and scientific ideas, and she was reacting to them in her writing. Marjorie Pryse explains the cultural anxiety around women who desired freedom from men, who were termed “inverts,” and homosexual

love between women was a condition that warranted a physical and mental examination (527). Pryse discusses Josephine Donovan's suggestion that in *A Country Doctor* Jewett specifically reacts to Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which discussed female inverts and their "neurosis," and was first published in Europe in 1882, the same year Jewett and Fields made their trip to Europe (528). There are specific passages in *A Country Doctor* in which Jewett writes that Dr. Leslie and Nan are well read in European medical publications, but reject their theories.

Although Jewett reacts against intolerant ideologies, the text reveals her own unwillingness to test other cultural norms. Besides focusing on Nan's individual professional goals instead of the equal opportunities all women deserve, *The Country Doctor* also exposes the key differences in expectations of a woman doctor versus a male doctor. These differences show that, although Nan is ambitious, she is not attempting to outrageously complicate her role as a woman doctor. For example, Dr. Leslie had been married and also had a child, but that is completely out of the question for Nan. By becoming a doctor, she is choosing to never marry or have children, but she does not see this as a difficult decision, but rather as a part of her natural character. Throughout the second half of the book, she, and others, frequently notices that she is not the marrying kind:

She was filled with energy and a great desire for usefulness, but it was not with her, as with many of her friends, that the natural instinct toward marriage, and the building and keeping of a sweet home-life, ruled all other plans and possibilities. Her best wishes and hopes led her away from all this, and however tenderly she sympathized in other people's happiness, and recognized its inevitableness, for herself she avoided unconsciously all approach or danger of it. (248)

It could be that Nan understands that the role of wife is one ruled by the husband, and her independent nature would not allow this to happen. As Dr. Leslie says, “When a man or woman has that sort of self-dependence and unnatural self-reliance, it shows itself very early. I believe that it is a mistake for such a woman to marry” (234). But Nan has fairly positive examples of married couples in her young life, her grandparents and her country neighbors, as well as Dr. Leslie, who is a strong and admirable man. Also, knowing Jewett wrote just a year before of one couple’s attempt to change the strict roles of husband and wife, it seems that she would be comfortable writing a similar example of a unconventional and more positive marriage. Instead, Jewett argues, like Dr. Leslie, that educated, driven women, like herself and Nan, should not marry.

By making Nan asexual, Jewett avoids questioning if women can really have it both ways: work outside the home as men do and be a wife and mother. In *A Country Doctor* Nan was never tempted to pursue a romantic relationship. She has many friends, but never experiences love or a sexual attraction to anyone. Again, Dr. Leslie points out, “Nan’s feeling toward her boy-playmates is exactly the same as toward the girls she knows” (234). Throughout the novel, Jewett writes her as simply the exception to the rule. She has a gift for medicine, is a free spirit, tests the expectations for a young woman, additionally, she has plenty of friends, is wealthy, beautiful and “showed no sign of being [...] mannish” (249). Even though she is pursuing something very unconventional, Nan has absolutely nothing that hinders her. Even her “choice” between marrying George Gerry or becoming a doctor in the end is not a difficult one. There is never any doubt that Nan will refuse George. She never lets on that she is in love with

him; instead, she thinks of him like a brother, and says so. For example, in the chapter “Paralyzing Men” Margaret Roman uses George Gerry to describe “the utterly ironic situation of the man unable to shape his own life, who desires to shape a woman’s instead” (75). George is not very ambitious or smart; he is truly so shallow and unaware, it is very funny. While Nan relishes the opportunity to put a man’s shoulder bone back into its socket, the scene actually makes George sick. Roman writes, “[Jewett] seems to be enjoying herself immensely with the character of George Gerry by embodying him with the stereotypical views men hold of women so she can write them down for their absurdity to be plainly seen” (77). Poking fun at George Gerry only reinforces the reading that Nan is not suited for this kind of man, and Jewett offers no hope of her ever finding a match. *A Country Doctor* takes a stand to show that women are individuals and should not be categorized by their sex, but falls short of giving women, or men, the opportunity to have both a private life and a public role.

In the end of *A Country Doctor*, Nan Prince must turn down the advice of family, reject the proposal of her friend George Gerry, and insist that she follow her heart and become a doctor. In the last scene of the novel, Nan returns to the river where her mother once considered taking her life and raises her hands upwards and rejoices, “O God, I thank thee for my future” (370). Although a simple reading might lend itself to an overall “feminist” agenda, in that it illustrates a woman standing up for her own dreams however untraditional, specific details do not fit. Instead, Nan follows what is right for *her*; and it is clear that Jewett is not attempting to make a larger statement about all women. In one critical scene, where Nan must defend her choice to her wealthy aunt and

her city friends, Nan says, “I won’t attempt to say that the study of medicine is a proper vocation for women, only that I believe more and more every year that it is the proper vocation for me” (328). She goes on to say that all women cannot be inclined to motherhood because some of them are “dead failures at it,” and while the other women agree that not “every marriage is a lucky one,” they also insist that marriage and home life are the surest way of a woman’s happiness (328). It would only be a small step further for Jewett to say that *all* women should have the opportunity to study medicine, or whatever they are inclined to pursue. Jewett is close, getting there, but hesitates. Instead of drawing attention to the novel through controversy, Jewett eases her opinions onto her readers as to not wholly disrupt the status quo.

Jewett uses this rhetoric again in her series of editorials and short stories published in the denominational journal *The Congregationalist*, starting in January 1882. Her submissions are very demonstrative of her interest in politics, as in some she exercises her creativity and others she discursively attempts to convince her readers to reform gender roles. As Terry Heller points out in his essay, “Speaking Softly to be Heard: Jewett’s Feminist Reform Contributions to *The Congregationalist*,” “*The Congregationalist* was strongly anti-feminist,” and had previously published the conservative views of Austin Phelps. In total, Jewett would publish eight articles here, ending with the last published in October 1884. Heller interprets this series of publications, in such a conservative journal, as a deliberate choice. He writes:

Jewett seems to have developed a deliberate program of placing in the paper a series of pieces that begins by essentially mirroring the paper’s opinions, but culminates with two feminist reform essays. This can be seen as a masquerade because Jewett manages to persuade the editors of *The Congregationalist* that her

views are safely orthodox, and does this so successfully that she is allowed—finally behind a thin veil—to express ideas to which the editors were openly and vigorously opposed. (“Speaking”)

Although it is only in two essays that Heller finds “feminist reform,” in several of the other articles, Jewett seems to be building up to her final argument. In her article “Lucky People,” published in May 1882, Jewett writes, “God gives to each of us blessing that are entirely our own,” echoing her stance in *A Country Doctor*, that God gives every individual, regardless of gender, talents and skills. Similarly, she argues that it is up to us to appreciate and use those talents, “God sends us the events of every day, and it is we ourselves who make them bad or good, according to the way we take them.” Next, in “A Guest at Home,” published in November 1882, Jewett shows that an educated woman is not, as Phelps had worried, unwilling to return to the work of the home. In this short story, a family nervously awaits the return of their daughter, Annie, who has been at school in the city for three years. The girl’s aunt illustrates Phelps’ fears, “Now she’ll always be wanting to get back among city folks, and all that painting of hers is all nonsense. I’d like to know what good it’s going to do her, after all’s said and done. I expect she’ll come home and be so high and mighty there won’t be no living with her.” But instead of being selfish and unappreciative, Annie instead saw “there might be a great deal that she could give” to her family. She helps her mother, befriends her crabby aunt, excels at her painting, and “made everybody happier.” “Somehow the work did not seem all drudgery anymore to her father and mother (who had begun to feel like horses in a treadmill), because she lent them a hand so kindly and tried to make the best of everything.” Jewett’s narrator even describes how, after returning to school, Annie is

praised for the improvement on her painting. “A Guest at Home” shows that an educated woman is not a hindrance to a family, but a blessing. Conservative readers and editors at *The Congregationalist* appreciate the story for Annie’s return to traditional values, but Jewett is continuing to react to fearful arguments like Phelps’.

In what could be interpreted as a straightforward response to women’s calls for reform, “Every-Day Work” was published in September 1883. From a modern perspective, “Every-Day Work,” does not suggest a radical approach to changing women’s roles, as Jewett understands most women will continue doing household work. However, reading the essay closely shows that Jewett continued to believe women should not assume these roles automatically. She opens this article by pointing out “many women nowadays [...] are sadly dissatisfied with their work and their position in life.” She goes, perhaps to appease her editors, to blame some of those women for their own unhappiness, “Some women are subjected to a sad oppression, and I am willing to confess that they are apt to be the losers in many contests, but I am willing also to confess, with shame, that it is more apt to be their own fault than anybody else’s.” In “Every-Day Work,” Jewett makes the case that housework should be taken as seriously as any other job; it should be professionalized, and by doing so many women would get a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from doing their jobs. “There is no doubt that we do not do half well enough the work that is ours already—first from lack of proper education for it, and secondly from lack of pride and ambition.” Jewett hopes women will turn their ambitions to what is at hand, highlighting the importance of the home and family life: “It was not drunkenness that made a wretched home, but the wretched home that had made

drunkenness.” This statement is strong, not putting any pressure on society to change but instead women themselves. She encourages all women to “choose some business that is in the line of a woman’s natural work,” however, she makes an exception:

A woman must take into consideration the possibility of her being married, when she plans her career and sets up a certain goal for her ambition. If she studies law or fits herself to be a teacher of some specialty in the higher grades of school, then, if marriage does fall to her lot, all her years of study and training are from many points of view seen to have been a waste of her time.

Here, Jewett is indeed recognizing that if a woman is not called to be married, like herself or Nan Prince, she should pursue a vocation besides housework. Also reminiscent of *A Country Doctor*, Jewett stresses that women should follow their given paths. She writes, “The minute you shirk your rightful work and try to escape from the place where you belong, you have blocked your machinery and you are worse than useless,” therefore arguing that a woman should do what she is called to do, whatever it may be.

But Jewett believed that before all women can freely follow their talents without society’s interference, they must first earn respect and show that they can better themselves individually. While Jewett’s October 1884 article, “Misdirected Energy,” does not speak to the women’s movement as a whole, the essay does outline the best way women can convince others of their rights. This essay can be read as a how-to-guide for women searching for ways to better their lives and achieve equal status with men. Jewett argues that fashion trends dictate how women use their free time, which creates useless work, adding to frustration and stress. “She grows tired of her little round of duties, and fretful, perhaps, and looks a little way up and down the street, as if she were a bird in a cage.” Instead, she wished women would read:

It is because fancy work steals so much of the time that reading ought to have, that I want some of my readers to find fault with it. There is too little strength and vigor in American women, and it is a pity any of it should be wasted. [...] we ought to learn something, and grow a little, mentally and spiritually, every day of our lives; we ought to be continually elevating our uses and enlarging our horizons.

Although Heller finds “Misdirected Energy” “milder” as far as its feminist goals, Jewett is suggesting how women might advance themselves “mentally and spiritually,” so that they might give back to society, change it and their personal realities. When it comes down to it, Jewett wants women to read, to pursue their God-given talents, and to better themselves, individually, because “if you wish to take a higher and better position in the world’s sight, you must earn your right to it (Every-Day Work). Instead of instilling her hope in organizations or in a political platform, Jewett shows that her faith rests in the individual woman, unhappy with the opportunities available to her and willing to work for change.

Jewett may remain best known for her attraction to and use of the country. It can be seen as only sentimental, but as Margaret Roman points out, “this environment exhibited the fewest forms of control” (xii). For Jewett, it was a place where she ran, grew, and developed without the rules of society. However, things seem to change more slowly in the country as opposed to the city. She was of the mindset that change takes time, and it cannot be forced to happen immediately, as she writes in “Every-Day Work,” “It is of no use to fight the question with platform speeches and petitions to the legislatures of the different States, since suffrage will not come until it comes by right and not by favor. But the world in general has never been ready for reforms, and in a certain sense the great changes come about independently of ourselves.” However,

studying her work during these years reveals a woman who was eager for change. It is clear that Jewett saw a need for reforms, perhaps not on the ballot, but in the way women and men think about their roles and their opportunities. In these texts, Jewett explores different angles on the issues that concerned her generation and those following, revealing just how complex and involved these debates were, and still are today.

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CHAPTER THREE

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN 1898-1900: FEMINIST EVOLUTION IN PRIVATE AND PRINT

At the turn of the century, no person was more passionate about the women's movement than Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Gilman, who was born into the well-known Beecher family in 1860, dedicated her life and work to examining women's role in society and rethinking how institutions such as the home and the economy privilege men and keep women from achieving independence and equality. Gilman had a curious mind, studying Marxism and evolution, and used both theories to better understand women's position. By examining Gilman's life and work between 1898 and 1900, readers can better see her focus as a feminist, as well as understand how her non-fiction, fiction, and poetry, all work to the same end. Unlike other women writers at this time, Gilman focused all of her writing on her primary interest: women's limited role in society. She was dedicated to studying the oppression of the American woman, oppression she had experienced. "She took the disadvantages of her life—her poverty, her mental illness, her unsuccessful mothering, her sense of alienation and marginalization—and turned them into arenas to investigate. She wanted to know about *her* roots, *her* evolution, *her* history, but history, science, and sociology were not written about her, and so she wrote them herself" (Lane 1990s 7). Her personal commitment led her to study aspects of American life that others would not. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was the most well known American feminist during this time, but more than her notoriety, she was also the most dedicated. Looking at both her writing and private life show that this was a woman

unwilling to make compromises. For Gilman, there was no distinction between her private beliefs and her public voice; although it was difficult, she maintained her commitment to feminism in every aspect of her life

1898 was a pivotal year for Charlotte Perkins Gilman; in many ways, it marked an end to some of her personal struggles. That year, she published her first book, *Women and Economics*, which earned her a national reputation as a reformist and writer, garnering positive reviews and going through several printings. She was also in a caring relationship with a man who supported her work. Just ten years earlier, Gilman had left her native New England for California, taking her young daughter and leaving her first husband, Walter Stetson, who she had reluctantly married in 1884. There, they lived with her sick mother, who needed constant nursing, and Gilman wrote incessantly (Nies 137). In 1893, Gilman's mother died. In 1894, Gilman's divorce became final and Gilman gave up custody of her daughter to Stetson and his new wife. Judith Nies sums up this bleak period in Gilman's life:

With the death of her mother, her divorce from her husband, and the departure of her daughter she closed out the first part of her life. It was 1895 and she was thirty-five years old. She wrote in her diary her assessment of herself: "A failure, a repeated cumulative failure. Debt...no means of paying, no strength to hold a job if I got one." (138)

And although Gilman struggled with depression the rest of her life, her attitude on her professional success surely must have turned in 1898. That year, she published *Women and Economics*, a book that, arguably, had been in the making for quite some time.

Gilman's personal story reads much like her writing and often serves as a primary text for readers in order to appreciate her work. For her, the issue of women's inability to make

and keep their own money was not new; like so many issues she took up in writing, she had experienced poverty and the financial stress of being a single woman. When her father, Fredric Beecher Perkins, abandoned the family in 1867, leaving his wife, Mary Fitch Westcott, and children, Gilman's mother was forced to travel from relative to boarding house, moving eighteen times in fourteen years. "Gilman often saw her mother completely without funds or hope of support in the near future" (Nies 128). Her father's departure came after his wife lost two children during pregnancy, causing speculation that he left for fear of killing his wife in childbirth (Lane *Herland* 28). Whatever the reasons, his absence left the family in dire financial circumstances. Her parents remained married for thirteen more years before her mother finally asked for a divorce. This action upset the Beecher family, giving Gilman the first glimpse of the unfairness of marriage: "And so Gilman learned the hard lesson that only the woman as victim can claim respectability; the woman who asserts herself loses social legitimacy" (Nies 132).

Her financially unstable childhood was followed by her equally unstable first marriage. While Gilman was studying at the Rhode Island School of Design she met Walter Stetson, who quickly proposed marriage, prompting Gilman to write him of her wish to remain single: "You *must* believe that I love you. [...] But much as I love you, I love WORK better, & I cannot make the two compatible" (qtd. Knight "Texts" 20). However, Stetson convinced her that she would be able to continue working, and Gilman hesitantly agreed on the marriage. However, after giving birth to her daughter, Gilman found her husband reluctant to keep his promise, and she fell into a deep depression, troubled by her inability to balance her desire to work with her role as a wife and mother.

Denise Knight writes of her frustration during this time, “She resented [Stetson’s] freedom to work, though he too had a child, a spouse, and a home, and resented the double standard that made this disparity logical” (*Diaries* 250). This frustration, combined with her husband’s unsympathetic response and her post-partum depression, lead Gilman into a difficult period of mental illness and depression, inspiring her to write “The Yellow Wall-Paper.”

She reflected on the meaning of her own experience with more intensity after she began reading Lester Ward’s work. Lester Ward, the first president of the American Sociological Society and once referred to as the founding father of American sociology (Finlay 252), would become “the single greatest influence on [Gilman’s] intellectual and professional development” (Nies 138). She most likely first read Ward in 1888, when he published his article on the female origin of the species, “Our Better Halves,” in *The Forum*. “In 1894, she twice made enthusiastic mention of Ward’s theories in *The Impress*, the journal of the Pacific Coast Women’s Press” (Davis “His and Herland” 73). When Ward requested a copy of Gilman’s 1893 poetry collection, *In This Our World*, in 1896, she began a correspondence with him and they finally met at an annual suffrage convention later that year. Ward was a “Reform Darwinist,” believing that Darwin’s theory of evolution could not be applied to our society, and that the idea of males truly being the stronger, most fit sex was false: their superior social role was not achieved by natural evolution. Ward believed women and men should be treated as equals; in fact, he argued that, “females in most subhuman species were the primary protectors of their young, the centers of their families, and the objects of male competition (but not

domination)” (Finlay 254). Of course, arguing that women could in fact be biologically superior, as he did in “Our Better Halves,” was not met with enthusiasm.¹ Ward writes, “woman is the unchanging trunk of the great genealogic tree; while man, with his vaunted superiority, is but a branch, a grafted scion, as it were, whose acquired qualities die with the individual, while those of woman are handed on to futurity” (275). While Ward saw women as the foundation of the human race, critics arguing that women should be contained within the home described the female sex as naturally inferior to men. Barbara Finlay notes Ward’s modern thinking, writing, “When most sociologists spoke of gender relations as based in ‘nature,’ Ward was already arguing that gender roles are cultural phenomena” (255). Gilman called Ward’s Gynaecocentric Theory “the greatest single contribution to the world’s thought since evolution” (Gilman *The Living* 187).

In *Women and Economics*, Gilman takes her own experiences and Ward’s theory into consideration and finds that women’s economic dependence on men has limited their role in society. She outlines the consequences of this dependence, showing that men have gone on to have important roles in developing our culture while women have remained in the home, consuming but not contributing to the economy. This has spoiled evolution’s natural plan. It is the environment we have adopted that is oppressing women. She shows that women are an anomaly in nature, being the only animal unable to provide for themselves as individuals: “We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relations is

¹ Gilman cites Ward’s “Our Better Halves” in *Women and Economics*, describing one reader’s response, which was printed in the following issue of *The Forum*. The writer rebuts Ward, saying that woman is “much less than man” and is valuable only for her reproductive qualities (172).

also an economic relation” (5). Echoing Ward’s sentiments in “Our Better Halves,” where he describes men as “insignificant,” and “an afterthought” (272), Gilman labels females to be the race-preservers, while men only serve a temporary function (134). Unlike other animals, our sex determines our economic role. Although women have economic value because they perform housework, which in turn allows men more time to work and make money, they are not independent because their labor “is given as part of [their] functional duty, not as employment” (13). Women are expected to cook, clean, and take care of children; these are not skills that they can be paid for. “The salient fact in this discussion is that, whatever the economic value of the domestic industry of women is, they do not get it” (14). Instead of continuing to practice this “biting injustice and slow, suffocating repression,” Gilman encourages men and women to change how they value women’s work (134). Her solution is to professionalize housework, dividing household labor into professions, “requir[ing] the service of fewer women for fewer hours a day” (245). Much like Sarah Orne Jewett’s essay “Every-day Work,” Gilman argues that if these positions were trained and practiced, a “woman [could] fill her place in those industries with far better results than are now provided by her ceaseless struggles, her conscientious devotion, her pathetic ignorance and inefficiency” (247). As Jewett described in “Every-day Work,” women lack pride in the work they are forced to do everyday; Gilman endorses this idea, suggesting that if women were trained, and paid for it, food would taste better and homes would be cleaner. Women could live “as a man lives in his home, spending certain hours of the day at work and others at home” (245).

Although most of this argument focuses on educating women on “women’s work,”

cleaning, cooking, and mothering, Gilman also notes the increasing number of working women, especially “business women, professional women, scientific, artistic, and literary women” (243). She points out that these women should not be denied homes because they are working; working women must labor twice as hard to maintain a home and be wage-earners. She suggests grouping homes together for these families, each kitchenless, and all instead sharing a collective kitchen area (243). By removing the kitchen from each home, houses would be much cleaner, and families could still enjoy going to eat together, “without interfering with other people’s comfort or sacrificing their own” (244). Gilman’s focus on architectural space is one feminists began exploring in the second half of the nineteenth century and have not put down yet (Gaudelius 111). By removing kitchens from the home entirely, Gilman emphasizes that it is not enough to simply educate women, employ women, or move women outside of the home. This removal broke down “the gendered ideology of both the house and the home,” preventing gendered space from continuing to perpetrate the social ideology of the family (Gaudelius 119). With this example, Gilman offers one of her more radical illustrations of what must be done to change our environment. Gender relations are complex and Gilman is not open to solutions that will ease conflicts only on the surface. It is important for the underlying ideologies to change, not just the external symptoms.

Besides our physical surroundings, Gilman calls for changes in our expectations for each gender. It is society’s practices, the strict assignment of gender roles, which have prevented women from achieving equality. Gilman writes, “To the young girl [...] marriage is the one road to fortune, to life,” going on to show that every aspect of a

woman's education and training "tells her that she is *she*, and that all depends on whom she marries [...] Where young boys plan for what they will achieve and attain, young girls plan for whom they will achieve and attain" (86-7). Although women are taught that marriage is the only way to success, they are not allowed to look for it, they must be chosen by a man and do not have the right to choose their partner themselves. Examining this duplicity from an economic standpoint, Gilman finds that "it is economic beggary as well as a false attitude from a sex point of view" (89). Although in order to succeed in life a woman's ultimate goal is to find a suitable husband, leaving her to do all she can to solicit a proposal, Gilman remains positive about the potential of marriage. Marriage does not *have* to be an economic condition, in fact, stressing the economic value of a marriage only distracts from the question of true love (218). Perhaps thinking about her own first marriage, Gilman writes, "The economic status of marriage rudely breaks in upon love's young dream" (219) and "marriage is not perfect unless it is between class equals," not between one partner who works "in the largest, newest, highest ways," like a man who studies and explores new technologies, and one partner who works "in the smallest, oldest, lowest ways" (220), perhaps a woman, who becomes the house-servant. Reminiscent of Jewett's "Tom's Husband," published in 1882, as well as her personal life, Gilman tells how the economic oppression of the marriage roles can prevent happiness:

Even the friendship which may have existed between husband and wife before marriage is often destroyed by the relation and its economic complications. They are deeply involved in the industrial and financial concern of their new business. This works steadily against the development of higher and purer relations between men and women, and tends to keep them forever to the one primitive bond of sex-union. (310)

By separating marriage, family, and economics, Gilman suggests that all relationships will result in “much higher fulfillment after the economic phase is outgrown” (213). Answering some potential critics, Gilman explains that the changes she recommends will not harm the sanctity of marriage or the value of motherhood: “It does not involve a change in the marriage relation except in withdrawing the element of economic dependence, nor in the relation of mother to child save to improve it” (210). Gilman demonstrates that for society to see the full benefits and possibilities of our institutions, they must be disconnected from one another. Economics color our views of what marriage and family should be; without that, humans would be much happier.

Women and Economics is not a book strictly about women, but rather a book on how society has shaped women’s position and affected men as well. “Lester Ward’s ideas had given her a different perspective from most feminist theoreticians, and rather than focusing on the disabilities of women in American society, Gilman concentrated on male and female relationships in equilibrium” (Nies 140). In her conclusion, Gilman writes, “It is not alone upon woman, and, through her, upon the race, that the ill-effects may be observed. Man, as master, has suffered from his position also” (337). With both sexes suffering presently, Gilman recognizes the need for changes and improvements, and although progress does not rest solely on one effort, she recognizes the possibilities of the emerging women’s movement. “The women’s movement, then, should be hailed by every right-thinking, far-seeing man and woman as the best birth of our country” (144). Gilman obviously viewed the women’s movement to be not just about changing women, but about changing individuals and society as a whole. Throughout, she is

positive about humanity's willingness and ability to correct itself. She remains optimistic about the quick changes that will happen when we alter our behaviors:

Where our progress hitherto has been warped and hindered by the retarding influence of surviving rudimentary forces, it will flow on smoothly and rapidly when both men and women stand equal in economic relation. When the mother of the race is free, we shall have a better world, by the easy right of birth and by the calm, slow, friendly forces of social evolution. (340)

Reflecting her own sense of "Reform Darwinism," Gilman expands on Ward's Gynaecocentric Theory, and concludes that once economics are disconnected from social expectations, the forces of evolution will keep both sexes flourishing. She recognizes that most women will remain focused on family life, and *Women and Economics* did not attempt to discourage or change society's value or reverence for family. Instead, she asks for changes in what Americans expect from our institutions, relationships, and genders.

Women and Economics made Gilman a well-known writer and women's activist. Prominent American women such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley praised the book (Nies 141). Gilman's activism crossed genres, and she pursued poetry, publishing "Up and Down," in *The Arena* in October, 1898. *The Arena* was a socially conscious journal, publishing literature focused on reform. "Up and Down" describes the human soul and its ability to transcend earthly boundaries: The soul escapes "the little beast" of the body and spreads "Into the lives of many-- / Feeling the joy and pain, / The peace the toil, the strain / That is not spared to any." In this way, Gilman portrays humanity "Feeling and working as one;" it will only be through this kind of equality that we will "taste the world's full worth." The souls reunite with their bodies, and Gilman depicts a comforting image of home, a place where we are surrounded by loved ones. In "Up and Down,"

Gilman is attempting to convince her readers that society can improve itself by employing equality. While writing in a different genre, one Gilman readers rarely study today, she broadens her audience, offering them a different medium by which to obtain her message.

Gilman's professional success led her publisher, Small, Maynard, & Co., to publish her short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper," originally published in *New England Magazine*, as a book in 1899. In 1900, Gilman married again, and this time, she was confident the marriage would work. She married her cousin, George Houghton Gilman, who she had first befriended as a girl and had reconnected with in 1897. The two corresponded frequently with letters, and in her diaries, visits with Houghton are described as "delightful" and "friendly" (668). They courted for almost three years before getting married; after her divorce, Gilman had decided she was "unsuited for marriage," and did not want to go through the mental anguish of another failed relationship. However, the optimism with which she writes about marriage in *Women and Economics* extended into her personal life, and her letters to Houghton reveal a willingness to work through her emotional issues, confronting her doubts and insecurities. In 1899 she wrote him, "O Houghton—I am so *tired* of all this restless doubt and hope and fear and flickering joy...I've got to the place I wanted. I can write what I please and say what I please and the world is ready to listen. And here I am floundering helplessly among my own affairs...It is shameful—shameful" (qtd Hill 48). But just like her desire to study the economic relations which hurt her mother and herself, Gilman needed to understand her apprehension about this relationship. Mary Hill writes,

“Self-indulgent, some might call it, but courageous in my view, was her determination to travel to the underworld, to take Houghton to her ‘catacombs’” (49). What makes Gilman a strong feminist is seen here in her personal life: her need to confront that which she does not understand. After the success of *Women and Economics* and the years of Houghton’s friendship and support, she felt confident about the partnership. Gilman’s professional success solidified her role as a writer, a woman who worked outside of the home, something Houghton fully encouraged. She had found the partnership that would grant her the freedom she wished for all women. Gilman’s private happiness mirrored her public achievements; her published ideas were not just theories, but personal beliefs. It was not until Gilman was professionally accomplished that she was able to put energy into her private life.

Gilman’s exploration of evolution and the influence of environment continued to cross genres. In 1900, her poem, “The Earth, the World, and I” appeared in *Cosmopolitan*. Much like her argument in *Women and Economics*, in the poem, Gilman shows an optimistic approach to the debate over what controls humanity’s progress. The poem is a dialogue between a child and the Earth and the World, and both ask the child, “What can you do? / What can you try?” The Earth contends that “all you are and can ever be / Is the product of Heredity,” while the World believes “all the effort you have spent / Is the product of Environment.” It is easy to see how Gilman is amusingly invoking the evolutionary debate, and although the narrator is only called “Child,” the response shows that it is someone who believes we can change any ill-effective influences. The Child responds to the Earth, “the fact of my coming from you / Does

not alter another, my dear-- / This fact—I am here!” It seems that Gilman would rather put this debate aside and instead focus on the power we have over our own destinies; we are here and we have power. She even evokes Ward’s image of the genealogic tree, “Yes, I admit / All you’re claiming for it. / The ‘first cause’ is still running your ranch / But I’m a collateral branch! / In which the same power is set free, / To be handled by me.” In the response to the World, the Child’s independence echoes again, “there’s much you don’t know. / Your power you correctly define, / But you fail to see mine.” By using a child as the narrative voice, Gilman’s rhetoric changes from the analytical, as it was in *Women and Economics*, to be more entertaining, although both texts have the same message. In the preface to *Women and Economics*, Gilman writes that her purpose is “To show how some of the worst evils under which we suffer, evils long supposed to be inherent and ineradicable in our natures, are but the result of certain arbitrary conditions of our own adoption, and how, by removing those conditions, we may remove the evils resultant” (xiii). She ends “The Earth, the World, and I” with the same sentiments, writing, “Our strongest impressions we take / From conditions we make; / and when we don’t like the effect / We can change—can select; / Can unmake and remake and choose / The conditions we use!” Each work performs its given purpose, but by reading both it is clear that Gilman was committed to her ideas and willing to repeat them in different forms. In this period, the major themes in Gilman’s writing remain the same; instead of offering one approach to an issue and beginning another, she devotes more writing to her study and provides concentrated readings of possible alternatives and outcomes.

In 1900, she again expanded on issues in *Women and Economics* and published *Concerning Children*. As Ann Lane writes in her book *To Herland and Beyond*, “Important as *Women and Economics* is, it is nevertheless only the first step in Gilman’s construction of a complicated and ambitious historical and sociological analysis of men and women in history and society” (254). Just as she acknowledged simple solutions would not totally free women, Gilman knew she was just beginning to unpack some of the complexities in relations between men and women. She believed women’s lives would forever be fixed on motherhood, and Gilman’s own insecurities about her role as a mother led her to further explore maternity in the US. In *Concerning Children*, Gilman contends that children make up a “large and permanent class of human beings” and “the progress of the world” depends on our treatment of children (119). If we view children as members of society instead of members of the family we will more swiftly change and improve our society (119). Indeed, she finds the current method of childcare selfish on the part of adults. Gilman finds that the most important virtue children learn is that of obedience, which is a virtue only for children, not for adults. Obedience keeps children under the thumbs of their parents and keeps them from asking questions. Gilman writes that obedience “does not develop judgment and will, but does develop that fatal facility in following other people’s wills which tends to make us a helpless mob, mere sheep, instead of wise, free, strong individuals” (39). In order for children to grow into independent, self-sufficient adults, we should think of a child as a “human creature [...] temporarily a child, far more permanently a man” (37). We should teach children virtues that benefit them as adults, and in turn the world and society at large. For this to happen,

we must educate the young instead of ordering their actions. We must answer their questions of “why,” in turn, teaching them to learn instead of to obey. Gilman knew that asking parents to think of their children as humans and adults would mean asking them to rethink the roles of a parent, especially a mother.

The overriding quality of a good, or “natural” mother as Gilman calls it, is maternal instinct. We assume the best mother is one who is naturally kind, gentle, and loving. Gilman contends that these are not enough, “The ‘natural’ mother of to-day is reared without an inkling of what lies before her” (267). The only attribute a “natural” mother has to call on is her instinct, one that more often than not, leads her astray, no doubt because of misguided expectations of women. She is not trained and has not taken the time to study child education, health, or parenting. On the other hand, Gilman offers an example of an “unnatural” mother, one who “thoughtfully considers her approaching duties” (268). Yes, she hopes to be a mother, but finds instead she does not have the faculties to be a good educator. “This is a blow, for she considers the training of little children as the highest work on earth” (269), writes Gilman, showing her own belief that motherhood is the greatest work a woman can do, but not all women are made for it. “Although Gilman challenged many conventional notions of her generation, the belief that women alone could and should nurture the young was not among them” (Lane *Herland* 263). Instead of pressuring these “unnatural” mothers into a role they cannot fulfill, it would be better for society if women were encouraged to study and practice their individual professions and leave the daily childcare to skilled professionals. Gilman suggests what would become modern childcare, daycares where children learn and play

together. Gilman writes that mothers should not be fearful of losing touch with their child, because if the time they spend with their children is devoted to them instead of trying to keep house, the bond between mother and child will only grow stronger. “The ‘natural’ mother is content to mingle her ‘sacred duties’ of child-care with the miscellaneous duties of a house-servant; but the ‘unnatural mother,’ for the sake of her children, refuses to be the kitchen-maid, parlour-maid, and chamber-maid of the world any longer” (275). Here, the desire for freedom is strong, and perhaps even more convincing to women in 1900 because it deals foremost with women as mothers, not professionals. Gilman argues that the best mother is one who wants what is best for her children, and realizes she cannot accomplish that alone. In order for this to happen, parents must abandon the romantic notion that they and only they can provide the best care for their child. “In Victorian America she stripped away the sentimentality from marriage and motherhood and exposed what the sentimentality masked: the power relations that imprison women and children, although she did not lump them together” (Lane “1990s” 8). Gilman writes that “we have urgent need of the unnatural mother,” that more unnatural mothers will decrease the sound of crying and produce happier children (277). As far as women’s role in society, *Concerning Children* is a subversive attempt to persuade women to change, if not for them than for their children.

But before these changes in parenting, and consequently women, can take place, our culture must examine the ethics by which we live. Yes, we value honesty and freedom, but those standards are not evident in our parenting. Gilman uses lying as an example:

1. We lie to the child. He discovers it. No evil is apparently resultant. 2. He accuses us of it, and we punish him for impertinence. 3. He lies to us, and meets severe penalties. 4. We accuse him of it, rightly or wrongly, and are not punished for impertinence [...]"

And so it goes, with one circumstance after another of how we “teach” children about the “value” of honesty (102-3). Although not explicitly stated, this could also be said for freedom; Gilman describes our desire for children to grow into “wise, free, strong individuals,” and yet we ration varying degrees of freedom to different sexes. Obviously, Gilman recognizes that we are ignorant of ethics. She shows that by teaching children, we will also be influencing all of society:

Once we boldly enter the field of ethical study, and reduce its simple principles to a teachable basis, —when we make clear to ourselves and our children the legitimate reasons of right conduct, —the same intelligence and ambition which carry us on so far in other sciences will lift the standard of behaviour of race, both in theory and practice. (117)

Gilman’s goal for *Concerning Children* is clear: Like *Women and Economics* is not just a book about women, *Concerning Children* is not just a book about children. Although Gilman is seen as a writer an activist concerned with women, she is mostly concerned with all of society; it is through women, and in this case, motherhood and child-rearing, that Gilman finds the most possibility for positive transformation.

Gilman’s concern with society is seen with her suggestion of social parentage. It will only be through a renewed sense of community and social concern that constructive reforms will take place. If children are to learn virtues that will better a community, they should learn them from a community. Gilman hopes parents realize that they live in society because it is convenient: each person is not responsible for every aspect of their survival. The advantages of society should be shared with children, not denied to them.

“The father is, to some extent, awake to the duties of social parentage; the mother, hardly at all. The difference is this: the father serves his children by means of serving other people; the mother serves her children personally, with her own hands” (283). Again, Gilman is emphasizing women’s position and its need for development. Gilman hopes children will be allowed into the public sphere, in the form of a public nursery: “We can and do cheerfully admit the advantages of a public school and a public school-teacher for our children. [...] Why not a public nursery and a public nurse?” (123). If children should be allowed outside the home, working and learning alongside other children, certainly it is alright for women, even mothers, to do the same.

But with all of her progressive ideas, Gilman cannot escape some of the ethnocentric and racist, albeit conventional, beliefs of the time. In the beginning of *Concerning Children*, Gilman discusses her belief that children inherit qualities parents acquired before the child is born, asserting that in order to produce an “advanced” child, parents should focus on improving themselves in the ten years before becoming parents; “we have power to improve the species, to promote the development of the human race” (4). From here, she contends that if you were “investing in young human stock,” a “sturdy English baby would be worth more than an equally vigorous young Fuegian” (4). Ann Lane writes that Gilman “did unquestionably believe in the superiority of some races over others” (*Herland* 255). Her own ethics are obviously limited. She even suggests that in order to “improve a race of low savages,” we should take children from that tribe and educate them, making them the most advantageous “stock” (7). Her prejudice stems from her understanding of evolutionary theory. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams describes:

Gilman embraced and extended to the realm of human society the evolutionary biological theories that Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace had made public in the 1850s. These theories stated that evolution by natural selection occurs when nature arbitrarily produces mutations in organisms and that organisms containing structures most adaptable to a given environment survive and reproduce. (18)

By limiting her understanding of progress to evolution, Gilman also prescribed to “an elitism of race and nationality” (Ganobcsik-Williams 19). In 1900, Gilman believed she was repeating the latest scientific ideas, however, modern readers will find her faith in evolution disconcerting. Gilman’s nationalist and ethnocentric beliefs taint all of her work, particularly because so much of her writing is obviously influenced by the same science. If Gilman, a progressive thinker, writer, and activist, fell prey to discriminatory beliefs, it calls for a reevaluation of our own beliefs. *Concerning Children* does not lose its worth due to Gilman’s ideological limitations; they instead reinforce her idea of assessing society’s virtues and the values we practice and teach.

In all of her work during these few years, Gilman’s writing asserts the theory of evolution and insists society must rethink women’s position. Although viewed as an activist for women, Gilman’s writing contends reforms are not for the sole benefit of women but for all humankind. By publishing *Women and Economics*, Gilman was embarking on what would become a lifelong study of relationships between men and women, the evolution of society’s roles and our ability to change that which we find limiting. 1898 marked a turning point for Gilman, professionally and personally; it is not a coincidence that success for her in both worlds came together. Her commitment to change in society caused her to change her personal relationships. She battled personal demons, insecurities about marriage and motherhood, and as modern readers, we battle

Gilman's own ethical fallacies. The complexities in her writing lead readers, past and present, to examine and rethink the cultural definitions by which we live, as well as question our own faith in society's ability and willingness to change.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ZITKALA-ŠA 1919-1921: CREATING RELATIONSHIPS IN SUPPORT OF
ACTIVISM

“Little peoples are to be granted the right of self determination!” (*Other Writings* 192). In 1919, Zitkala-Ša wrote these words, referencing not only the conference being held in Paris which would result in the Treaty of Versailles and end World War One, but also her passionate belief in equality. In these words, Zitkala-Ša’s energy is clear, as is her intention. While some critics have said that her literary career ended after her 1902 marriage to Raymond Bonnin and the birth of their son, Zitkala-Ša continued to use her writing talents and publish work to further the Native cause. Zitkala-Ša’s work and writing between 1919 and 1921 reflect the changing, and sometimes turbulent, American political landscape. She made calculated decisions on what causes to take up in her writing and where to present it in order for her voice to have the most impact. She rethinks past positions, considering how present circumstances have caused her opinions to change. Pressing issues for Native Americans included citizenship, freedom of religious practice, and education. The 1920’s was “a decade marked by contestation over what it meant to be an Indian—and American” (Carpenter 140) and alongside the Native cause was the emerging women’s movement, which was also high on the American political agenda. In this period, Native Americans and women were dealing with the same questions: What does it mean to be an independent citizen? What is the best way for us to be educated? How can we best maneuver in US politics? Zitkala-Ša saw possibility for reforms in these two movements; not only did she support both, but during

these years she would draw on the activism and energy of women's groups to further Native causes.

In 1919, Zitkala-Ša's attention was focused on the rapidly declining Society for American Indians (SAI). The previous year's conference brought together only 30 members; debates about peyote and tribalism had divided the Society and members boycotted the meeting (Welch 46). Members disagreed over the campaign for citizenship, and their failure to agree on whether to pursue American citizenship or strengthen tribal values halted the group's work. The political organization, founded in 1911, was the first pan-Indian group of its kind. Early on, many professional Natives hoped the group would reform government policies and improve the health and education of their people, but by 1919 it was at a standstill (Washburn 308). After five years of serving the SAI in various ways, including two years as the organization's secretary/treasurer, 1919 would be her second, and final, year as editor of their magazine, the *American Indian Magazine* (also known as the *Quarterly Journal*). But in that last year Zitkala-Ša wrote numerous editorials dealing with Indians' role in American politics and suggestions for reform. She covered various topics including patriotism, equality in educational opportunities, and the need for Indians to learn and speak English. In a brief 1919 editorial, Zitkala-Ša's passion for freedom is strong and she calls on democratic principles to answer the calls of the oppressed. She shouts for justice and rights for all minorities, including women, and she writes, "Women of the world, mothers of the human race, are pressing forward for recognition" (*Other Writings* 192). Zitkala-Ša is creating a shared experience between Native Americans and women, making the concern

for Native independence a priority for all people who value democratic principles. In her role as editor, she is politically motivated, and she creates a relationship between these two reform-minded groups.

Within the SAI, Zitkala-Ša was one of a few female members who held a leadership role, and she arguably used the power of her position to influence and change the group the most aggressively². As Deborah Welch points out, although women were involved in its creation, including Nora McFarland and Laura Cornelius Kellogg, the SAI drew its membership from educated Natives, and these women were “assimilated into the subordinate gender role assigned by Anglo societal mores” (43). In the SAI, women were forever in the minority; for example, in 1912, there were 219 active members, and only 66 were women (Welch 42). But Zitkala-Ša shows in her efforts that women’s commitment to change stretches from the typewriter to the podium. Again in 1919, at the summer SAI Annual Convention, Zitkala-Ša calls on women, this time Native women, to have an active role in Indian reforms. In this speech, she thanks the members of the organization for “their high regard for an Indian sister,” and asks them to extend that praise to all Native women (*Other Writings* 213). She asks for women’s involvement and stresses to the audience their critical importance in the work that the SAI does:

I hope my brothers that at the next meeting you will invite your sister to come with you because you realize that in the home, in the Indian home, the mother teaches the children these very principles we are talking about—we teach our children as they play about our knees and that is why the Indian woman must

² For example, Welch points out Marie Baldwin, “a trained attorney and suffragist” who “kept her feminist interests apart from the Society, serving only as treasurer and occasionally writing articles for the *Quarterly Journal* emphasizing women’s proper roles as helpmates” (43).

come to these gatherings, she must listen with her mind open and her heart open that she may gather the truths to take home to our little ones—they are our future hope. (*Other Writings* 213)

In another political move, reminiscent of Sarah Orne Jewett's *Congregationalist* editorials, Zitkala-Ša distracts the attention away from her and her untraditional female role as a leader and activist, and refocuses it on the acceptable role of women in the home, caring for and teaching children. In doing so, she concentrates on the goals of the SAI, and the members' willingness to effectively make changes for the future betterment of their people. Later in the speech, Zitkala-Ša discusses the work that must be done in order for Indians to achieve the consciousness that God has granted them. In a statement much like Jewett's in "Every-day Work", she says, "There is no work that is degrading. It is all honorable. [...] It was no disgrace for the mother to prepare the meal. Work is honorable. We must have work and do it each day to the best of our ability" (*Other Writings* 214). Like Jewett, Zitkala-Ša sees the ability to work as a God-given power that must be utilized by both men and women. Women must work with men, side by side, and seek out "truths" with open minds and open hearts. She specifically endorses the role of women in Indian activism and their abilities: "This is the thought that I would give to you to take home not only to my brothers at home, but my sisters. We are rational beings. Let us develop our powers by thinking and acting for ourselves. That is the way we grow" (*Other Writings* 216). Here, she is arguing that both Indians and women are "rational beings," able to think for themselves. Zitkala-Ša sees women as an essential part of her work and she admits that without them, her goals and the goals of the Society

cannot be accomplished. In discussing her ideas for change, she again encourages women to participate:

Then you know we must have a voice. He must say what is in him and by exchanging opinions, we are going to grow. I believe in that and that is why I am working with my brothers and I hope as time goes on, my sisters, Indians, will come to do their part in their own homes. Then they will help up carry on this work as it must be done so that we may succeed. (*Other Writings* 217)

In what would be her last address to the SAI as an officer, Zitkala-Ša stresses the importance of women; for her, success depends on their involvement.

In 1920, the SAI had only fallen into more disarray and in hopes of acquiring new readership, “the SAI decided to make its journal ‘quiet in tone’ [...] by publishing romantic accounts of American Indians and articles on ‘popular ethnology.’ The articles were no longer written exclusively by Indians, nor were they primarily directed at the plight of the Indians to achieve equality in white man’s America³” (Johnson 30). Zitkala-Ša herself realized that the magazine was not popular reading; in May, 1919, she wrote to Arthur Caswell Parker, a prominent member and former president of the SAI, “The spring magazine is an exceedingly interesting one to me; but do not expect that all the readers, particularly the pro-bureau people will find it so readable.” The magazine’s strong political voice turned off readers, and at this point, SAI executives were eager to boost their membership and hoped the magazine’s new direction would do so. Zitkala-Ša disagreed with the goals of the new format and resigned as editor; within the year the

³ This decision was probably made by the magazine’s advisory board, which included the editor and other members of the SAI. The organization also had an executive advisory board. Interestingly, one member of the 1918-1919 magazine board was Carlos Montezuma.

magazine was no longer published. After the election of a pro-peyote SAI president, Zitkala-Ša ended all of her SAI commitments. She moved on from the *American Indian Magazine* and found another outlet for her writing first through the Indian Rights Association and then the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC). The Indian Rights Association was founded in 1882 and the group's goal was to bring about the citizenship of the American Indian. Zitkala-Ša articulates this argument in her essay "Americanize the First American." We can assume it was published by the Indians Rights Association in 1921, circulated as a pamphlet, and in her writing Zitkala-Ša makes rhetorical choices that demonstrate her new audience: American women.⁴ "Americanize the First American" calls for the country to acknowledge the American Indian and make reforms to provide the same freedoms to Natives as to every American citizen. Zitkala-Ša begins by recalling the tragic conditions of the Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where, during a blizzard, two government physicians attempted to travel the 3000 square miles to aide the people and stop the influenza epidemic that was killing them. She writes:

It is a tragedy to the American Indian and the fair name of America that the good intentions of a benevolent Government are turned into channels of inefficiency and criminal neglect. Nevertheless, the American Indian is our fellow-man. The time is here when for our own soul's good we must acknowledge him. In defense of democracy his utter self-sacrifice was unequaled by any other class of Americans. What now does democracy mean to him and his children? (*Other Writings* 243)

⁴ Dominquez states that it is "an undated pamphlet" (xxv), Davidson also calls it a pamphlet, and describes the cover sheet, dating it 1921 (267), and Johnson deems it an article, but does not assign it a date (33).

In WWI, about 12,000 American Indians served for a country that considered them “government wards,” including Zitkala-Ša’s husband, and she reminds her audience of that sacrifice as she proclaims that American democracy and the government that upholds it are failing these people (Encyclopedia “Indians”). Zitkala-Ša is appealing to women, who just received the right to vote themselves, to recognize the need of others. She implores their sympathy by focusing on the Indian children left orphan by the flu and reflecting on the strong family values of Native Americans. “Indians love their children dearly. Never in all history was there an Indian mother who left her darling in a basket upon a doorstep. [...] Appreciation of the spiritual reality of the child place the Indian abreast with the most advanced thought of the age” (*Other Writings* 243). For her female audience, Zitkala-Ša emphasizes children and the traditional, admirable standards of the Native American mother. Her rhetoric convinces the reader that the old vision of the Indian savage inaccurately portrays the people that live repressed by the country they love. She ends with an impassioned appeal and clarifies what needs to be done to remedy the terrible situation of Native Americans:

Womanhood of America, to you I appeal in behalf of the Red Man and his children. Heed the lonely mariner’s signal of distress. Give him those educational advantages pressed with so much enthusiasm upon the foreigner. Revoke the tyrannical powers of Government superintendents over a voiceless people and extend American opportunities to the first American—the Red Man. (*Other Writings* 244)

While it is unknown exactly how the pamphlet was distributed, the cover sheet did include a picture of Zitkala-Ša framed by small American flags (Davidson 267). Her message is clear: Indians are Americans too. Zitkala-Ša knew the power of a picture and played with images throughout her career, to manipulate and influence her audience.

This image is one of patriotism and American values, the same morals that Zitkala-Ša is calling on the readers to engage “for our own soul’s good.”

In another essay, “Bureaucracy Versus Democracy,” also published by the Indian Rights Association in 1921, Zitkala-Ša again calls for the end of government organizations that prevent freedom, specifically the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Once more, her rhetoric establishes a community between women and Indians; she asks Americans to deliver the freedoms women have also been fighting for. “Give them freedom to do their own thinking; to exercise their judgment; to hold open forums for the expression of their thought, and finally permit them to manage their own personal business” (*Other Writings* 246). These freedoms reflect the same independence women had been fighting for and, with the adoption of the 19th amendment, had recently achieved some success in.

It makes sense that Zitkala-Ša would circulate these pieces as pamphlets. This format would reach the most readers, mostly women who were passionate to use their new political power to make changes. Her pamphlets worked and got the attention of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, a volunteer service organization concerned with improving communities and the nation. The GFWC, still active today, is made up of state and community women’s clubs and by 1920, the GFWC had well over one million members and affiliated clubs in every state and on the local level (Encyclopedia “General”). Nationally, they organized working committees to tackle what they saw as the most pressing social issues. David L. Johnson and Raymond Wilson write that it was with the GFWC that Zitkala-Ša accomplished some of her most effective work. “She

utilized the organization as an outlet for many of her writings concerning Indian reform. The major issue that [Zitkala-Ša] addressed was the conflicting definitions of self-determination for American Indians” (Johnson 33).

Zitkala-Ša’s writing not only affected the GFWC, but resulted in positive changes for her people. “Americanize the First American” and “Bureaucracy Versus Democracy” made GFWC members aware of the Native cause. As William Willard states, “Her descriptions of the reality of the corruption and brutality of the Bureau of Indian Affairs system kept their attention and moved them to political action” (13). Members responded to her recommendations and in 1921 the GFWC created the Indian Welfare Committee. Because of Zitkala-Ša’s passionate writing and lobbying for reforms, the GFWC created this national committee which was responsible for collecting field research and publishing information “in order to expose injustice and inequality in the Indian assimilation process” (Johnson 34). Immediately, the committee and its chair, Stella Atwood, appointed Zitkala-Ša as the committee’s research agent. She attended the GFWC national convention in Salt Lake City in June 1921 as a guest of Atwood, and was a featured speaker. “When introducing her friend [...] Atwood reminded the clubwomen, ‘now that our boys are home from the war and we have won the vote, let us turn our attention to the American Indian’” (Dominguez xxi). The GFWC women were ready for their next challenge, and Zitkala-Ša made sure they knew the best way to tackle it. Out of this speech grew the essay “America’s Indian Problem,” which was published in the December 1921 issue of *Edict Magazine*, the monthly publication of the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs. Zitkala-Ša utilized the magazine to educate the members

of the GFWC on the need for the newly created national committee and the necessity of their support. In “America’s Indian Problem,” Zitkala-Ša uses the familiar themes of patriotism, civic duty, and humanitarian concerns to convince her audience and further her cause. She writes, “Now the time is at hand when the American Indian shall have his day in court through the help of the women of America. The stain upon America’s fair name is to be removed, and the remnant of the Indian nation, suffering from malnutrition, is to number among the invited guests at your dinner tables” (*AIS* 186). Women understood Zitkala-Ša’s rhetoric, recalling images of domestic life. She is also distinguishing between classes; most American suffragists were upper-class white women, whose dinner tables contrasted greatly with the poor majority of Native Americans. Metaphorically, now women had the right to vote, and been “invited to the table” of policy making, and Zitkala-Ša writes that it is their duty, their responsibility, to work to give the Indian the same rights. She includes herself with the reader as she appeals to their moral obligations: “We serve both our government and a voiceless people within our midst” (*AIS* 186). Zitkala-Ša writes that “wardship is no substitute for American citizenship” (*AIS* 187), and quotes from a 1915 report on the BIA by the Bureau of Municipal Research, showing that it is because of the BIA’s red tape that the Native American is suffering.

Alongside the story ran a full-length photograph of Zitkala-Ša “in traditional Indian dress and long braids” (Dominguez xxi). Zitkala-Ša often wore Indian clothing when addressing social service groups, using it as another way to convince her audience that the Native American Indian was real and she represented their interests. In 1917, she

explains in a letter that using the “calling card” of Indian dress can be “for a good cause;” “No doubt, there may be some, who may not wholly approve of the Indian dress. [...] Even a clown has to dress differently from his usual citizen’s suit” (Davidson xxiii). For her, dressing the part was part of her job. In order to satisfy audiences, she used her image and the recognizable images of American tribes to further her cause. Zitkala-Ša had used her appearance in the past and would continue to use it for her own subversive ends. While critics often disapproved of her dress, which included styles from all American tribes, Zitkala-Ša realized that all reformers were subject to scrutiny, and defended herself by “[noting] that to be a real Indian is to work for one’s tribe” and she defined her work in terms of her writing, public speaking, and lobbying for land and financial rights of Indians (Carpenter 151). She spent little time worrying about what her critics thought and instead focused on persuading her audiences.

It was later in 1921, after the first publishing of “America’s Indian Problem,” that Zitkala-Ša’s earlier serialized work and some of her more recent writing was collected in *American Indian Stories*, published by Hayworth Publishing House. Zitkala-Ša saw this publication as part of her “work for ‘the Indian cause’” (Davidson xxvii) and was well aware of its significance; even the cover of the book was place for a political statement:

In personal letters from the time, she calls her new book the ‘blanket book’ (the cover image was an image of a Navajo blanket). [...] [The blanket] stand[s] in stark contrast to the assimilative efforts of Indian boarding schools’ regulations [...] students who rejected their boarding school education and returned to their reservation were said to be going “back to the blanket.” (Davidson xxvii)

“The blanket book” included her collection of writings from 1900-1902, autobiographical sketches published by the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s* and fictional short stories, as

well as the more recently written dream story, “A Dream of Her Grandfather” and the allegory “The Widespread Enigma of Blue-Star Woman,” in addition to “American’s Indian Problem.” In the 21 years between the oldest and most recent texts of *American Indian Stories*, a lot had changed for Zitkala-Ša. In order to fully appreciate the complexity of Zitkala-Ša’s activism and writing, it is important to study these years of her life. Although she took a break from publishing, she had grown up and her experiences had changed some of her previous positions.

In 1902, she married Raymond Bonnin, also a Yankton Sioux, after ending a year-long engagement to Carlos Montezuma, a Mohave-Apache, who, as a doctor, was described as “a living example of the successful assimilated American Indian” (Spack 177). Montezuma later became one of the founding members of the SAI and a recognized voice for Indian reforms. While the exact circumstances of their meeting are disputed, they surely knew of each other through Carlisle’s school paper, *The Indian Helper*. Montezuma was a subscriber and Zitkala-Ša was regularly featured for her accomplishments in oration and music⁵. Their engagement is chronicled in their letters between 1901 and 1902, and in the letters, a young Zitkala-Ša reveals her opinions on assimilation and education. Throughout the letters, she debates with Montezuma over the role of education in “civilizing” the Indian. Montezuma was a fierce supporter of off-reservation education and remained close with Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Like many Indians who had achieved success after

⁵ Spack writes that Zitkala-Ša and Montezuma first met on the Carlisle Indian School Band tour in 1900, when Zitkala-Ša was performing and Montezuma was a chaperone (178). Enoch believes that they met while Montezuma was a physician at Carlisle (119). Johnson and Wilson write that the two met while Zitkala-Ša was teaching at Carlisle (29).

boarding school education, Montezuma remained convinced that reservations only furthered Native problems, preventing learning and furthering dependency on the government (Spack 178). Pratt was a strong influence on Montezuma. For example, in 1915, Montezuma, encouraged by Pratt, created tension and strain within the Society of American Indians by advocating the immediate abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and promoting Indian assimilation (Washburn 307). It was Pratt who created the model for off-reservation education for Indians. He believed in the destruction of the reservations and the exposure of Indians to American institutions, going so far as to “propose that the government take all the Indians in the United States and distribute an equal number to each county” (Ostler 150). His motto was “Kill the Indian... save the man.” Zitkala-Ša worked at Carlisle from 1897-1899, and grew to hate Pratt and his assimilating education. In a 1901 letter to Montezuma, she had called him “woefully small and bigoted” (Spack 187). Her experiences as a student at an Indian boarding school and her years teaching at Carlisle became the theme for her early writing, including “The School Days of an Indian Girl” and “An Indian Teacher Among Indians.” Zitkala-Ša first attended the Josiah White Institute in Indiana when she was eight years old. Her mother had opposed her daughter leaving; boarding school had already caused her son to leave and she did not want the same for her daughter. But with promises of apple trees, Zitkala-Ša begged her mother to go. Like many Sioux, Zitkala-Ša was convinced to leave her home by lies from school recruiters. Jeffrey Ostler writes that when Pratt first developed his idea for an Indian school in September 1879, he visited the Rosebud Agency to recruit Sioux children. “After Pratt explained his purpose, Spotted

Tail replied in words something like these: *Wasicum kin oyasin wamawicanons'a na iwicatonpisi*" which translates to "The white people are all thieves and liars" (149). Although the Sioux did not want their children to grow into thieves and liars, they did want their children to be successful and be able to live and thrive in a world with whites. Pratt told them that the education he was offering would allow Indians to translate for elders and earn higher wages. Sioux parents even thought that Pratt's education would help them recover stolen land. Like Zitkala-Ša, parents did not have an understanding of boarding school theories of social evolution and "their implications for cultural destruction" (Ostler 151). Zitkala-Ša would learn these theories the hard way, but her experiences would translate into her life and work.

In her correspondence with Montezuma, Zitkala-Ša repeatedly stood up for Native lifestyles, claiming Natives must "claim our full heritage" (Spack 195-6). She wrote that schools like Carlisle should not take credit for educating Native Americans. "Education could not make you the man you are today. It was not that you were Indian—nor that civilization was an irresistible power—but because in an unusual measure the Spirit of a Universal God was + is in you!" (Spack 196). In her 1901 story, "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," Zitkala-Ša questions the benefits of white education. Indeed the story focuses on a young Native man, who returns to his father's tribe from boarding school to preach Christianity in opposition to his Native religion and other cultural aspects such as hunting. In a decision that would come to haunt him, the young man ignores his sick father's wishes and sends the medicine man away. The medicine man convinces the rest of the tribe to abandon the man and his family, calling him a soft-hearted traitor who

cannot provide for himself or his family. On the verge of starvation, the young man kills a white man's cow in order to give his father meat. Running back to the tepee, he is followed. Suddenly, "A deafening whir filled my head. The moon and stars began to move. Now the white prairie was sky, and the stars lay under my feet. Now again they were turning. At last the starry blue rose up into place. The noise in my ears was still" (AIS 122). He sees in the snow below him the body of the white man, and blood on his knife. The story ends with the young man about to be hung for the murder. The story emphasizes the hypocrisy of Christianity and the detrimental effect Christian education can have on Native youth. "Capital punishment is somehow exempt from Christian indictment of killing living creatures" (Davidson xxxiv). The story received harsh criticism from the Carlisle school and Pratt, who deemed the story "morally bad" (Dominguez xv). "Pratt had pronounced the story 'trash' and Zitkala-Ša 'worse than a Pagan'" (Spack 187). In a letter to Montezuma, Zitkala-Ša calls the review "laughable" (Spack 188), and it did little but fuel Zitkala-Ša's passion for exposing the truths of Indian boarding schools. Understanding the potential rift this exchange could cause, she warns Montezuma not to "stand too much for me," assuring him that he would not be asked to choose between Pratt and his fiancée (Spack 187). Zitkala-Ša remained confident in her writing and subject matter; she was fiercely sure of herself and would not let any critic stand in her way.

Later in life, Zitkala-Ša would take a different approach to education. In her *American Indian Magazine* editorials and her work with the SAI, the white model of education was always the standard. In a 1919 editorial, "Letter to the Chiefs and

Headmen of the Tribes,” she encourages all Indians to learn English. She writes that learning English is key in their fight for citizenship; “Very often I have wished that you could write to me in a language we both would understand perfectly” (*Other Writings* 199). Even as a mother, Zitkala-Ša sent her own son to Catholic boarding school. As Cari Carpenter points out, Zitkala-Ša’s advocating for off-reservation education “demonstrates a changing sense of where she could be most productive” (146). Zitkala-Ša’s perspective was changing. She made tactical decisions about what would work best, negotiating between her people and the US policy makers that would choose their destinies. During this time, she also faced choices in her personal life, ones that would shape her activism. The engagement between Montezuma and Zitkala-Ša finally ended because Montezuma wanted her to move to Boston, while she wanted him to take a government position in the west. “She fear[ed] that his vision of her role [was] analogous to a desire for “a fine horse to draw your wagon!”” (Spack 181) and that fear lead her to rededicate herself to helping her people. She moved to North Dakota, where she worked as an issue clerk. There, she met Bonnin. Later that year, the two transferred to Uintah and Ouray Reservation in Utah and stayed there for 14 years. Soon after the move, Zitkala-Ša gave birth to her only child, a son. While in Utah, Zitkala-Ša worked hard to improve the lives of the people living on the reservation. “In Utah, Zitkala-Ša taught school and developed a community center [...] She started a sewing club, began a hot lunch program, and opened a free arts and crafts space for children” (Davidson xx). Although her focus was on reservation life, she continued writing, collaborating on an opera, *The Sun Dance*.

In 1916 Zitkala-Ša was elected secretary of the SAI. Her appointment, along with her husband's enlistment in the US Army, moved the family to Washington, D.C. While living in Utah, Zitkala-Ša had become a harsh opponent of the peyote, a cactus used in Native American ceremonies that causes hallucinations when ingested. Being in the country's capital gave Zitkala-Ša the ability to lobby against peyote. "She witnessed the beginning and subsequent spread of peyote use among the Utes. She determined that peyote was responsible for the decline in mental and physical health of Indian users" (Johnson 31). Her experience made her a strong advocate for laws outlawing peyote, so much so, she joined forces with her former adversary Pratt, whom she had previously written that she would have "no dealings with" (Spack 187). Zitkala-Ša joined Pratt and other Indian reform groups in this effort, and "argued that peyote caused physical harm to the user, demoralized him, and that peyote religious 'rites' were in truth 'orgies'" (Johnson 31). This fight illustrates another strategic choice Zitkala-Ša made, prioritizing education and self-determination over the drug's role in religious ceremonies. In February 1918, the House Sub-Committee of the Committee of Indian Affairs considered "House Resolution 2614," which moved to include peyote with the liquor laws on reservations. The committee heard testimony from witnesses both for and against the use of peyote. Zitkala-Ša gave her testimony, but was subjected to the ridicule of James Mooney, a white liberal ethnologist (Davidson xxii). As a part of his testimony, Mooney called Zitkala-Ša a fraud and a half-breed. "In an attempt to discredit her politics about peyote regulation, he employed an old trick typically used against women: he overemphasized her physical appearance and thus drew attention away from the

seriousness of her interest in the political issues at hand” (Davidson xxiii). He mocked her Indian dress and critiqued her “for wearing clothes that were from non-Sioux tribes” (Carpenter 150). However, Mooney’s attempts were overlooked and the sub-committee quickly passed the resolution, but the bill never made it into law.

Life in Utah and working for peyote reforms in Washington, D.C. strengthened Zitkala-Ša’s resolve to help Indians. When *American Indian Stories* was released in 1921, Zitkala-Ša made sure it had the impact she wanted, even if it meant altering her original writing. In 1902, Zitkala-Ša published, “Why I am a Pagan,” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The essay tells the story of a first-person narrator, perhaps Zitkala-Ša herself, and the confrontation between her and a converted Native minister. The narrator spends the morning in nature, appreciating the beauty of the earth and her place in it. She recalls the flowers, birds, and rocks, and reflects on how they “soothe my soul” (802). She writes, “Beautiful is the spiritual essence they embody” (802). After the minister warns her of “the deep pit below” and the “torturing flames” that will consume her unless she goes to church, the essay finishes, “A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan” (803). The last sentence and the title make a strong, direct statement about the differences and tensions between Native and Euro-American religions. In the 1921 publication, Zitkala-Ša not only renamed the essay “The Great Spirit,” but deleted the last sentence from the original and added, “Here, in a fleeting quiet, I am awakened by the fluttering robe of the Great

Spirit. To my innermost consciousness the phenomenal universe is a royal mantle, vibrating with His divine breath. Caught in its flowing fringes are the spangles and oscillating brilliants of sun, moon, and stars” (*AIS* 107). The straightforward announcement of paganism is removed, and in its place is a more acceptable image of the Christian god, male, royal, and dressed in a robe. Also embedded in this ending is the image of the star spangled American flag. Zitkala-Ša changes her frank challenge to Christianity to a more conventional, and perhaps tolerable, Christian abstraction. Whether these changes occurred due to Zitkala-Ša’s own change in faith or to soothe and win over readers, she made the deliberate revision and it changed the tone and purpose of the essay both considerably.

Also added to her previous work is “A Dream of Her Grandfather.” This story centers on a woman and her grandfather. Zitkala-Ša recalls the first Yankton delegation to travel to Washington, D.C., and the grandfather, a medicine man, was among those who made the trip “in behalf of peace among men” (*AIS* 155). After his death, his granddaughter follows her grandfather’s lead and as an adult, works in Washington, D.C., helping the welfare of her people. One night, she has a dream that she receives a large cedar chest from her grandfather. Expecting beads or medicine bags, the granddaughter opens the chest to find none. Instead, the chest contains a vision. The granddaughter sees a camp of teepees and Indian men, women, and children listening to a town crier. “At this point she, too, heard the full melodious voice. She heard distinctively the Dakota words he proclaimed to the people. ‘Be glad! Rejoice! Look up, and see the new day dawning! Help is near! Hear me, every one’” (*AIS* 158). Susan Rose Dominguez writes

that this story was probably written after Zitkala-Ša resigned from the *American Indian Magazine*, and if it is so, the story instills hope not only in the reader, but for the author. After the dissolution of the SAI and their magazine, it seems appropriate that Zitkala-Ša needed a new sense of hope for her life's work. "The cedar chest vision dispels previous notions that Zitkala-Ša lived in despair. This dream-story reaffirms that her 'stay' in Washington is for a worthy purpose" (Dominguez xvii). This new hope was not in vain, because with the GFWC, Zitkala-Ša would see progress towards her goals and encourage American women across the country to support the Indian cause.

"The Widespread Enigma of Blue Star Woman" tells the story of a weathered Indian woman, who, like many Native Americans in the beginning of the century, is haunted by the question, "Who am I?" (*AI* 159). The story, based on "a 1920 land claim by Ellen Bluestone, a mixed-blood Yankton who grew up on the Standing Rock Reservation" (Dominguez xviii) reveals the traps of the Dawes Act. The Dawes Act, or the General Allotment Act of 1887, authorized the President to divide tribal land for individual allotments. The Act presumed that the tribal system was detrimental to the success of Indians in American society—with it, they would never become self-sufficient. Blue-Star Woman has not claimed her lot of land because due to a lack of written record and Blue-Star's practice of the tribal teachings not to speak the names of the dead, she is denied her property. In order to get it, she accepts the offer of two young assimilated Indians, who call themselves her "nephews," who will see that her name gets put on the tribal rolls for half of her allotment. "Did she guess the truth, she would have known they were simply deluded mortals, deceiving others and themselves most of all"

(*AIS* 165). In describing Blue-Star Woman and her troubles, Zitkala-Ša is highlighting the corruption and greed the BIA and the Dawes Act bring to the Indians. The second half of the story focuses on Chief High Flier, “one of the bad Indians” who sings war songs and opposes the government (*AIS* 177). He is arrested, and in an ironic turn, must sign over half of his land to the same “nephews” in order to get out on bail. However, before he is released, he has a vision of the Statue of Liberty coming to life. “Very majestically she turned around, and, lo, she smiled upon this great galaxy of American women. [...] Her light of liberty penetrated Indian reservations. A loud shout of joy rose up from the Indians of the earth, everywhere!” (*AIS* 179-180). Again, Zitkala-Ša reveals her hope for change, and again, she shows her dependence on the support of American women. A woman illuminates the reservations and women are thanked with a smile for their service.

Zitkala-Ša’s goal of Indian citizenship was realized in 1924 with the Indian Citizenship Act. In 1926, Zitkala-Ša and her husband formed the National Council of American Indians. The Council’s goal was to help induce Indians to participate in politics and it attempted to serve as a national intertribal council, although its success was limited. By looking at Zitkala-Ša’s work between 1919 and 1921, her political enthusiasm and drive is fully realized. No matter was too small for her if it meant reaching a potential supporter or helping a fellow Indian. “Her challenge was not to maintain her connection to an American Indian identity but rather to fine-tune the public persona that was most amenable to her activist work. [...] [Zitkala-Ša is] a figure who

actively manipulated available (and sometimes conflicting) genres and identities in order to improve conditions for American Indians” (Carpenter 140).

In 1915, soon after she applied for membership, SAI Secretary/Treasurer Arthur Parker wrote Zitkala-Ša, “You can see that the power of the Society lies not so much in the actual things that it is able to do of itself but the justice or better things it is able to compel the delegated authorities to do.” These words carry more meaning after looking at Zitkala-Ša’s life and work during these years. Zitkala-Ša used her talents to influence others. She participated and impacted Native American policy; her life is an example of ideals and realities, and her work shows us the choices she made in service to her people.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Sarah Orne Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived in a time where they had to confront harsh realities and envision new ideals. They each faced professional and personal turning points, places where choices had to be made, and these choices affected the rest of their work. Jewett chose to publish in *The Congregationalist*, and chose to respond to the intolerances of science and religion; Zitkala-Ša chose her political battles, peyote, education, and citizenship, and faced critics over her positions, and Gilman made difficult decisions in her personal life which influenced her study and writing. These turning points illustrate how each author asserted herself in a different way, controlling her role as much as she could.

With the control they exerted on their own writing and publications, these women negotiated between their personal beliefs and principles. These negotiations are fascinating because they came at an important time in our country's history, but they illustrate the compromises that all writers make. Every word is a choice, a choice made in part from a cultural perspective. These written choices reveal the range of approaches writers take and give readers significant insights into histories, personal, political, and literary.

While enlightening the work of three women, this study also illuminates the shortcomings of our understanding of authors, their work, and the cultural ideologies that help create them. Literary history has not forgotten these writers, but we have ignored

entire genres of their work and the range of mediums they used to communicate their beliefs. Instead of using a range of texts to understand these authors, literary studies attempt to use only a fraction of these women's work to view them. This leads to limited analysis and stunted conclusions. We have only been able to see the negotiations and depth of these author's works by studying multiple genres in a condensed time period. As so often realized, things are rarely black and white. Different conclusions can be made about Jewett's politics by studying her next to Gilman; Gilman's prejudices make Zitkala-Ša's arguments even more poignant. Critics can expand their understanding by studying multiples together: multiple authors, multiple genres, and multiple texts.

These women navigated their lives and work during a time where many attempted to limit the choices of their sex. Even when offered in the smallest amounts, it is obvious that Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Gilman used their writing to communicate their desire for change. Each carefully considered the role of their writing and used it to varying degrees to influence their readers. Perhaps what is most revealing are the conscious choices these women had to make about *roles*: gender roles, the roles of writers, and the role of their work within the world they lived in. Although once published, an author has only marginal control over their writing, these women used all the power at hand to shape how readers would interpret their work, and subsequently, themselves as women.

What is obvious is that each of these women believed in society's capacity for change as its individuals change. Sarah Orne Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote hoping to change one reader at a time, knowing that it would be through individuals that reforms would occur. In their work, they struggled against cultural

definitions and offered alterations to definitions that restricted women. Current critics and readers should not ignore the understudied writings of these authors because it is clear that a writer's goals, interests, and influence cannot be found in only one piece of their work. Instead, a range of their writing should be studied. While American women were rethinking their roles, Jewett, Zitkala-Ša, and Gilman were also revising their ideas and work, all of which were undergoing change as society evolved. Modern readers and critics should focus on these changes, on a writers' evolving understanding of their roles, because it is in the transformation, in the choices, that writers can fully be valued. Although these grey areas present complexities about writers and their views of society, it is in the grey of our understandings that *we* are capable of the most change.