



“STRANGELY TANGLED THREADS”:  
AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS NEGOTIATING NATURALISM, 1850-1900

by

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*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.*

Mark 10:27 (NIV).

Dedicated to my grandparents  
in honor of  
Grace Adcock (on her 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday)  
and in memory of  
Woodrow Adcock and Frank and Mildred Smith  
for the hereditary and spiritual legacy  
that determines my character in the best possible ways

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## Introduction

The exploration of the interrelationship between literature and rhetoric exposes ways writers use narrative to argue social, scientific, political, and religious theories. The seven American women writers in this study attract attention because their rhetorical treatment of debates about determinism (the causality of human actions) is a significant aspect of their social reform agendas and emerges as compelling patterns of discourse among competing voices within the texts. Since determinism is a key tenet of naturalism, I argue these authors should be considered as precursors to, or participants in, the genre of American literary naturalism.<sup>1</sup> Literary naturalism is unique in its focus on deterministic themes and is different from other genres (like tragedy) that use the fate motif because the authors negotiate contemporaneous social and scientific theories. However, because the characteristics of American literary naturalism are widely debated, additional discussions of what may represent literary naturalism should be considered. Past discussions of literary naturalism focus on the importance of heredity and environment on characterization, but the texts in this study are unique in the fact that the mere existence of characters' and narrators' theories

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<sup>1</sup> Studies about American literary naturalism examine hereditary, economic, social, and environmental determinism. See Pizer, Papke, Bloom, Mitchell, Becker, Campbell, Howard, and Walcutt.

about determinism (specifically references to scientific, social, environmental and economic determinism) stands out as a distinctive form of feminist negotiation of male-dominated discourses. Of the most widely-read studies of American literary naturalism, none addresses the authors' participation in a rhetorical movement, and only Christophe Den Tandt addresses rhetorical strategies, although not specifically those of women writers.<sup>2</sup>

Since I am expanding the canon to include assessing rhetorical strategies authors use to assert arguments about naturalism, I broaden the definition of literary naturalism to include more women writers whose texts are not controlled by plots of decline,<sup>3</sup> but who choose to participate in social, scientific, and religious debates about determinism. In *Literary Feminisms*, Ruth Robbins argues that we need to "re-think the term 'literature' to make it more inclusive and for readers to be more reflective about what is in or out of the category, and why" (9). In this case, I examine what is "in or out" of American literary naturalism and how and why women writers enter the rhetorical debates of the times. In *Margret Howth*, Rebecca Harding Davis's narrator claims: "I write from the border of the battlefield, and I find in it no theme for shallow argument or flimsy rhymes" (3). Even though many women writers assume their work may be

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<sup>2</sup> In *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*, Christophe Den Tandt explores the "rhetoric of sublimity" in works of Howells, Dreiser, Norris, and London.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to a variety of texts associated with American literary naturalism, William Modellmog, in *Reconstituting Authority*, says, "The two works [*Financier* and *Titan*] thus reflect what Philip Fisher calls 'the Naturalist plot of decline' - the rise and inevitable fall that characters such as Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* and Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*

marginalized, they choose to participate in the scientific, social, and religious discourses of the times and argue theories that will lead readers to evaluate and synthesize these ideas according to cultural constructs and identify with a particular character's rhetoric and behavior.

Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, Rebecca Harding Davis, Ellen Glasgow, Pauline Hopkins, Helen Hunt Jackson, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton use literary narratives to present arguments in reaction to contemporaneous public discourse about various kinds of determinism. Although these women writers refute or mediate pure theories of determinism, they are not anti-naturalistic. They argue for the removal of race and gender from prejudicial views of hereditary determinism and hypothesize hybrid theories about human nature which do not deny the possibility of the hand of God or man's moral will in addition to other forces beyond one's control. Since rhetoric is the art of persuasion, these authors use their art to persuade readers to change their attitudes or beliefs toward those marginalized by race-, gender-, or class-based social and scientific views of determinism.

"Determinism" is a multi-faceted term. Studies in American literary naturalism include references to hereditary (genetic, biological), social, economic, environmental (climatic, geographical), psychological, and theological determinism. These terms often have positive or negative connotations; most

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experience" (201). Some but not all of the texts in this study follow plots of decline in addition to theorizing about naturalism through the narrators and characters, including Glasgow's Michael Akershem and Davis' Hugh Wolfe.

would consider the term “determinism” itself negative.<sup>4</sup> Through the arguments in their texts, the authors in this study ask: are lives determined by heredity, social institutions, economic policies, God, chance, or choice? The questions evoked by the rhetoric in the texts capture the imagination and lead to more questions: Were women writers negotiating naturalism differently than the male writers of the period? Why are male writers like Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser the focal point of most American literary naturalism studies, to the general exclusion of others? Why do the authors’ texts in this study stand out from other women writers of the period? Why was I noticing references to determinism that presaged the work of the canonical writers long before naturalism was considered a genre? The answers to these questions presented in the following chapters highlight these writers as theorists who negotiate social and scientific discourse about the struggle to survive. This study broadens the definition and field of American literary naturalism studies by focusing less on plot and theme and more on rhetorical patterns and motives.

The most recent and comprehensive collection of critical essays on literary naturalism appears in Mary Papke’s *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism* (2003).<sup>5</sup> In the “Preface,” Papke writes,

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<sup>4</sup> See Walcutt’s “divided stream” of naturalism and references to Becker’s “pessimistic, material determinism.”

<sup>5</sup> Harold Bloom’s *American Naturalism* (2004) is another collection of essays about American literary naturalism and contains essays written between 1949 and 1997. Again, these essays about literary naturalism focus on characterization and plot instead of the rhetorical representations of determinism in fiction.

American literary naturalism, as the contributors to this volume illustrate, is a post-Enlightenment philosophical and aesthetic movement, the foundations of which are based on the materialist, scientific determinism reflected most spectacularly in the social science theories of Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine." (viii)

Papke goes on to list additional theorists on which the foundations rest: Darwin, Spencer, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Zola. Although the writers in this dissertation specifically address several of these theorists, the key difference between my research project and the essays in Papke's collection is the focus on the negotiation of deterministic theories as a rhetorical movement, in addition to a philosophical or aesthetic movement. Instead of concentrating on naturalistic themes developed through characterization or plot, my findings are based on tools and goals of persuasion, which highlight particular rhetorical moments and speakers' motives. According to Papke, "Naturalist works are profoundly concerned with the powerful influence of heredity and environment upon character, the role of chance and free will in the struggle for survival in an increasingly industrialized, urbanized capitalist state" (viii), but in the last twenty years, the studies have moved beyond Zola's idea of a literary experiment, a specific time period (1870-1900), and a limited list of authors.

Moving beyond American shores, comparing these authors to their French and British counterparts is appealing but beyond the scope of this study; however, I note specific moments when those comparisons are useful in certain

chapters of this dissertation. Although comparing American writers to Émile Zola is important,<sup>6</sup> I propose an alternative to examining common themes or approaches to narrative<sup>7</sup> (which files texts under the heading of literary naturalism) to examining rhetorical approaches to philosophies about determinism. The authors included in this dissertation do not participate in Zola's construction of the experimental novel and scientific character, but contest the public discourse about naturalism that seeks to deny rights to some based on gender, race, or economic situation.

As I examine Wilson's, Jacobs', Jackson's, Hopkins', Davis', Glasgow's, and Ruiz de Burton's rhetorical choices for their characters and narrators, their negotiations of naturalistic theories stand out from other texts by women writers of the times for their realistic portrayal of brutal human conditions. Their desire to faithfully render the effects of hereditary, social, economic, and environmental influences on human behavior and to debate battles between theories of nature versus nurture, society versus environment, science versus religion, and "one blood" versus "mixed blood," situates their texts in explorations of literary naturalism. Most debates about American literary naturalism challenge models of conventions with the dual purpose of 1) labeling novels as naturalistic and 2)

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<sup>6</sup> Zola is considered by many as the "father of modern naturalism" (Farrell 251), although some place the title, "father of naturalism," on Voltaire; in one example, referring to the time "1877 onward," Ernest Alfred Vizetelly writes, "Wherever one went in Paris one heard allusion to or discussion of Zola, 'L'Assommoir,' and 'naturalism'" (159).

<sup>7</sup> In "Some Observations on Naturalism, So Called, in Fiction," James T. Farrell writes, "Affirming these views [about determinism], Zola looked forward to the day when the experimental novelist, the naturalist, would bring forth decisive results of a scientific character" and that "the experimental novelist would thus act as a scientist . . ." (252).

examining authors' portrayal of deterministic themes through plots of decline; the result is a genre dominated by male authors and masculine aesthetics.<sup>8</sup>

Although women writers such as Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin have not been overlooked in these studies,<sup>9</sup> few women are acknowledged as writers of naturalistic novels.<sup>10</sup> Even less acknowledgment is given to the ways in which women writers theorize or negotiate theories about naturalism; that such theories appeared in novels instead of essays should not lessen the impact of their contributions.

Many American women writers of the second half of the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century explore issues connected to naturalists' teachings and make significant contributions to ongoing debates about naturalism, not to theorize or characterize a literary movement, but to participate in public discourse of the times.<sup>11</sup> Debates among naturalists and theologians,

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8 June Howard, in *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, focuses on genre criticism and claims, "Naturalism is not a fashionable genre; the efflorescence of critical publication by American academics has produced only a relatively small body of work dealing with this group of writers. I suspect that many critics find naturalist novels somehow scandalous" (xi). Even a contemporary reviewer of Ellen Glasgow's *The Descendant* called the work "distinctly, almost audaciously, virile and vigorous," (qtd. in Scura 7), and since it was first published anonymously, many thought the book was written by a man.

9 See John Dudley's "'Beauty Unmans Me': Diminished Manhood and the Leisure Class in Norris and Wharton," Donna Campbell's "The 'Bitter Taste' of Naturalism: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and David Graham Phillips's *Susan Lenox*," Lilian Furst's "'Hunting For the Real': Response to Art in Edith Wharton's *Custom of the Country*," and Barbara Hochman's "*The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*: Plotting Experience and Experiencing Plot." Although many argue Chopin follows a plot of psychological determinism, she does not rhetorically address specific theories or make specific philosophical arguments about naturalism.

10 A few authors include Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and Ellen Glasgow's *The Battle-Ground* and *The Descendant* in studies of American literary naturalism but focus on characterization, imagery, and plot instead of Davis's and Glasgow's use of literature to argue about determinism.

11 See studies by Eze, Zack, and Johada.

traditionalists and reformers, played out in periodical literature and public debates throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Pseudo-scientific theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had placed racial views of hereditary determinism in the minds of the mass public, which led the authors in this study to use their writing to fight prejudicially based reasoning for depriving women, blacks, Indians, and the poor of their social and political rights. The women writers in this study do not seek to create a deterministic world, but to enter social, scientific, and religious debates on the nature of humans and their relationships to forces beyond their control for the purpose of changing readers' perceptions toward gender, race, and class. Donald Pizer, one of the most prolific writers on the subject of American literary naturalism, reinforces my decision to explore texts with plots not tightly controlled by determinism, but whose characters argue theories about determinism, when he says:

Both my efforts to break the hold of the criterion of an absolute determinism in the definition of American naturalism and to claim the persistence of naturalistic strains into twentieth-century American writing have been criticized for resulting in a definition of naturalism so loose and flexible that it is no longer a useful critical and historical construct. This criticism, it seems to me, returns the discussion of naturalism to an earlier phase of critical examination, when works in the movement were examined principally in relation to their adherence to Zolaesque beliefs.

There always has been, and, it appears, there always will be, a desire to attach naturalism to a fully deterministic and thus a pessimistic core of belief. (*Theory and Practice* 9)

As Pizer's statement demonstrates, the tendency to focus on "fully deterministic" plots and themes limits the inclusion of many authors, male and female. In analyzing texts most often associated with American literary naturalism (Frank Norris's *McTeague*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Stephen Crane's *Maggie*)<sup>12</sup>, scholars do not often analyze specific references to naturalistic theories and their rhetorical effects in lieu of studying plots of decline, themes of survival and violence, and characterization based on hereditary and environmental determinism.<sup>13</sup> After spending time studying the canonical writers of American literary naturalism, I found more and more unusual connections to writers not covered in these studies, mainly women writers, but also writers before the usual "beginnings" of the genre (see more on time periods below). Comparing the authors in this study to the male counterparts of American literary naturalism illuminates striking similarities and differences that highlight characters' and narrators' rhetorical techniques and effectiveness.

The authors in this study raise the voices of marginalized (women, poor, ethnic and racial minorities) to participate in a rhetorical movement toward

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12 E. C. Applegate, in *American Naturalistic and Realistic Novelists: A Biographical Dictionary*, lists the studies that focus on these writers as the canon of American literary naturalism including those by Ahnebrink, Becker, Everett Carter, Claridge, Conder, Holman, and Pizer.

13 See Mitchell, Walcutt, Papke, Pizer, Howard, and Bell.

attempting to change people's often misinterpreted scientific and social beliefs. From Harriet Wilson's, Harriet Jacobs', and Pauline Hopkins' characters' African American voices, to Rebecca Harding Davis' Welsh puddler's and female reformer's voices, to Helen Hunt Jackson's and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's characters' Indian- and Mexican-American voices, these representatives contribute to breaking down stereotypes by refuting claims of scientific racism<sup>14</sup> or addressing issues of hereditary, economic, and environmental forces beyond one's control. I enhance the debates about literary naturalism by showing patterns of persuasion by women writers who define naturalism differently and use various techniques, such as sarcasm, public and private debates, and ethical or emotional appeals, to create a sense of unrest and questioning, thereby providing the opportunity to reconstruct the characteristics of a diversified culture.

Most literary studies of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century American women authors contextualize historical, political, and cultural concerns (American frontier, Native American identities, women's experiences, women's regional writing, and cultural studies).<sup>15</sup> These approaches highlight historical treatment of women and racial and ethnic minorities. Even though most scholars locate American literary naturalism between 1870-1910, I extend

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14 In *An African Voice*, Robert W. July claims, "The older versions of scientific racism had been naïve by comparison—studies based on phrenology and cephalic indexes, on linguistic traits or cultural variations, and always concluding with assertions of European superiority that rarely troubled with factual evidence, let alone even-handed analysis" (203).

15 See Campbell, Cutter, Elbert, and Kilcup, among others.

the boundaries to include transition texts with clear rhetorical presentations of naturalistic discourse from pioneers of literary realism and naturalism, such as Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, and Rebecca Harding Davis, to those who carry on the tradition into the twentieth century, such as Hopkins and Glasgow. Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margaret Howth* break ground for women writers wanting to move into a realm of heightened reality and the study of outcasts, degradation, and determinism. Many authors of fiction during this period, 1850-1900, respond to scientific, social, and literary theories of Darwin, Spencer, and Comte. In *Margret Howth*, Davis specifically addresses Comte's and Fourier's theories, while Ruiz de Burton takes up Herbert Spencer in regard to economic determinism in *The Squatter and the Don*. Economic and political struggles as a result of industrialization and urbanization lead authors to play out the anxieties about human existence – including natural laws and social forces beyond human control – amidst a shifting cultural milieu. In the "Introduction" to *Twisted from the Ordinary*, Mary Papke writes, "That naturalism in America seems to have erupted spontaneously during this period [the 1890s] should not blind us to its deep affinities with frontier, gothic, romance, transcendental, and sentimental literature" (viii).<sup>16</sup> Also extending the time period and moving forward to modernism, Susan Donaldson, in *Competing Voices: The American Novel 1865-1914*, argues, "Naturalism's anticipation of many modernist concerns, even to the extent of blurring conventional boundaries

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<sup>16</sup> See genre studies by Boeckmann, Hoeller, and Coultrap-McQuin.

between naturalism and modernism, suggests some of the difficulties in defining naturalism" (125). The seven American women writers in this study exemplify Donaldson's association between naturalism and modernism; they were ahead of their times as feminist writers arguing for minority rights in a world dominated by pseudo-scientifically prejudicial views which determined lives socially and economically.

The foundational rhetorical studies of literary narratives by Wayne Booth and Kenneth Burke offer a theoretical basis for examining the challenges of literary language as sites of social and political change. Since rhetorical criticism tells us that fictional texts may be read as artistic expressions of persuasion, the next step is to examine what is significant or revealing about the rhetorical choices the authors make.<sup>17</sup> How the rhetoric works to persuade and what it is persuading the audience to believe is significant to understanding the authors' theories about determinism, which is significant to their recognition as part of the genre of American literary naturalism and for an appreciation of the ways they use literature as feminist negotiations of public discourse. When these patterns (which emerge through narrators' tone, narrated monologues, and unique rhetorical situations) are examined and evaluated, less obvious treatments of naturalistic theories become a clearer and richer element of the texts. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "We decided, therefore, that the striking coherence we noticed in literature by

women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society” (xii). The women writers in this study negotiate a limiting philosophy of human nature as a means to “struggle free” from literary constraints and to stimulate social awareness. By using rhetorical strategies to engage the readers’ intellectual and conceptual frameworks, the authors facilitate exchanges of ideas among competing voices in various positions of power to alter readers’ attitudes toward racial and gender discrimination, business ethics, ecological devastation, and political participation; these rhetorical moments are connected to the authors’ theories about how, when, and why lives are determined by internal and external forces, which uniquely situates them in this discussion and future discussions about American literary naturalism as a rhetorical movement.

As another source of inspiration for my exploration of women authors’ negotiations of scientific, social, and economic philosophies of determinism, Elaine Neil Orr, in *Subject to Negotiation: Reading Feminist Criticism and American Women’s Fictions* argues that negotiation is a state of consciousness and a method of examining movements among one’s own interests and the multiplicity of opposing viewpoints and identities. Drawing on third-wave feminist criticism, Orr claims:

I was criss-crossing terms and muddying theories, bringing together pieces of a puzzle that, to me at lest [sic], spelled *feminist*

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, studies by Booth, Burke, and Foss.

*negotiation*, [. . . and] I observed that we can trace a certain progress in rhetorical and thematic negotiations in American women's fictions as we move through the century. (128)

Although Orr focuses on twentieth-century women writers, the idea of negotiation as a model for emphasizing "contentious middle grounds" (129) applies to the nineteenth-century women writers in this dissertation who were forced to navigate liminal spaces between hereditary and social, scientific and religious, or environmental and economic influences. Orr asks, "And if a clear demarcation between *negotiating* and *being negotiated* is not possible, must feminist criticism remain otherwise confined to an oppositional politics and discourse?" (1). The struggle between negotiating and being negotiated is clearly played out in these texts by women writers trying to accommodate a variety of readers while at the same time challenging boundaries restricting women, which leads them to make striking rhetorical choices. We may ask, what makes these authors' texts persuasive or not? What can we learn from the narrators' or characters' use of rhetorical structures, not only for insight into a particular text, but for applying the author's strategies to the study of other texts? These questions highlight places of negotiation among competing voices about deterministic views and lead to discussions about significant rhetorical motives and choices. According to Orr, "What most distinguishes feminist criticism is not its establishment of a separate field or a unique methodology but its go-between movements among a variety of fields and methods in the interest of

providing space and agency to women writers, characters, and readers” (46); this struggle within these texts is what engages readers and opens the dialogue for social change.

By negotiating two critical approaches (using rhetorical methodology to illuminate aspects of literary criticism), I advance a new understanding of literary naturalism that includes a broader view of naturalistic discourse and reveals these women writers as literary naturalists, as important to the genre’s studies as canonical writers, Norris, Dreiser, and Crane. This examination puts characters’ words under a microscope – imitating the way naturalists examine nature – and determines the effects of rhetorical choices on the ability to persuade the implied reader to accept, reject, or mediate a theory about naturalism. In *Rhetoric Retold*, Cheryl Glenn notes, “Men have appropriated many public social practices, particularly prestigious practices like rhetoric, as universally masculine; the feminine experience (that of bodies sexed female) has come to represent exceptions, or the particular” (173). Although Glenn’s project examines many kinds of texts by women rhetoricians from ancient times through the Renaissance, her focus on “cultural constructions of the body, human identity, and power” are applicable to the way the women writers covered in this dissertation negotiate theories about naturalism in narratives with a rhetorical purpose. Glenn writes, “Men have acted in the polis, in the public light of rhetorical discourse, determining philosophic truth, civic good, the literary canon, and the theories and praxes of rhetoric” (1). The authors in this study

have chosen to enter that “public light” through stories about men and women as characters who navigate philosophies of determinism toward a better understanding of civic good – how a world of prejudicial views and practices becomes a better world with the possibility of moral will, and how women authors and characters can “speak” for those who have been silenced by socially determined institutions and philosophies. I use these examples, and tie the rhetorical and the poetic together, because the characters and narrators in this study “speak their way into the public domain” to debate Darwin, Spencer, Comte, among others. These women authors “manipulate the medium” for the purpose of “favorable reception” (Glenn 19); however, some negotiations of deterministic theories more persuasively presented the reform goals of the text than others, presenting the difficulties the authors faced trying to engage readers without sermonizing.

In my effort to negotiate both literary and rhetorical criticism, I turn to Kenneth Burke, Wayne Booth, and Sonja Foss and their views about the rhetorical purposes of literary narratives. Their applications of rhetorical criticism to literature are extensive and examine the complexity of the rhetorical choices authors of literary narratives make that may affect the persuasiveness of their message and story. In the “Afterword” to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth writes of his original work, “On the one hand, there is the implicit claim throughout, one that I still hold to, that rhetorical inquiry is universally applicable, that no fiction can fail to yield interesting stuff when we

look at it through *this lens*" (405). Booth's original work in 1961 and revisited analysis in 1983 may seem outdated to the twenty-first century scholar, but his treatment of the rhetorical aims of fiction is still more comprehensive and useful (even if criticized, as he acknowledges, for a lack of a theoretical basis) than rhetorical analyses of many single works of fiction today.<sup>18</sup> The rhetorical study of fiction is not about finding the "one right way" to write fiction, but about understanding the choices authors make in effectively communicating (or not) with different audiences on different occasions. The terms may continue to evolve, but the concepts are basically the same: there are many layers of voices (referring to Bakhtin's discussions of "heteroglossia" and "polyphony") and rhetorical strategies for a scholar to sift through to get at the arguments directed at the reader or assumed by the reader.<sup>19</sup> According to Booth:

It should be obvious to all readers who have got this far that every rhetorical figure or trope that anyone has ever used to heighten a narrative effect belongs somewhere in our subject. Almost every page of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, almost every device in Quintilian's *Institutes* or in Kenneth Burke's monumental study of the grammar,

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<sup>18</sup> Although many rhetorical studies of fiction lead to interesting analyses, such as Mason I. Lowance's *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin* (which focuses on religious, racial, and domestic rhetoric), their application to a single text limits transferability as a comprehensive rhetorical methodology.

<sup>19</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin writes, "[T]he language of a novel is the system of its 'languages'" including the various kinds of narration and characters' speeches (qtd. in McKeon 340). These voices coming together in dialectical debates create the "verbal-ideological world" (343), and, in the texts in this dissertation, they create rich rhetorical moments where readers are invited to, in Bakhtin's words, "actively [choose] one's orientation among them" (351).

rhetoric, and 'symbolic' of human exchange, could help explain the success or failure of some story or possible story. (412)

Booth lists male rhetoricians and applies their theories to mainly male authors of fiction (with a few notable exceptions of the rhetorical techniques and their effects found in the works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf).

Although a history of rhetoric is not feasible here, it is important to note the latest studies on adding women rhetoricians to the history of rhetoric and examining women's rhetorical styles of the nineteenth century is relevant to this study of women writers of literary narratives because these authors were using rhetorical gestures to change readers' attitudes and awaken a sense of social reform.<sup>20</sup>

As another source of influence on the theoretical basis of this dissertation, Kenneth Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, writes, "We have tried to show how rhetorical analysis throws light on literary texts and human relations generally" (xiv). I examine the authors' theories about naturalism, in Burke's language, as "literature for use" (*Motives* 5). Burke contends that authors force "rhetorical considerations upon us" (*Motives* 26) when they seek to change attitudes. In this dissertation, connecting naturalists' theories about unbending natural laws or social forces with conflicting arguments about religion, racism, and reform creates a sense of intellectual curiosity, which illuminates the authors' purpose of seeking to change readers' attitudes. All of these elements of Burke's "philosophy of literary form" come together in the concept of "identification"

and especially apply to the ways the women writers in this study work to create “associational clusters” to help readers identify with certain arguments.<sup>21</sup> Burke claims:

By “identification” I have in mind this sort of thing: one’s material and mental ways of placing oneself as a person in the groups and movements; one’s way of sharing vicariously in the role of leader or spokesman; formation and change of allegiance; . . . one’s way of seeing one’s reflection in the social mirror. (*Philosophy* 227)

In what ways do these authors work toward feminist identification? How do these women writers evoke identification with a character or position in the reader? If scholars argue that traditional rhetorical strategies (argumentation) exclude women prior to the twentieth century, then earlier women writers need to be acknowledged for developing feminist negotiation strategies (empathy, sympathy, invitation, refutation, etc.) that draw readers into ongoing conversations and possibly change minds and, in turn, cultural conventions.<sup>22</sup> These questions and ideas lead to compelling discoveries about the authors’ rhetorical choices and with which characters the audience is directed toward identifying. With Burke’s idea of consubstantiality, a joining of opposites, he not only presents the key term “Identification” as a kind of persuasion, but also the

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<sup>20</sup> See studies by Lunsford, Glenn, Sutherland, and Lipscomb.

<sup>21</sup> See more on “associational clusters” in the Methodology section.

joining of Identification and Division, the creation of ambiguity and controversy, in order to “invite” rhetoric through this “Rhetorical wrangle” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 21-26).<sup>23</sup> This “wrangle” plays out within texts through competing voices, sometimes through narrators sarcastically commenting on characters’ views, sometimes through characters openly challenging the views of another.

To develop identification with readers, the authors in this study present interesting rhetorical situations (a sewing circle, political conferences, stories within stories, narrator/character “dialogue,” etc.) to persuade readers to identify with one individual over another for the purpose of countering or mediating certain arguments that have held certain groups down on the ladder of social hierarchy. These authors have not tried “silencing the opposition,” but allowing for “give-and-take” (*Philosophy* 444), or a negotiation of reality. The authors in this study structure the negotiation and create identification through the dialectical process of thesis (naturalism), antithesis (Christianity), and synthesis (morality). They achieve the process by creating characters with whom to connect each position, and then use specific rhetorical tools to lead the reader to identify with and be persuaded by the hybrid (synthesized) character. Burke addresses this negotiation when he writes, “Allow full scope to the dialectical process, and you establish a scene in which the protagonist of a thesis has

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<sup>22</sup> See Craig R. Smith’s “Multiperspectival Feminist Critiques and Their Implications for Rhetorical Theory” (*American Communication Journal* 4.3, Spring 2001) and Kristen Hoerl’s “Reframing Rhetorical Theory and Practice through Feminist Perspectives” (*The Review of Communication* 2.4, Oct. 2002: 368-372).

maximum opportunity to modify his thesis, and so mature it, in the light of the antagonist's rejoinders" (*Philosophy* 444). The purpose is to lead readers to identify with certain positions and distance themselves from others (to attain position in the hierarchy). We need to understand the processes by which we build social agreement through our use of language. The authors use rhetoric as a tool of feminist negotiation, creating rhetorical authority for characters that would lack power in reality, including Jacobs' Linda, Wilson's Frado, Glasgow's Rachel, and Hopkins' Dora (characters sometimes read as New Woman figures).<sup>24</sup> Burke's goal is that we learn to perceive our use and abuse of language to justify inclinations toward conflict or cooperation.

Moreover, that negotiation is created by the work's structure (the rhetorical situations and patterns of rhetorical choices). Burke argues for focusing on a work's structure, not to "inform about a work's subject, plot, background, the relationships among its characters, etc.," but to examine "general problems of internal structure and act-scene relationships" (*Philosophy* xvii). The most important aspect of evaluating structure of the act for the women writers in this study is what Burke calls "the 'Power' family" and lists some of the members as social, sexual, and political power and "powers of emancipation,

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23 Burke claims that we are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 21).

24 See New Woman scholarship by Nelson, Ledger, Cunningham, and Richardson. Angelique Richardson writes, "New Woman Scholarship is now beginning to tackle the complexities of the late nineteenth-century debates around femininity, and acknowledge the New Woman's involvement not only with various forms of female emancipation but with empire and eugenics" (146).

liberalization, separation" (*Philosophy* xxi). The authors in this study use rhetorical strategies to combine civic, academic, and personal contexts into one form, emphasizing the flexibility of rhetoric as a tool of communication.

This study provides rhetorical contextualization for literary texts, and the participation of these women writers in the rhetoric about naturalism is striking. These texts stand out from the field, not because they are stylistically polished, but because they stimulate intellectual curiosity about theories that are rarely debated today, but continue to impact interpretation and enjoyment of the texts by contemporary readers. The writers in this study do not only create characters who react to situations based on their hereditary makeup (as Norris's McTeague), economic position (as Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*), or social influences (as Crane's Maggie); additionally, these women authors create narrators and characters who participate in debates about deterministic theories through a variety of rhetorical methods, sometimes creating hybrid theories that blend different kinds of determinism with elements of free will and moral choices, which is significant because their accommodations create a sense of identification with readers, but also create a sense of ambiguity that may cause the reader to question the motives of the rhetor. One of the most striking patterns of persuasion among the authors in this study is the attack on racial prejudice through the examination of hereditary determinism. In his article "Whither Naturalism?" Philip Gerber argues, "Investigative forays into the dark world of heredity have lagged. What is passed along from generation to

generation – the force of the heritable, so powerful in concept but difficult to depict, too much a tantalizing mystery” (370). To the contrary, I examine several literary narratives that do forge into this “dark world,” providing plot twists and social commentaries while challenging individuals to reconstruct social and cultural beliefs and practices based on racial associations between blood and behavior.

### **Methodology**

As a means of entering texts, delineating naturalistic theories, and then allowing for analysis of rhetorical patterns, I apply aspects of Kenneth Burke’s model of a statistical analysis of language, leading to an understanding of “associational clusters” of key terms. Burke claims, “And you may, by examining his [every writer’s] work, find ‘what goes with what’ in these clusters – what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc.” (*Philosophy* 20). In this dissertation, examining the “interrelationships among all these equations” focuses on the writer’s representations of natural laws, which leads to possible sites of identification for readers.

To focus on specific arguments within each text, I began with a word-level search within four areas of naturalistic discourse: heredity, environment, economics, and chance. Another important word-level method for finding naturalistic arguments is to search for the names or ideas of specific theorists,

such as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Charles Fourier, and Joseph Le Conte, which are specifically found in Davis', Glasgow's, and Ruiz de Burton's texts. I use naturalism as an interpretive context to discover the patterns of persuasion – the artistic ways in which the authors persuade the reader to accept certain assertions about human nature, laws of nature, evolution, atavism, positivism, survival, genetics, and chance.

First, I located arguments by searching for the key words listed below in specific deterministic categories. Burke argues, "A work is composed of implicit or explicit 'equations' (assumptions of 'what equals what')" (*Philosophy* viii). Burke's system of equations would necessitate the use of the word "equals" among key terms; therefore,

1. **Human Nature/Heredity:** "blood" = "natural" = "race" = "species" = "naturalist" = "naturalism" = "science" = "amalgamation" = "evolution." For example, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs writes in Linda Brent's voice, "They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who 'made of one blood all nations of men!' And then who *are* Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves?" (38-39).
2. **Nature/Environment:** "force" = "brutal" = "survival" = "outcast" = "nature" = "animal." Examples from Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* include Mrs. Willis saying, "I am of the opinion that most men are like the

lower animals in many things – they don't always know what is for their best good" (156) and Will Smith claiming that the "science of man's whole nature" is "animal, moral, and intellectual" (269).

3. **Class/Economy:** "prey" = "struggle" = "worth" = "class" = "machines."

For example, in Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*, when visiting the governor, Don Mariano refers to Herbert Spencer's theories in order to place blame on legislators for offering "a premium to one class of citizens to go and prey upon another class" (161). The narrator in Ellen Glasgow's *The Descendant* describes Michael Akershem in naturalistic terms: "The genius of endurance was fitting him to struggle, and in the struggle to survive" (19); however, in the end, Akershem's life follows a plot of decline; after he murders a man and spends time in jail, he succumbs to illness and death. Near the end, Michael says, "I am a cur that the stones of mankind have beaten to death" (275).

4. **Chance/Fate:** "destiny" = "fate" = "Providence" = "chance" = "fortune."

The narrator in *The Descendant* makes several references to fate (sometimes capitalized, sometimes not), including "his last chance at the hands of Fate" (32) and, in the end, Michael dies with the "blood-red seal of fate" on his lips (276).

Every example of these words does not signal an argument about the laws of nature. After discovering a key word, I examined the context for arguments about deterministic philosophy. Moreover, these words are not an exhaustive

list. For example, in another nineteenth-century narrative, Sarah Orne Jewett's phrase, "fellows of the cell," (*Country of the Pointed Firs* 82), would not be detected by this list even though it fits under the Human Nature/Hereditary category, arguing for a common biological heritage, possibly even a reference to some theory of evolution.<sup>25</sup> Even though these terms create a way to enter texts for further research, they are not the only way of locating deterministic theories, and close readings of philosophical arguments by characters and narrators is an important part of the analysis that I have envisioned and developed in this dissertation.

Similarly, in *The Descent of Love: Darwin and the Theory of Sexual Selection in American Fiction, 1871-1926*, Bert Bender uses word-level recognition to indicate the evidence of authors' uses of Darwin's arguments; however, after finding evidence of Darwin's ideas in the texts, Bender turns to a literary analysis of the authors' use of Darwin's themes. My inquiry continues to ask questions about *how and why* authors argue Darwin's, Spencer's, Comte's, among others' ideas about naturalism. The authors' rhetorical choices communicate complex, sometimes contradictory, interpretations and presentations of the various debates swirling around Darwin (evolution), Comte (positivism), Lombroso (criminal atavism), Spencer (social determinism), and Zola (scientific documentation). Some may wonder how Darwin's theory of evolution might be connected to determinism. James Reeve Pusey claims,

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<sup>25</sup> Although Darwin refers to cells, he does not use this phrase.

But Darwin's theory of evolution logically leads to determinism – and nowhere else – not to a simple "biological determinism," but to a determinism born of the chance "interaction" of "genetic chance and environmental necessity." Darwin explains no other forces behind the evolution of anything. He *mentions* will, "the mysterious power of the will," but *nothing* in his theory tells us how such a power could be. (95)

Similarly, in *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, David Ray Griffin says, "Darwin was convinced that science requires complete predictability and thereby a completely deterministic world" (261). However, again we see the many facets of the term, "determinism," when Griffin qualifies Darwin's determinism by saying, "Perhaps the dimension of Darwinism most clearly contradicted by our hard – core common sense is its *predictive determinism*" (269). The question remains the same: Is the struggle for survival based on mechanical laws or human choices? Another philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, claims, "The 'mud' in which Darwin said he was immersed was the opacity which always characterizes a deterministic world-view" (qtd. in Browning 421). Taking the conversation from scientists and philosophers back to authors of literary narratives, Bert Bender claims:

American novelists of this period were not only reading the discussions of Darwin and reading Darwin firsthand, but, [. . .], they sharpened their thinking by closely reading and contesting

each other's work with Darwinian ideas. This is not to suggest that they – Howells, James, or Jewett, for example – should be regarded as accomplished biologists or, say, evolutionary anthropologists; only that they made the best sense of it they could [. . .] (366)

My purpose is not to analyze an author's adherence to a certain philosophy or theory, but to use methods of rhetorical criticism to show that the patterns of persuasion indicate a rhetorical movement for women writers theorizing about naturalism and that the movement affects other writers and readers (through evidence in periodicals, journals, and letters). Another important question to consider is to what degree "rhetorical heightening" is necessary to effectively communicate these theories with the reader? Booth argues that authors use various methods of rhetorical heightening to move the reader "beyond whatever might be considered a natural response" (*Rhetoric of Fiction* 110). The chapters of this dissertation explore those methods, including sarcasm, antithesis, appeals to fear, etc. Scholars should continue to mesh literary and rhetorical criticism, thereby analyzing rhetorical choices in literary narratives to examine the ways authors enter historical debates for the purpose of changing readers' attitudes and possibly public policy.

Second, after locating an example of a naturalistic argument, I examined the rhetor and rhetorical situation to determine the author's strategies for arguing about issues associated with naturalism including appeals to pathos,

ethos, and logos.<sup>26</sup> This is not an attempt to follow neo-Aristotelian criticism, but a way of examining the authors' choices for developing identification with readers. In examining ethical appeals, I evaluate how the "speaker's" (character's or narrator's) status, gender, and rhetorical techniques influence the effectiveness of their arguments. In regard to style, rhetorical choices may include use of figures of diction and thought, use of sarcasm through narrated monologues, and use of repetition. The patterns that emerge lead to significant points about the voicelessness of women writers who want to participate in scientific discourse and who have the desire to shape cultural changes.

Third, after evaluating the persuasive strategies the women writers in this study use to theorize about naturalism, I examined the ideological effects. June Howard, in *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, says, "the form itself is an immanent ideology" (ix). Howard writes, "Naturalism is a literary form that struggles to accommodate that sense of discomfort and danger, a form that unremittingly attends to the large social questions of its period" (ix). While Howard clearly demonstrates the chaotic nature of naturalistic discourse, she limits the discussion to a "single literary genre" (ix), thereby including the texts and authors of the "canon" of "pessimistic determinism," while excluding many interesting arguments about naturalism by women writers in novels not overtly focused on plots of decline. Howard states the following about her project: "To

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<sup>26</sup> Neo-Aristotelian criticism evaluates the author's use of the canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Although I examine elements of classical rhetoric in the texts in this study, including appeals to ethos,

elicit the voices of nonhegemonic groups from the historical record is not the task I have taken on here" (ix). However, the writers in this study raise the voices of the marginalized to participate in a rhetorical movement. The pattern of mixing theories about naturalism, religion, race, and capitalism, among others, is provocative and leads to questioning representations of race, gender, and class for the purpose of changing attitudes about cultural norms.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Beginning with a text as early as 1859, chapter one examines Harriet Wilson's and Harriet Jacobs' arguments against scientific racism<sup>27</sup> through their use of examples of white brutality, African Americans' resilience, and personal and biblical authority, making these claims from a position of limited freedom and establishing rhetorical appeals distinctive of women writers during and after slavery. Through the combination of rhetorical and literary theory, we can view these narratives as entering the racial, religious, and scientific discourses of the nineteenth century, refuting pseudo-scientific claims based on racial prejudice, and utilizing arguments about the material body as sites of identity construction for the purpose of changing readers' attitudes toward commonly held cultural views.

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pathos, and logos, I do not attempt to reconstruct the historical context of every argument.

<sup>27</sup> See studies by Zack, Boeckmann, Carter, and Eze.

In chapter two, continuing the debates about hereditary determinism, though more ambiguously than Wilson and Jacobs, Helen Hunt Jackson and Pauline Hopkins examine the actions of characters through discussions of blood and behavior, theorizing a balance between biological and social forces beyond one's control. Their presentations of competing views gain the attention of those holding on to racist views of hereditary determinism. In reaction to these conflicting views, these authors use rhetorical tools of sarcasm and appeals to pathos to show readers a progression from a negative view of "mixed blood" to a positive view of the hybridization of people and cultures.

Although Rebecca Harding Davis and Ellen Glasgow also address hereditary determinism, chapter three reveals that they did not shy away from intertwining threads of scientific and religious discourse, which led to the intellectual tension necessary to challenge readers' commonly held social and scientific beliefs. In many of the narratives in this study the arguments about naturalism and religion intertwine in one character's rhetoric, even in one sentence. For example, in Davis's *Margret Howth*, the narrator claims, "But he, coming out of the mire, his veins thick with the blood of a despised race, had carried up their pain and hunger with him: it was the most real thing on earth to him, – more real than his own share in the unseen heaven or hell" (50). This comment is striking because Davis challenges the reader to examine commonly held beliefs about racial prejudice and their attachment to hereditary determinism versus the intangibility and role of personal spirituality or the

possibility of theological determinism and how that affects someone's view of life. Since the authors in this study are "filterers" of naturalistic theories, they tangle threads of discourse in unique ways to force the reader to question scientific, religious, and social beliefs and doubts for the purpose of reconstructing personal values that give women characters and readers a model of feminist negotiation of public discourse and the possibility that natural forces exist because of divine intervention.

In chapter four, in addition to examining aspects of hereditary determinism, Davis and Ruiz de Burton portray characters' lives in the tangle of economic and environmental determinism. By using theories of ecocriticism as a lens, and examining theories of economic agency and competition and the outcome of social evolutionary rhetoric as feminist negotiation of the market economy, I compare the difference between studies of nature writers and literary naturalists.<sup>28</sup> The authors' use of naturalistic theories leads the reader to question whether human beings in an urban society can exist in a natural state apart from the market economy and humans' participation in the destruction of nature, making industrialization a social form of pessimistic determinism.

In the conclusion, I compare the rhetorical strategies used by all the authors in this study to draw conclusions about feminist negotiations of

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<sup>28</sup> Ecocriticism is a field of literary study that examines the relationship between literature and the environment. Although the term is highly debated (environmentalism, literary ecology, ecological literature, etc.), the practices apply to the way I examine theories of environmental and economic determinism in chapter four of this dissertation. See studies by Armbruster, Kern, and Mazel.

contested social and scientific discourse. The seven authors in this study stand out from other women writers of the times by entering philosophical discussions about various kinds of determinism through compelling narrative and rhetorical techniques. Although there are other writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who address theories about naturalism, including Edith Wharton and Pearl S. Buck, some authors included in studies of American literary naturalism do not use rhetorical strategies to theorize about determinism in their texts. For example, Jewett and Zitkala-Sa would more likely be considered nature writers than writers negotiating theories about naturalism. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is often studied in relation to American literary naturalism for its examination of psychological determinism as a theme instead of as a rhetorical move because Chopin does not specifically argue about deterministic philosophies.<sup>29</sup> Since the authors in this study use rhetorical gestures to negotiate sites of social, scientific, and economic power struggles, their texts offer a rich historical context for discovery and discussion. In *Rhetorical Power*, Steven Mailloux claims, "Such attempts place theory, criticism, and literature itself within cultural conversation, the dramatic, unending conversation of history which is the 'primal scene of rhetoric'" (18). For Mailloux, "Rhetorical hermeneutics always leads to rhetorical histories" (18). A rhetorical system of interpretation for literature provides a history of using literary narratives as persuasion. The authors in this study are part of the

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<sup>29</sup> See Pizer's "A note on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as Naturalistic Fiction," *Southern Literary Journal* 33.2 (2001): 5-13.

rhetorical history of American literary naturalism and feminist rhetorical studies and through their strategies provide a better understanding of women writers negotiating social and scientific theories to the purpose of affecting readers' beliefs about the extent to which human behavior is determined by society, heredity, environment, or economics. In the final analysis, all the authors in this study acknowledge that social and economic forces determine people's lives, but argue that those who have the power to change these institutions have a moral obligation to do so for the ones who are denied a voice in the system.

## Chapter One

“Degraded by the System”:  
Negotiating Naturalism and Refuting Scientific Racism in  
Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* and Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

“She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother’s instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother’s agonies” (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 17).

Theoretical discussions of nineteenth-century African American women’s narratives often explore cultural, religious, and political contexts, but do not fully address the influence of scientific inquiry and language on nineteenth-century race and gender struggles. Harriet Wilson, author of *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs, author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), specifically and uniquely address racial and gender prejudices based on scientific theories. The women in this study argue against scientific racism<sup>30</sup> through counterexamples of white brutality, black elevation, and personal and biblical authority, making claims and establishing rhetorical appeals that are characteristic of women writers in positions of limited freedom. Through the lens of rhetorical criticism, readers can view these narratives as refuting eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific claims based on racial and gender prejudices. Highlighting the power of mediation and refutation in

women's rhetoric, I explore Wilson's and Jacobs' participation in the discourse as an important element of the rhetorical movement of American literary naturalism.

Most histories and critiques of American literary naturalism focus on novels and short stories, neglecting autobiography, oratory, essays, and periodical reviews.<sup>31</sup> Even most studies about naturalistic novels center mainly on male writers and only within a limited time period (1870-1900). Since eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social and scientific commentaries on hereditary and environmental determinism influenced public discourse and found their way into literary narratives of the times, these instances should be considered in discussions of the genre. The variety of forms (in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse about naturalism collides and converges)<sup>32</sup> needs to be investigated as a supplement to novel-only studies because these precursory literary examples establish a rhetorical pattern for later writers. When studying American literary naturalism, readers should review practices of neglecting texts, revise concepts of literary traditions, and re-evaluate women writers' negotiations of scientific discourse about natural laws and human nature. Even though the authors in this study are not writing

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<sup>30</sup> Scientific racism is a term for discourse which justifies racial discrimination based on pseudo-scientific arguments used in the service of colonialism and slavery. See Back, Baker, Boeckmann, Bob Carter, and Ellingson. Some scholars put quotation marks around "scientific" to indicate sarcasm.

<sup>31</sup> See studies of American literary naturalism by Charles Walcutt, Donald Pizer, Christophe den Tandt, and June Howard. All focus on the canon of Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and London. Some try to enlarge the canon with Edith Wharton, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Kate Chopin, but never address nonfiction precursors.

“naturalistic novels” (novels based on characters whose lives are controlled by heredity, environment, or chance instead of free will) and are most often mediating or refuting accepted scientific “truths,” their rhetorical treatments of the issues relating to naturalism lead to interesting comparisons to later novels by Pauline Hopkins and Helen Hunt Jackson, and even the treatment of race and ethnicity by canonical writers such as Frank Norris and Jack London. Wilson and Jacobs should be given credit for their contributions to the development of literary realism and naturalism. The treatment of hereditary determinism, human brutality, and forces beyond one’s control in Wilson’s and Jacobs’ narratives prepared audiences for future explorations by women writers of scientific theories and naturalistic themes, a rhetorical legacy that continues to influence readers’ interpretations of the texts and the genre today.

From 1850-1870, while writers’ exploration of discourse about naturalism in fiction was in the early stages (see chapter two and three of this dissertation on Rebecca Harding Davis’ texts, *Margret Howth* and “Life in the Iron-Mills”), the discourse in essays, autobiographies, and other periodical literature sets the stage for the development of a literary genre. Although American literary naturalism is often cited as “beginning” in the 1870s, and “flourishing” in the 1890s, literary naturalism as a rhetorical movement began much earlier.<sup>33</sup> This debate is clearly

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32 See studies by Bob Carter, Drees, Eze, Griffin, and Wright.

33 In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, June Howard presents a comprehensive study of naturalism as a genre: “[T]his group of texts, produced in America at a particular historical moment, assembles a characteristic set of conceptual oppositions, investments in characters, and organizational strategies; analyzing them through the concept of

a part of Jacobs' and Wilson's narratives. As a neglected area of study in American literary naturalism, nineteenth-century African American women's narratives offer interesting treatments of scientific discourse associated with philosophies of determinism. By establishing patterns of rhetoric (communitarian, sympathetic, and emancipatory), Wilson and Jacobs encourage identification with readers, generate support for causes, and break boundaries of social discourse by taking advantage of one of a few "public speaking" opportunities for women (literary narratives), providing rare access to a larger audience and a voice in the ongoing conversation. Just the fact that these narratives were published exemplifies their entrance into the debates of the times; additionally, their rhetorical techniques continue to affect readings of these texts today.<sup>34</sup>

After exploring the rhetoric of women's literary narratives in relation to nineteenth-century scientific discourse, I found a connection among mid-century African American women's literary narratives and late-nineteenth-century naturalistic novels. Fictional naturalistic texts increased over the second half of the nineteenth century. However, earlier examples, which include only elements of naturalism, have not been considered part of the genre. For example, a few studies of American literary naturalism include Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in

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naturalism enables us to see how they constitute a significant and distinct development in the ideology of form" (10). Howard also looks at the development of the term "naturalism" and its adoption by literary critics from the 1850s and Émile Zola's naturalist school in France (11), but does not take into consideration the earlier history of the words "naturalism" and "naturalists" and the contributions from earlier texts participating in the public discourse.

the Iron-Mills," but do not include any narratives by African American women writers. Incidentally, Davis' text was published the same year as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Notably similar between Davis' and Jacobs' texts are references to scientific discourse on natural instincts and brutally realistic illustrations of abusive institutions. While the genre of literary naturalism limits the inclusion of texts that do not fit a range of criteria, studies about texts that address elements of naturalism should be considered as precursors. Even though women writers blend theories of naturalism with other discourses (religious, romantic, legal, and political), their texts should be considered part of American literary naturalism and should be studied for their impact on the genre and the rhetorical movement associated with it.

Among nineteenth-century African American women's texts, Jacobs' and Wilson's are unique. First, Jacob's narrative stands apart because the text is more fully developed in plot, characterization, interior monologues and dialogue than the majority of slave narratives that relate a few short anecdotes or follow an interview pattern.<sup>35</sup> Because Jacobs uses techniques of fiction writing to draw the reader into her characters' lives, she is able to address issues that affect all slaves, not just moments of personal experience. In this respect, her narrative is set

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<sup>34</sup> See studies about Wilson's text by Bacon, Grasso, and Leveen, and studies about Jacobs' text by Pittman, Accomando, and Nudelman. These authors mention treatment of abolitionist rhetoric, paternalistic rhetoric, and the rhetorics of success and contrast but focus on other aspects such as legal and historical.

<sup>35</sup> See the website, The Library of Congress American Memory Project, and *Six Women's Slave Narratives* from The Schomburg Library for examples. Although Mary Prince (1831) narrates horrendous anecdotes of brutality through

apart from the majority and allows for more opportunities to examine scripted beliefs and commonly held racist views through the dialogue of a variety of characters. Highlighting discourse connecting heredity and race, Naomi Zack, in "Mixed Black and White Race and Public Policy," says:

By that time, those individuals who were then called "negroes" and who historians after the 1930s refer to as "Negroes," but who should probably be referred to as American slaves, had been conceptualized as a distinct race from whites, lower in biological hierarchy and intellectually and morally inferior to whites. (116-122)

Zack's studies in historical representations of race are used in the service of "unraveling racial mythology in general" and developing future public policy which allows for "self-identification" ("Mixed" 1). Zack's work highlights the inability of some to remove race from discussions of biological determinism, the point for which Wilson and Jacobs fought so long ago.

As unique as Jacobs' perspectives and techniques developed in her narrative are, Wilson's text offers a contradictory view of a free woman who is not called a slave, but whose life is bound by a ghostly hand of slavery.

Examining the origins of the African American novel, in "Freeing the Voice, Creating the Self: The Novel and Slavery," Christopher Mulvey claims, "Texts

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realistic descriptions; she only addresses discourse about naturalism specifically when she writes, "Oh the Buckra people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection" (9).

come from texts, and two answers have been given for the starting point of these texts: the black slave narrative and the white popular novel. The fact is that the African American fiction is rooted in both, but it owes its distinctiveness to the slave narrative" (18). Mulvey more specifically claims:

Harriet Wilson was a Free Colored woman living in the North, and there are no slave codes where the heroine of *Our Nig* lives, but [using Wilson's words from the novel] "she was indeed a slave, in every sense of the word; and a lonely one, too." Wilson's novel presents another evolution of the slave narrative by universalizing the virtual slavery of so many caught in segregation's trap and from which escape was less easy than from the plantation. (19)

We cannot call *Our Nig* a slave narrative, but it is an "evolution" of form which plays a role in the development of fiction in which Wilson did not shy away from addressing scientific claims of the day and called attention to the causality of human behavior determined by the institution of slavery.

Second, these women writers create a distinctive, emancipatory rhetoric and offer a model for studying specific sites of refutation and resistance in the construction of identity. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, "appeals to authority" through experience, identification, and identity claims (27-28) help authors establish the "authority to narrate" and create arguments through rhetorical acts, including "justifying their own perceptions, upholding their

reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures among others" (10). Wilson's and Jacobs' key arguments work to break down culturally constructed myths and promote a positive public discourse about racial and feminine identity by shaping their own rhetorical methods. Continuing the discussion of using literary narratives to emancipate voices and break boundaries of social discourse, Sterling L. Bland, in *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and Their Fictions of Self-Creation*, argues, "The narrators had to tread a series of fine lines in which they understood themselves as both subject and object, self and other, author and narrative subject" negotiating "fictionalized elements" (xiv). This complicated convergence of generic forms, material bodies, and public discourses is tied to the authors' rhetorical appeals in which the audience must accept or reject the author's truth even when experiences and identities between reader and author do not correspond. Bland claims a "vast veil" separates "black experience and identity from the larger body of American identities" (8). By notably presenting this negotiation of forms and discourses as a struggle for survival, Bland uses the language of social Darwinism when he also states:

[T]heir authorial "voices" and rhetorical strategies include creating their identities out of the authorizing language of the Bible, rhetorically struggling for survival against the forces that ostensibly sought to liberate them, and even paradoxically masking their true

intentions for freedom and escape behind the façade of compliance and acceptance. (7)

Wilson's and Jacobs' rhetorical moments focusing on arguments about naturally and socially determined behavior illuminate the need for authors to establish authority and community to open minds toward their messages, which allows scholars to enlarge the scope of American literary naturalism to include a tradition of examining women's texts that mediate or theorize naturalism. Adding Jacobs' and Wilson's texts to studies of literary naturalism leads to new ways of examining the canonical male writers (and the way they address race in naturalistic fiction) and other women writers (and the way they use similar rhetorical techniques to negotiate naturalism later in the century).

Third, Wilson and Jacobs use rhetorical techniques to remove the element of race from discussions about hereditary determinism by refuting pseudo-scientific claims and to negotiate theories of social determinism by focusing on the uncontrollable, destructive forces of social institutions. After establishing ethos (by situating themselves in a community of women through authorial commentary), the authors employ rhetorical techniques of refutation and mediation to tackle issues of hereditary determinism that are rarely addressed in slave narratives or African American women's fiction before the Civil War. For example, both narratives address interracial relationships (Frado's parents and Linda's own) that lead to discussions about the "amalgamation" of blood, which connects and contrasts their arguments with Enlightenment theories. Since

many themes of American literary naturalism owe their origins to the deluge of scientific debates of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the vast amount of public discourse would have affected Jacobs and Wilson.

### **Racialized Rhetoric and Early Scientific and Philosophical Discussions**

Opportunities for Jacobs and Wilson to read and hear about public discourses on science and race multiplied with the abolition movement and popular periodical reading.<sup>36</sup> Publications such as *The Liberty Bell* and *The Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1843*, edited by Lydia Maria Child,<sup>37</sup> offered literature of racial uplift while periodicals such as *The United States Democratic Review* (1837-1859) included book reviews upholding commonly held prejudicial views about race.<sup>38</sup> The widespread accessibility of scientific discourse is evident in the number of publications available to Frederick Douglass. According to The Douglass Papers Project online,

Between 1838 and 1844 Douglass avidly read such antislavery publications as the *Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the *Liberty Bell*, the *Emancipator*, the *Anti-Slavery Almanac*, and the

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<sup>36</sup> See Paul Goodman's *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality*.

<sup>37</sup> In a letter to John Greenleaf Whittier (April 4, 1861), Lydia Maria Child wrote of Jacobs' narrative, "I have taken a good deal of pains to publish it, and circulate it, because it seemed to me well calculated to take hold of many minds, that will not attend to arguments against slavery." Child's emphasis on "arguments" and the words "well calculated" indicates her understanding that Jacobs' narrative subtly works as argument.

<sup>38</sup> Some early-eighteenth century examples of articles on the nature of humans include "Do the Various Races of Man Constitute a Single Species?" in *The United States Democratic Review* (1842) and "Unity of the Human Race" in *The American Whig Review* (1850).

*American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* which contained speeches, interviews, and autobiographies of dozens of fugitive slaves including Lunsford Lane, James Curry, Lewis Clarke, and the Amistad rebels.

As a male author, Douglass may have had more access to public discourse than Jacobs and Wilson; however, Jacobs wrote letters in response to public discourse on slavery that appeared in the *New York Tribune* (1853), the *Liberator* (1862), *Black Abolitionist Papers* (1863), and *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1864).<sup>39</sup> These texts mingled in the minds of readers with other periodical publications on the nature of humans, natural laws, and natural rights, including essays such as “Darwin on *The Origin of Species*,” which was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The North American Review* in 1860.<sup>40</sup> Since many of the anti-slavery newspapers were printed as early as 1831, the social and scientific themes and theories Jacobs’ and Wilson’s characters discuss were part of the concerns of the times.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary scholarly studies about Wilson reinforce the author’s focus on concerns of the day including “the inflammable ambiguities of African American-white sexual relations and the baleful influence of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act” (Ellis 99) and how *Our Nig* “trespasses beyond authorized abolitionist parameters in its grimly unsentimental portrait of U. S. racism” (Ellis 118). These realistic representations of racialized degradation based on the socially,

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<sup>39</sup> See Jean Fagan Yellin’s *Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Slavery and Women’s Rights*, Yale UP, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* was published in *The Living Age* in 1860.

economically, and politically based institution of slavery demonstrate the power of public discourse to deter the science of human behavior from genetic disposition to racial prejudice.

Discussions about natural qualities and abilities grew out of the accumulation of anthropological, philosophical, and scientific studies conducted during the eighteenth century. Londa Schiebinger, in *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, writes that eighteenth-century natural history was "big business, an essential component of Europe's commercial and colonial expansion" (4). Eighteenth-century naturalistic studies fed nineteenth-century commentaries on race, determinism, and environmental influences. Schiebinger does not specifically address the authors of slave narratives and their reactions to scientific racism; however, she presents arguments that connect the issue of slavery to the harm done by naturalists of the eighteenth century in "looking to nature for solutions to questions about sexual and racial equality" and perpetuating discourse on the "differences imagined as natural to bodies and hence foundational to societies based on natural law" (9). Schiebinger also argues, "[I]nclusion in the polis rested on notions of *natural* equalities, while exclusion from it rested on notions of *natural* differences" (10). Wilson's and Jacobs' narratives refute the idea of "natural" racial and gender inferiorities and celebrate human similarities as justification for acceptance of participation in public affairs. While issues about women's rights are part of the characters'

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41 *The Liberator* was published as early as 1831 and *The American Anti-Slavery Reporter* in 1836.

identity construction and conversations in these narratives, Wilson's and Jacobs' goal to refute scientific racism is more important. In order to spread the message that blacks are not naturally inferior to whites, these writers made specific arguments against commonly held claims about race. Even though Jacobs and Wilson refute hereditary determinism based on race, they do not refute that hereditary factors determine human disposition and behavior. This contrast is made compellingly clear in their representations of the good and bad natures of characters of any race, which makes their refutation of scientific racism even more prominent in the texts.

The mingling of opinions in popular periodicals contributed to individual and cultural attitudes, which often highlighted erroneous representations of oppressed groups. As an example of the connection between hereditary determinism and race in philosophical and scientific debates, in the Introduction to *Race and the Enlightenment*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze asks, "Why had the concept of race gained such currency in European Enlightenment scientific and socio-political discourse?" (4). Eze examines the positioning of Europeans and non-Europeans on an evolutionary scale in the writings of enlightenment thinkers, whose use of the "race issue," he argues, is rarely addressed in scholarly works. Although these writers (David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Georges Leopold Cuvier, Thomas Jefferson, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) focus on European/non-European contrasts, this comparison transfers to the colonists' perspectives of slaves and Indians. Eze

also highlights the contribution of travel writing to the discourse on race, which would have been available to Jacobs and Wilson in popular periodicals (5).<sup>42</sup>

Even if Wilson and Jacobs did not have access to copies of all these publications, the discourse would have been part of public discussions, speeches, meetings, and even sermons.<sup>43</sup> Eze says his anthology of Enlightenment texts is an attempt “to pursue the question of whether or not, and in what ways, the ‘race idea’ might be a key component of metaphysics, ethics, and philosophy of history, in Kant and other major Enlightenment thinkers” (4). The works in Eze’s anthology vary from anthropological studies to philosophical treatises, all including views on race as a factor in hereditary determinism and, as Eze notes, were pervasive in eighteenth-century discourse. Eze cites Hume’s “Of National Characters” (first published in 1748), which contains, according to Eze, “the famous footnote in which Hume suspects ‘all other species of men . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites” (29). Although hereditary determinism based on race was being debated even in the eighteenth century, many used the pseudo-scientific theories and language of Enlightenment thinkers on the “order of nature” to justify slavery.<sup>44</sup> Even Thomas Jefferson, in an essay entitled “Laws,”

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42 Examples of travel writing with views on the nature of races include *Caillie’s Travels in Africa* (1833), *Burckhardt’s Travels in Africa* (1835), David Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1858), and Heinrich Barth’s *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (1857).

43 See “The Injustices and Impolicy of the Slave Trade and the Slavery of Africans,” a sermon by Edwards published in 1791; reviews of *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* (1854), *Kant and His Philosophy* (1834), and “Writings of Herder” (1825) appeared in *The North American Review*.

44 James Beattie, in *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Skepticism* (first published in 1770), refutes Hume’s comment on other races’ “natural inferiority” to whites by using Aristotle’s example

writes, "I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind" (qtd. in Eze 102).

While Jefferson argues against degrading humans of any color, he does claim socially determined circumstances give one race an advantage over another.

These examples of Enlightenment texts show the pervasiveness of inquiry into naturalist studies and influence of scientific language on the connection between hereditary determinism and race in public discourse throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Wilson and Jacobs break down the boundaries set up by society to limit or bar participation in scientific and cultural rhetoric by embedding arguments in literary narratives, giving them access to a larger audience that male-dominated discourse of scholarly institutions and periodicals did not allow. These authors refuted generally held views of "natural" abilities, instincts, and order passed down through the years and based on biased scientific findings by contrasting characterization of various races. Emphasizing the inability of women and blacks to engage scientists and philosophers, Londa Schiebinger claims, scientists acted as "mediators or marketeers of political ideas" (8), and, in Sterling Bland's

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that Greeks are naturally superior to others. Beattie argues that the Greeks "have for many ages been doomed to that slavery, which, in his [Aristotle's] judgment, nature had destined them to impose on others" (34). Beattie continues the comparison when he writes, "The inhabitants of Great Britain and France were as savage 2,000 years ago as those of Africa and America are to this day" (qtd. in Eze 35). The debates were not new during Jacobs' and Wilson's time; however, since the same arguments continued to arise, these authors took advantage of an opportunity to address the debates in their narratives.

words, created a “cultural fabrication” (4), which worked to exclude or suppress marginal subjects from entering the dominant discourse. According to

Schiebinger:

The failure of academies and universities to open their doors to blacks and women on a regular basis is especially poignant, considering that they were the objects of intense study by anatomists and medical men in this period. Excluded from centers of learning, women and Africans could say little about their own nature, at least not in the idiom of modern science. (200)

Through the “continued exclusion” (Schiebinger 7) of women, racial and ethnic groups, and lower-class peoples, scientific studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carried gendered and racially biased conclusions to the public. Wilson and Jacobs employed literary narratives as a public debate forum for cultural reform messages. Additionally, Schiebinger claims, “gender was to become one potent principle organizing eighteenth-century revolutions in views of nature, a matter of consequence in an age that looked to nature as the guiding light for social reform” (4). Although Schiebinger focuses on gender in scientific studies and gender issues are clearly addressed in these narratives, Wilson and Jacobs concentrated more on removing race from claims about natural abilities. The power of rhetoric to exclude marginal subjects is reversed in these narratives through Wilson’s and Jacobs’ use of the subtlety of characterization (in Wilson’s text through juxtaposing the positive natural qualities of Jane and Frado with

Mrs. Belmont's "vixen" nature) and developing the authority of narration (through the choice of first-person narration in Jacobs' text and narrator asides to the reader in Wilson's text).

While they use literary conventions of the times, Jacobs and Wilson move beyond the times by experimenting with techniques that are now commonly associated with literary realism and naturalism.<sup>45</sup> For example, Frank Norris, a participant in developing the idea and genre of American literary naturalism, claims that literary naturalism explores "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" (qtd. in Pizer's *Literary Criticism* 72). Although Norris' list of characteristics could describe fiction in general, he focuses literary naturalism on darker, primitive aspects of human nature, what Charles Child Walcutt says leads to the "chronicle of despair" (21). If American literary naturalism is a literary experiment, like a scientific experiment, and the writer is an objective observer relating the problems created by hereditary, social, and environmental determinants, Wilson and Jacobs fit this mold by focusing on the institution of slavery, and its control over people's lives, opening many avenues

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45 For characteristics of realism and naturalism see Charles Child Walcutt's *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (1956), Donald Pizer's (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London* (1995) and *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (1998), David E. Shi's *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920* (1995), Kenneth Warren's *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (1993), Phillip Barrish's *American Literary Realism: Critical Theory and Intellectual Prestige, 1880-1995* (2001), and Mary Papke's (ed.) *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism* (2003).

into exploring the darker depths of human nature and behavior and drawing the reader into the examination of human brutality and degradation.

### **Practical Rhetoric – Challenging Traditional Boundaries**

Through argumentation these authors use ethical, emotional, and logical appeals to show that racial prejudice is a socially conditioned response and can be challenged by presenting the opposition's lack of evidence and use of fallacies. Aristotle calls these "artistic" or "intrinsic" proofs – those that could be found by means of rhetorical choices – in contrast to "nonartistic" or "extrinsic" proofs such as witnesses or contracts that are simply used by the speaker, not developed by the author's methods of persuasion. In Book I, Chapter 2, of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes,

Definition of rhetoric as 'the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.' Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. The rhetorician finds the latter kind (viz. witnesses, contracts, and the like) ready to his hand. The former kind he must provide himself; and it has three divisions -- (1) the speaker's power of evincing a personal character which will make his speech credible (ethos); (2) his power of stirring the emotions of his hearers (pathos); (3) his power of proving a truth, or an apparent truth, by means of

persuasive arguments (logos). Hence rhetoric may be regarded as an offshoot of dialectic, and also of ethical (or political) studies. (vii)

Wilson and Jacobs may not have had formal rhetorical training, but were probably exposed to rhetorical patterns in public speeches and sermons. Their rhetorical choices also may have arisen from necessity. Because they were writing from an authorial position limited by social restrictions on gender and race, they knew they needed to argue their case for personal and textual authority to secure consideration for their messages. Wilson and Jacobs explore scientific racism through examples of animalism, references to blood and natural instincts, and appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos in order to gain readers' support and sympathy, then change readers' perceptions based on erroneous scientific and philosophical views.

Are women's rhetorical techniques different from men's? This would be essentializing; however, studies show women writers do use certain rhetorical techniques more than others.<sup>46</sup> In *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, Andrea Lunsford includes several essays on rhetorical strategies in women's writing. Over the past twenty years, relatively recent in the realm of criticism, a burst of scholarship developed from a change in attitudes toward the recovery and legitimatization of women's writing as literary and rhetorical texts.

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<sup>46</sup> See other sources on women's rhetorical strategies including Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* (1997), Shirley Wilson Logan's "We Are Coming": *The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (1999), Molly Meijer Wertheimer's (ed.) *Listening to Their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of*

These methods of analyzing writing open new avenues of understanding and appreciation. Many essays, articles, and books address the connection between rhetorical choices and identity formation for women writers. The formation of identity through the empowerment of refutation and responsibility of public memory is an important point in the development of the rhetoric of African American women's literary narratives.

The convergence of the construction of a literary self, the negotiation of scientific discourse, and the use of particular rhetorical techniques in Wilson's and Jacobs' narratives demands attention. This complicated juncture is a literary and rhetorical *tour de force*. In "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction," Shirley Neuman writes in regard to "theories of the subject as constructed in and by discourses" as a response to "a moment of cultural contestation about the 'self'" (1). This autobiographical theory focuses on the construction of self "as both the historical site and the product of a nexus of cultural discourses," but does not account for a positioning against the dominant discourse.

However, examining rhetorical methods of women writers that position themselves against the dominant discourse makes more noticeable the feminist negotiation of male-dominated discourse, but are there distinctive methods and patterns? In a specific application of rhetorical criticism to another African

American woman's rhetorical choices, Drema R. Lipscomb's essay, "Sojourner Truth: A Practical Public Discourse," presents a study of the oratory and autobiography of Truth, a speaker doubly marginalized for being a woman and black, which leads to the discovery of similar techniques in Wilson's and Jacobs' texts. Studying references to speeches and the "collective" autobiography of the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, Lipscomb presents a systematic analysis of the usual elements of public discourse in an unusual application. This reference to "a practical public discourse" extends to Wilson's and Jacobs' choice to use literary narratives as an entrance to contemporaneous debates about scientific racism. Truth does not specifically argue about scientific theories relating to race, but does address references to animalism. According to Lipscomb, Frances Titus, an eyewitness to Truth's public speaking, claims, "Alluding to the black race, he [another speaker] compared them to monkeys, baboons, and ourangoutangs [sic]." Truth's humorous rejoinder is that she will tend to "dat critter" (237), which, referring back to Smith and Watson's "appeals to authority," exemplifies "disputing the accounts of others" and "settling scores" (10) by turning the hegemonic discourse back on its proponents. Practical rhetoric arose out of necessity and challenged traditional boundaries of discourse for women, but possibly carries more impact than classical patterns because of the passion behind the words.

Again, in regard to Truth's rhetoric but applicable to Wilson's and Jacobs', Lipscomb discusses the historical context of nineteenth-century public discourse.

Lipscomb cites sources that characterize nineteenth-century rhetoric as traditional, classic, and primarily about rights (individual, state, and nation). Although Lipscomb does not specifically mention Truth's addressing contemporaneous scientific discourse, her analysis of Truth's rhetorical strategies applies to this study of Wilson's and Jacobs' narratives. With the intent to affect readers' attitudes and beliefs, Truth develops a unique form of public discourse arguing for the rights of the black community generally and women specifically with humor, irony, rhetorical questions, enthymemes, and legal and moral arguments (234-38). Although some of these techniques are more easily studied in speeches than narratives, Wilson and Jacobs employ several. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in the "Introduction" to *Our Nig*, Harriet Wilson's use of "the most feared and hated epithet by which the very humanity of black people had been demeaned adds to the list of ironies in her endeavor" (xiii). This rhetorical choice forces the reader to question the uses and abuses of language and examine views of humanity based on social constructs. In another example of rhetorical techniques, Wilson uses a series of binaries that cause the reader to question socially constructed meanings when Jim says to Mag: "I's black outside, I know, but I's got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in white skin, or a white heart in a black one?" This example works on many levels to argue against cultural scripts of using white/black as equal to good/bad or superior/inferior. Jim is the good guy, but the fact that he has to claim a white heart for Mag (and possibly Wilson's audience) to understand his

argument shows the depths of associating color with human nature at that time. The desire to affect cultural change through refutation of racially prejudiced views of human nature leads Wilson, Jacobs, and Truth to develop similar rhetorical skills. Wilson and Jacobs also primarily address rights (individual and community) through the power of rhetorical choices. Readers should study how authors make their arguments through persuasion, refutation, or mediation in order to understand the purpose for changing readers' attitudes and beliefs, and, in this case, highlight and explore moments of naturalistic discourse.

### **Communital Rhetoric – Encouraging Identification with Readers**

Establishing community through ethical appeals is a key component to achieving audience awareness of the arguments about natural instincts, scientific racism, and socially sanctioned abuse. Wilson and Jacobs establish ethos by presenting realistic representations of personal and eye witness experiences and creating a women's community of understanding. In her "Preface," Jacobs claimed she does not "care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings" but to "arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse" (5). She would remain "silent" on her own account, only entering public discourse for others. Her identity is collective and she writes "in behalf of my persecuted people!" (5). Jacobs works to establish a community of women, black and white, as part of her ethical appeal. Addressing

the understanding that slavery determined the education and access of many lives, William L. Andrews, in *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*, writes, “*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was written as much to assert the power and potential of women’s community in the South and the North as to denounce the state of commonage under which all reside under the patriarchy of slavery” (253). *Incidents* may have been about the “sisterhood of all women” (Yellin 127), but the reader must remember that white women did not have to refute naturalistic claims about the inferiority of race; however, these authors argue that all women (and men) need to examine the “commonage” of slavery, the role everyone plays in the abuse and degradation of those whose lives have been controlled by a social institution. Valerie Smith, in “‘Loopholes of Retreat’: Architecture and Ideology in Harriet Ann Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” writes of Jacobs, “From within her ellipses and ironies – linguistic narrow spaces – she expresses the complexity of her experience as a black woman” (213), reminding us that the representation of the female slave is a combination of collective and individual experiences, histories, and discourses. However, Jacobs’ linguistic spaces are not limited to representing her experience as a black woman, but include using this experience to participate in public discourses as a means of opening minds.

Similarly, Wilson encourages community when the narrator addresses the audience with direct statements such as “gentle reader” (8, 13) and when she says, “Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader,” and “Enough has

been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid" (130). This technique, directly addressing the audience, establishes a connection between audience and narrator, but Wilson also connects with the reader in the "Preface" when she writes, "I sincerely appeal to my colored brethren universally for patronage, hoping they will no condemn this attempt of their sister to be erudite, but rally around me a faithful band of supporters and defenders"; it seems as if Wilson is only addressing her African American audience; however, earlier in the "Preface," she claims to omit "what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home" – a technique which may work to appease some whites, but also reminds her audience that the effects of slavery even for those who have been freed are worse than described in the book. These confessions and concessions demonstrate the difficulty in trying to reach a variety of audiences, but the rhetorical techniques display the author's willingness to negotiate to achieve agreement on significant issues of reform.

### **Sympathetic Rhetoric – Generating Audience Support**

Once establishing author credibility as part of a community of women, Jacobs and Wilson often used the vocabulary of naturalism and dehumanizing aspects of slavery to dispute racially based scientific arguments. They appealed to pathos as a means of entering public discourse and breaking down racial myths. The power of emotional appeals is especially strong in showing society's lack of understanding of slaves as humans. By presenting examples of public

discourse degrading African Americans to animalism, Jacobs and Wilson elicit sympathy from their readers; however, in a bold move, these authors transfer animalization to whites to the effect of demeaning their behavior. Addressing issues of scientific racism through the use of terms signifying animalization and dehumanization, Wilson and Jacobs, as did Truth, engage hegemonic discourse to their own ends by taking the racist language of animalism and applying it to those using the language. Examples of the animalization of slaves (and Native Americans) pervade the writings of philosophical, anthropological, and scientific studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>47</sup> According to Schiebinger:

Race also became a significant factor in the search for a clear and distinct line dividing humans from brutes. European naturalists tended to describe apes more sympathetically than they did Africans, highlighting the human character of apes while emphasizing the purported simian qualities of Africans. (5)

The most complicated and engaging rhetoric derived from reactions to scientific discourse on race comes from Jacobs. Addressing the idea of “natural” inferiority and creating an appeal to pathos in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs uses the striking wording of acceptance, and then makes the swift change to the presentation of counterexamples in the following commentary:

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<sup>47</sup> A particularly disturbing example comes from *The Old Guard* entitled “Ape-Like Tribes of Men.” Although this article does not appear until 1866, the ideas are based on earlier comments by travelers in Africa (Andrew Battel’s travels in 1625).

Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters. Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior order of beings? What would *you* be, if you had been born and brought up a slave, with generations of slaves for ancestors? I admit that the black man *is* inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. *They* do the work. (38-39)

Jacobs claims heredity is not what keeps the slave in slavery, but the brutality and prejudice of whites (the effects of social determinism). Jacobs clearly reverses the claim of animalism by applying it to whites: “It made me sad to find how the north aped the customs of slavery” (128). Jacobs also compares white slaveholders to snakes when she writes, “But even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than the white men in that community called civilized” (90) and “Hot weather brings out snakes and slaveholders, and I like one class of the venomous creatures as little as I do the other” (136). Her tendency to turn slaveholders’ rhetoric of animalism back on themselves presents a clear picture of her audience – blacks, most likely women, and northern white women sympathetic to abolishing slavery; however, although she

may have felt her audience would understand these examples, Jacobs' rhetoric clearly works to persuade readers to change attitudes toward common scientific beliefs of the times, which means she still saw a need to remind her expected audience of these abuses and hoped her book would reach a wider audience. Enlightenment thinkers' and naturalists' comparisons of Indians and slaves to animals shows a "tyrannical indifference" (Herder) that desensitized many to the plight of blacks in America.<sup>48</sup> In another example of an appeal to pathos, Jacobs addresses the myth that blacks do not have the same natural instincts as whites in the following comment: "It never occurred to Mrs. Flint that slaves could have feelings" (115). Wilson and Jacobs appeal to the emotions of their readers to see slaves as part of a single human race with intellect and feelings just as whites. Jacobs also appeals to the emotions of her northern readers by comparing slaves to machines, the backbone of industrialization, when she writes, "These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend" (12).

Similarly, in Sojourner Truth's narrative about dominant discourse on racial inferiority, the author claims, "[H]e is denied the comforts of life, on the plea that he knows neither the want nor the use of them, and because he is considered to be little more or little *less* than a beast" (15). Truth's appeal to pathos highlights the injustice of likening African Americans to beasts. In one

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<sup>48</sup> In his essay "Organization of the Peoples of Africa," Johann Gottfried von Herder does not argue that blacks are animalistic, but that the Europeans "handle them like cattle" and "when they buy them, distinguish them by the marks of

instance, Olive Gilbert, Truth's amanuensis, writes, "and they were still human, and their human hearts beat within them with true affection" (19). However, although Gilbert works to create an appeal to pathos and refute the animalization of slaves, she does not achieve the ethical appeal of Wilson, Jacobs, and Truth for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, Gilbert does participate in the community of women developed through women's literary narratives, and her arguments work toward the same purpose of changing minds and abolishing slavery.

Another appeal to pathos comes through the authors' references to blood and amalgamation.<sup>49</sup> Much was being written about interracial unions, and the heated debate arises in Wilson's and Jacobs' texts. A possible inspiration for both authors is the story of William Allen and Mary King. In 1853 William G. Allen, the "Coloured Professor" of Classics at New York Central College recorded the details of his love story with Mary King, daughter of a white abolitionist minister in a pamphlet called "The American Prejudice Against Color: An Authentic Narrative, Showing How Easily the Nation Got into an Uproar," which clearly addressed fears of amalgamation and its ties to pseudo-scientific claims of hereditary determinism; however, a troubling aspect of the narrative is Allen's statement that Rev. King was "a fervid preacher of the doctrine, that character is above color" (42). Allen could not even discuss unprejudiced views without

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their teeth" (qtd. in Eze 74).

using prejudiced language. Allen also mentions how the power of the idea of “one drop of the blood of the African” harmed a young woman of his acquaintance, even though she was “in complexion as white as the whitest in the village,” and he says, “Truly, this, our human nature, is extremely strange and vastly inconsistent!” (44). Again, Allen traps himself in the justification for his arguments in racialized language, but today’s reader can understand the difficulties these authors faced in developing rhetorical strategies to remove race from discussions of hereditary determinism.

Wilson’s novel begins with the discussion of Frado’s parents’ interracial union and Jacobs’ Linda Brent has two children with her white lover, Mr. Sands. To appeal to audiences’ emotions about “amalgamation,” Jacobs uses scripture references, internal images of the body, and race ambiguity to refute the questioning and approbation of racial purity:

They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who “made of one blood all nations of men!” And then who *are* Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves? (38-39)

This statement highlights the contradictions between “one blood” and “mixed blood” theories that are later debated in Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces* and

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<sup>49</sup> See the study of discourse on amalgamation in James Kinney’s *Amalgamation! Race, Sex, and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-century American Novel*.

Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (see chapter two of this dissertation), and shows the same conflicts William Allen encountered in using racialized language to battle racial prejudice. Jacobs' use of rhetorical questions and italics emphasizes the variety of possible answers from her various audiences. Her we/they binary also emphasizes her desire to draw her audience into a community of readers who identify with her arguments.

Jacobs' quotation also shows the conflict within theories about naturalism and naturalistic novels which try to separate the natural from the presence and influence of the divine (see more on this topic in chapter three of this dissertation). These texts, although realistically and scientifically based, still connect the natural and divine.<sup>50</sup> Later naturalistic texts that meet more characteristics of the genre of American literary naturalism make a more concentrated effort to faithfully represent nature, exclusive of and in opposition to the spiritual nature of man and divinity of God; however, some scholars consider the connection between nature and religion to be a "new naturalism," less reductive and mechanistic (Griffin 83), even though the nineteenth-century women writers in this study were making the connection over a hundred years ago, and, again, should be given credit for their rhetorical techniques.

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<sup>50</sup> According to Kenneth Burke, "Naturalism pure and simple sought to eliminate the rôle of divine participation completely, as with the 'God-function' implicit in the idea of 'progressive evolution,' where God now took on a 'historicist' rôle" (*Philosophy* 115).

In another example negotiating the public discourse of mixed-race marriages, and speaking of the union between her parents, Wilson's Frado writes,

He prevailed; they married. You can philosophize, gentle reader, upon the impropriety of such unions, and preach dozens of sermons on the evils of amalgamation. Want is a more powerful philosopher and preacher. Poor Mag. She has sundered another bond which held her to her fellows. She has descended another step down the ladder of infamy. (13)

The narrator's voice begins in a dry, objective tone, and then reaches a crescendo of sarcasm by the end of the quotation. The dramatic stacking of negative terms like "poor," "sundered," "descended," and "infamy" actually has the opposite effect. Instead of evoking sympathy for Mag, the reader's sympathy goes to Jim, which bears out later in the text, after Jim dies, and the reader sees that "poor Mag" is willing to give away her mulatto "devils" (16), giving Frado to the Bellmonts. Referring to Jim and Mag's union, Wilson calls attention to popular opinion and the use of sermon rhetoric to argue against mixed marriages, but uses the rhetorical technique of appropriating the language of the oppressor to satirize oppression. Her technique is subtle but biting. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. claims that the reference to interracial marriage "did nothing to aid the book's circulation in the North or the South" and posits that was possibly the cause for the book's disappearance "for well over a century from the boldness of her

themes" ("Introduction," xxix). Even though Frado comes from this "amalgamation" of a kind black man and a selfish white woman, Wilson clearly celebrates Frado's hybridity and "natural temperament" through Frado's ability to remain playful and mirthful "amid such constant toil" (53), alluding to the fact that she received her disposition from her father, not her mother.

Adding to our understanding of African American women writers' rhetorical techniques applied to arguments about natural instincts, Sojourner Truth's narrative also addresses the key concepts of "blood" and "body" as areas of identification. Gilbert, Truth's editor, clearly references eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel narrative writers' and Enlightenment thinkers' comments on the environmental effects on biology, but also ties them to divine creation. In Truth's narrative, amid the struggle between the authorial voices of Truth and Olive Gilbert, Gilbert makes exotic references to the black body and Christ when she writes of Truth, "Doubtless, her blood is fed by those tropical fires which had slumberingly crept through many generations, but now awaken in her veins; akin to those rivers which mysteriously disappear in the bosom of the desert, and unexpectedly burst forth in springs of pure and living water" (vi). This struggle plays out in interesting reversals and discussions of scientific and naturalistic rhetoric and religious references. For example, in the "Preface," Olive Gilbert uses Herbert Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest" to exemplify Truth's "longevity" (vi). The material body is an important aspect of identity construction and a theme central to literary and scientific naturalism. Shirley

Neuman, in "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction," claims:

The body, defined as 'natural,' functioned as the binary opposite and as a metaphor by which the spiritual was understood; it remained necessary to this understanding at the same time that it had, necessarily, to be transcended in philosophy and effaced in representation. (138)

This duality of the body as sites of physical instincts and desires and metaphysical thought plays out in the texts between realistic moments of physical suffering and philosophical discussions of human existence as one race. Jacobs and Wilson used brutally realistic imagery of beating and whipping the body to take hold of audience emotions; however, these examples were often related through an objective, journalistic voice, another characteristic of literary realism and naturalism. Amid sentimental and even melodramatic moments in the narratives, the descriptions of brutality and torture are told in the most realistic and least subjective voices of the narratives, which make the effect on the audience's emotions even stronger. For example, Wilson writes, "No sooner was he out of sight than Mrs. B. and Mary commenced beating her inhumanly; then propping her mouth open with a piece of wood, shut her up in a dark room, without any supper" (35). Wilson continues to show the degradation of blacks to the level of animals as a product of social and environmental determinism instead of a hereditary regression by calling attention to the "inhumanity" of

some whites. For Wilson, these assaults could not deprive Frado of her natural tendencies: “Her jollity was not to be quenched by whipping or scolding” (38). Even though “jollity” could also be seen as a part of racist ideology, Wilson seems to be arguing that natural tendencies of personality and behavior (hereditary determinants) exist but are clearly separate from race. In several instances, Wilson works to discredit Mrs. Bellmont and settle the score by reversing roles of feminine and racial inferiority, highlighting Mrs. Bellmont’s “vixen nature” (40). These examples continue to elicit sympathy for Frado and anger toward Mrs. Bellmont. Since Wilson’s arguments work to separate race from hereditary determinism, the community of women she establishes in the beginning remains intact even though she discredits Mrs. Bellmont. In the “Introduction” to *Our Nig*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., writes,

By dividing her white characters, of the same family and the same class, into absolute categories of evil and good, Harriet E. Wilson was allowing for more complexity in her analysis of the nature of oppression than generally did, or perhaps could have, those novelists who wrote either to defend or to attack the institution of slavery. (xliv)

Again, this strategy by Wilson (and Jacobs) to remove race from the topic of hereditary determinism allows her to show the good and evil in any human being regardless of race. Wilson’s rhetorical gesture argues for an understanding of Frado’s elevation based on “*natural equalities*” and Mrs. Bellmont’s

degradation based on “*natural* differences” (Schiebinger 10) for the purpose of paradoxically “disputing the accounts of others” while “inventing desirable futures among others” (Smith and Watson 10). This complex interweaving of identification and division works to equalize humanity based on individual behavior instead of cultural scripts.

### **Emancipatory Rhetoric – Breaking the Boundaries of Social Discourse**

Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, in “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” summarizes this “dialectic of identity and difference” for black female writers when she argues:

Unlike Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” model configuring a white male poetic tradition shaped by an adversarial dialogue between literary fathers and sons (as well as the appropriation of this model by Joseph Skerrett and others to discuss black male writers), and unlike Gilbert and Gubar’s “anxiety of authorship” model informed by the white woman writer’s sense of “dis-ease” within a white patriarchal tradition, the present model configures a tradition of black women writers generated less by neurotic anxiety or dis-ease than by an emancipatory impulse which freely engages both hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse. (264-65)

Refutation is an “emancipatory” rhetorical tool, which allows the racialized, gendered subject to engage in hegemonic discourse to her own ends. These

writers resist racial and gender limitations imposed by social and pseudo-scientific hegemonic constructs, which marginalized the intellectual and leadership abilities of black women and worked as a catalyst to writers like Wilson and Jacobs to establish a community of women in order to address issues of race. Wilson and Jacobs use narrative and ethical appeals in order to gain audience support, then appropriate the language of hegemonic, regulatory discourse to change commonly held prejudicial views.

As a key rhetorical strategy, Wilson and Jacobs critique the kinds of evidence or lack of evidence of the opposition's argument. Through Linda Brent's narration, Jacobs claims, "[T]here was no justification for difference of treatment" (138); then she adds the "lack of prejudice in England" (144) as important counterevidence to some Americans' racial views. Wilson also demonstrates the fallacies of white slaveholders' arguments through Mrs. Bellmont's contradiction when she claims that people of color "were incapable of elevation" (30), while at the same time she must use physical force "to subdue" Frado and "keep her down" (33). These contradictions stand out in this battle between blacks' elevation and whites' manipulation.

Jacobs' narrator loudly proclaims that the system of slavery has the power to degrade lives: "She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies" (17). Jacobs contrasts her refutation of the myths about natural instincts and black family relations with her understanding

of the power of social and environmental forces beyond one's control. Jacobs claims, "I like the straightforward course, and am always reluctant to resort to subterfuges. So far as my ways have been crooked, I charge them all upon slavery (130). Jacobs shifts the focus to the lack of control slaves had over their own lives from hereditary determinism to social determinism. This move is significant in the battle to eradicate prejudicial views based on race.

Dialogues between characters in published narratives become scenes of public discourse and part of the ongoing conversations in society. Although the following example of dialogue is part of "a confidential interview," the characters' views about naturalistic racism become part of public discourse. In regard to James and Abby, Wilson writes, "They would discuss the prevalent opinion of the public, that people of color are really inferior; incapable of cultivation and refinement. They would glance at the qualities of Nig, which promised so much if rightly directed" (73). The ironic technique of "praise for blame" in this sentence calls into question who has the right to direct Frado's development and why whites thought only their direction of a black person's natural qualities would be positive. As part of Wilson's promotion of positive public discourse, she writes in James's voice, "I assured her that mother's views were by no means general; that in our part of the country there were thousands upon thousands who favored the elevation of her race" (76). The recurring theme of elevation works to refute the scientific discourse on racial inferiority. From Wilson and Jacobs' time through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

the literature of racial uplift is an important element of literature by African Americans.<sup>51</sup> In later texts, such as Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*, many characters argue positions against scientific racism through rhetoric of racial uplift.<sup>52</sup> Many other later examples of realistic and naturalistic texts present both positive and negative attitudes toward racial issues. The continued need to remove race from discussion of hereditary determinism highlights the racism of naturalism found in later texts considered part of American literary naturalism, including racial and ethnic references in texts by Jack London and Frank Norris. Examples of negative representations include the "Chinee" in Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* and John Thornton's dog named "Nig" in the London's *Call of the Wild*. David Shi, in *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture*, calls attention to the Anglo-Saxon racial superiority of naturalistic writers like Norris. Shi also comments on the "democratic" nature of realism to address "real" needs and problems of society at all levels, and he shows how naturalist writers attempt to put the "lower" classes of humans under the microscope for scientific observation, but this "democratic" attitude has not always covered racial, gendered, and class conditioned responses. These authors rarely use rhetorical gestures like Jacobs and Wilson to address scientific racism or racialized

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51 See studies of literature of racial uplift including Jacqueline Moore's *The Struggle for Racial Uplift*, Joy James's *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, and August Meier's (et al) *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience (Blacks in the New World)*.

52 Examples of rhetoric of racial uplift in *Contending Forces* include positions taken by Mrs. Willis and Sappho in regard to the education and development of black women and the debates between the characters representing Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois.

representations. Writing for Jacobs and Wilson was a rhetorical move to change the attitudes of their readers toward marginalized Americans.

Also addressing the discriminatory rhetoric in naturalistic novels, Jennifer Fleissner, in *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* uses feminist and psychoanalytical criticism to expose areas of the neglected study of gender in American literary naturalism. Fleissner claims that critics overemphasize the “manly-men” nature of naturalism and do not focus on what she calls “the work of womanhood” in naturalistic texts. Although Wilson’s and Jacobs’ focus has been on race more than gender, this “manly-men” nature of naturalism exemplifies a brand of continued racism that Jacobs and Wilson tried to eradicate. In *McTeague* and *The Octopus*, Norris often objectifies race and ethnicity through signs of heredity and labeling, creating distance between the reader and the character. Marginalized individuals include the Indian, the Spanish-Mexican girls, and the Portuguese. Some ethnic characters like Vanamee, from *The Octopus*, have substantial roles but still work in the realm of stereotype, such as the Eastern mystic. Readers must be ever mindful of the neutralizing nature of written conventions and literary forms. Wilson and Jacobs, forty years before Norris’s *McTeague*, wrote about scientific racism in order to break down these stereotypes and use narrative form for the rhetorical purpose of changing cultural attitudes toward naturalistic views of race.

## Conclusion

In the spirit of adding a variety of texts to the study of realism and naturalism, Elizabeth Ammons, in “Expanding the Canon of American Realism,” begins to address the problem of neglected texts by including Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Legends*, Pauline Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*, and Sui Sin Far’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (100). However, these examples only examine the presentation of themes about naturalism, not the participation in contemporaneous scientific discourse or a rhetorical movement. Zitkala-Sa’s and Sui Sin Far’s texts are autobiographical narratives like Wilson’s and Jacobs’; however, Zitkala-Sa and Far “fit” more into an ecocritical study of naturalism (which will be discussed more fully in chapter four of this dissertation) than in a study of the ways they negotiate scientific and social discourse about human nature.<sup>53</sup>

In another modern reference to Wilson and a compelling connection between Wilson’s protest rhetoric and Richard Wright’s naturalistic fiction (*Black Boy*, written a little less than one hundred years later than *Our Nig*), Joyce Ann Joyce claims,

Just as it was natural for Harriet Wilson, Frances E. W. Harper, and William Wells Brown to adopt the sentimental methodology of their day to delineate the ramifications of slavery, it was equally natural for Richard Wright to choose the mode of naturalistic

fiction to describe the evils of racism. Both the literature of protest and naturalistic fiction – a particular mode of protest – focus on society's mistreatment of an individual and of a particular group of individuals." (10)

Although Joyce does not acknowledge the naturalistic elements in Wilson's work and clearly places *Our Nig* in the genre of sentimental literature, she highlights the protest nature of naturalistic fiction that Wilson and Jacobs should be given credit for pioneering. Joyce adds,

From Harriet Wilson and William Wells Brown to Richard Wright and Toni Morrison, Black writers, to varying degrees and through diverse techniques, have always predominantly concerned themselves with their relation to the dominant culture. For the Black American novelist has always protested. But because of the emotional and historical side effects of racism, the mere mention of "protest literature" or provocative subject matter that highlights the lives of Blacks solicits an entire chain of programmed responses that obscures the subtleties of technique and inhibits fresh, stimulating discourse on works by Black writers. (8)

Jacobs and Wilson used convincing rhetorical techniques to remove race from discussions of human behavior, breaking down dominant racial arguments (that

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53 American literary naturalism has many facets and one significant difference is the treatment of nature (ecocriticism) compared to the study of human nature (hereditary, social, and environmental determinism and chance). Zitkala-Sa's,

were upholding the institution of slavery) and using narratives to emancipate the voices of the marginalized.

## Chapter Two

### “Strangely Tangled Threads”: Negotiating Hereditary Determinism, Social Determinism, and Cultural Fears in Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* and Pauline Hopkins’ *Contending Forces*

“Yes; there are strangely tangled threads in the lives of many colored families—I use the word ‘colored’ because these stories occur mostly among those of mixed blood” (*Contending Forces* 373-74).

As Harriet Wilson and Harriet Jacobs entered public discourse on the nature of humans through literary narratives before them, Helen Hunt Jackson, in *Ramona* (1884),<sup>54</sup> and Pauline Hopkins, in *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900) also negotiated theories about hereditary and social determinism through rhetorical gestures indicating their desire to affect individual perspectives about women’s and racial issues. By using patterns of narration, dialogue, and public speaking situations to draw multiple audiences into the debates, Hopkins and Jackson make arguments about human nature based on blood, behavior, and social forces beyond one’s control. Through characters’ and narrators’ competing voices, the authors try to isolate factors of influence on human behavior (animal, moral, and intellectual)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> All quotations from *Ramona* are from the 2001 Signet Classic version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>55</sup> See studies that argue “as to the nature and origin of the moral and intellectual faculties of man” (Wallace vii) by Wallace (1891), Combe (1846), Hare (1876), and Gall (1835). Hare and Hare write, “One of the most important, but one of the most difficult things for a powerful mind is, to be its own master. Minerva should always be at hand to restrain Achilles from blindly following his impulses and appetites, even those which are moral and intellectual, as well as those

for the purpose of dispelling prejudicial views about race and gender, and then hypothesizing their own hybrid theories about determinism.<sup>56</sup>

By putting characters' actions and words under the microscope, the authors exhibit techniques of scientific study common to the repertoire of nineteenth-century naturalistic writing.<sup>57</sup> The characters participate in the experiment – what will the blood (hereditary determinism) tell about their natures? How much does their family (nurture) and social situation determine their behavior? Why do some characters inherit mainly positive traits while others only negative? Since the result of the experiment is related to theories of biological and social determinism and the struggle for survival, the reader needs to weigh the characters' and narrators' words as well as intentions to decide which overall argument the author asserts. From a complex arrangement of rhetorical patterns, Hopkins and Jackson advance several conclusions about determinism, balancing humans' lack of control in the face of impersonal social and environmental forces with the power of the blood, heart, and mind to influence behavior. "Social" and "environmental" influences are both external but distinct. Social determinism in its purest form argues social interactions and constructs (customs, education, etc.) determine behavior (as opposed to

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which are animal and sensual" (240). Nineteenth century studies exploring human nature in regard to animal, moral, and intellectual impulses abound and would have been available to Hopkins and Jackson in books and magazines.

<sup>56</sup> As Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson did before them, Hopkins and Jackson continue to examine hereditary determinism through references to what the "blood" tells about human behavior. Hopkins and Jackson contrast or blend hereditary determinism with the controlling aspects of social institutions, but also acknowledge the element of chance in the chain of events in each person's life.

biological or environmental factors). Environmental determinism relies on environmental conditions (climate and geography) rather than social conditions to determine behavior. Environmental determinism has often served to justify racial prejudice and imperialism. References to blood in these novels usually indicate theories associated with hereditary determinism, which highlight genetic traits as determinants of human behavior. The negotiation between two races, or any mixture of hereditary determinism, reminds readers that appeals to fear reinforce racial stereotypes.

Though feminist and racial issues are explored in literary discussions about these novels, critics often overlook the connection to American literary naturalism.<sup>58</sup> Through a careful study of the ways these authors present competing voices in the debates about deterministic theories, I find compelling examples that should be considered part of literary naturalism studies. Reading fiction as rhetoric locates instances in which narrators and characters make arguments about human nature, and authors use rhetorical choices to encourage audience identification with particular theories. Since the “speaker” (character or narrator) of the theory affects the way the argument is received by the implied audience, the authors make choices that encourage identification with some (reliable) and division from others (unreliable).<sup>59</sup> In that case, the rhetorical

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57 See examples from Stephen Crane’s *Red Badge of Courage* (1899) and Frank Norris’s *McTeague* (1899).

58 See Bergman, Cassidy, Evans, and Nerad, which examine race and gender in relation to domestic, sexual, political, and legal aspects of the texts.

59 See theories about narrator and character speech acts by Chatman and Booth.

advantage depends mainly on the speaker. According to Aristotle, in *Rhetoric*, “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible” (7). The ways the authors establish a speaker’s ethos are affected by the narrator’s and other characters’ attitudes toward the speaker and through the constraints of the situation. The debates through dialogue in these novels are either public (the Sewing-Circle and the American Colored League meeting in *Contending Forces*) or private (discussions with family or friends). Although the sewing-circle is part of the private, domestic sphere, I consider this instance a public speaking moment because Mrs. Willis, “keen in her analysis of human nature,” is using “parlor entertainments where an admission fee of ten cents was collected from every patron” (141) as a platform for her agendas since “the parlor was crowded” with young ladies (143). When the characters negotiate theories about human nature, they are either prejudiced against mixing races or in favor of the hybridity of races and cultures. When the narrators negotiate theories about hereditary or social determinism, the authors’ choices of narratorial techniques either create a sense of sympathy or skepticism toward the characters and their situations, which leads the reader to identify with the mixed-race characters, mistrust the prejudiced characters, and begin to understand the complexities of cultural scripts and socially determined behaviors. This may sound fairly straightforward, but for Hopkins and Jackson, in the late nineteenth century, the negotiations of racialized language and rhetorical choices that encouraged reader

participation in the scientific, social, and cultural debates were often problematic and ambiguous. Hopkins and Jackson had to find ways to negotiate competing voices through a variety of rhetorical situations to present their reformist visions.

As the characters or narrators negotiate commonly held pseudo-scientific and social theories about human nature, readers need to be aware of the complex combination of critical positions and the accompanying problems. The idea of negotiation as a model for emphasizing “contentious middle grounds” (Orr 129) applies to liminal spaces these women writers navigate between categories of heritable influences for characters (black, white, Mexican, Indian, Scottish, and Spanish), kinds of traditionally male-dominated public discourse (science, philosophy, and politics) and kinds of determinism (internal and external). Elaine Neil Orr, in *Subject to Negotiation*, states, “The authors I study are positioned between competing and unequal ‘worlds,’ both or all of which contribute to their vision; and the writers’ negotiations of authority and history are published through their characters’ thinking across contested lines” (23). In addition to characters’ competing voices, Orr also demonstrates the importance of negotiating “narrative alliances” (25) between “male and female occupations, domestic and public space, and the rhetorical modalities of sympathy and critical judgment” (28). Before examining characters’ voices and “narrative alliances,” Hopkins’ and Jackson’s “negotiations of authority and history” need to be investigated to better understand the origins of the scientific, social, and political

debates of the nineteenth century that were infected by racial prejudice and that required negotiation and reform.

Hopkins and Jackson were exposed to a variety of arguments about human nature and natural laws throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, including those by Darwin, Spencer, Combe, etc.<sup>60</sup> These conversations are an important part of the debates in the novels and are employed to protest racial views of hereditary determinism and change minds toward socially abusive institutions. Although this is not a biographical study of the authors, it is important to note that both Jackson and Hopkins tackled the reform issues highlighted in their fiction in additional ways. Through their public speaking and writing campaigns, they heard and developed arguments about the issues, leading to the debates about determinism which appear in their novels. Before her 1879 encounter with a presentation on Ponca Indian injustices, Jackson had shown little interest in minority affairs.<sup>61</sup> After that event, Jackson took up the cause, wrote many letters and *A Century of Dishonor*, a collection of government records on Indian affairs and the basis for *Ramona*, and became a commissioner of Indian Affairs for California's Mission Indians (Dorris vii-ix). Michael Dorris, in an "Introduction" to *Ramona* claims, "*Ramona* was propaganda. It was meant

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<sup>60</sup> As noted in the "Introduction" to this dissertation, periodical literature on human nature and natural laws in the nineteenth century is plentiful. Industrialization, evolutionary science, social Darwinism, and other philosophies of the times led to many cultural, social, and religious changes. Jackson said she "devoted a great deal of time to Intellectual Philosophy" (qtd. in Kate Phillips 55). By annotating Hopkins' non-fiction works, Ira Dwoikin tries to identify Hopkins' periodical readings and to reconstruct her library (xxxix).

<sup>61</sup> See Michael Dorris' "Introduction" to *Ramona* (viii-ix).

to have a political as well as a literary impact, and it succeeded on both fronts” (xvi). In this effort to call attention to the treatment of Native Americans, Jackson employed actual events related to her during her travels in California in the novel,<sup>62</sup> which contributes to the realism of the narratives.

Through connections among characters of various races in *Ramona*, arguments about hereditary and social determinism mainly arise from prejudicial views of “mixing blood” and how one’s blood or social position determines one’s behavior in both positive or negative ways. The characters’ views are sometimes openly challenged, sometimes ambiguously questioned, and sometimes conventionally accepted, leading the reader to sift through the mixture of positions to draw conclusions about the whole. These contradictions begin as soon as the story opens in the household of Señora Gonzaga Moreno and her son, Felipe, whose lives have been affected by “the Fates” of the environment and waves of “tossed destinies” of their Spanish and Mexican cultures.<sup>63</sup> Jackson sets up the contradictions among arguments about biological determinism (and their connections to race) through the paradoxical nature of Señora Moreno whose physical appearance and voice are “amiable and indolent, like her race,” but which really obscure an “imperious and passionate nature” (1-2). Also, through the young woman, Ramona, who was put into Señora

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>63</sup> Donald Pizer and others (see Mitchell, Campbell, and Papke) also list chance and fate as common themes of American literary naturalism: “The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance” (*Realism and Naturalism* 11).

Moreno's keeping years ago by her sister upon that woman's death, her complex hereditary history allows for discussions of commonly held views about race and ethnicity. Ramona's history is complicated and Señora Moreno cannot love her because she did not want to deal with "such alien and mongrel blood" (30).<sup>64</sup> As the story goes, the Señora's sister, Ramona Gonzaga, had been engaged to a Scottish man, Angus Phail, but she married Señor Ortegna instead. Bereft of the woman he loved, Angus married an Indian woman and later fathered a daughter whom he named Ramona, after his only love. Twenty-five years after their broken engagement, Angus went to Señora Ortegna and asked her to raise his baby as her own. After Señora Ortegna's death, Ramona grew up in Señora Moreno's household, never treated badly and loved by all but Señora Moreno. But when Ramona fell in love and married Alessandro, an Indian, more discussions of what blood "tells" about behavior and identity increased among the characters.

Throughout *Ramona*, the commentary on heredity, environment, and fate comes from competing voices through patterns of rhetorical situations, which develop from a dialectical debate into a hybrid theory of what Charles Child Walcutt calls the "divided stream" of naturalism ("New Ideas" 289). Walcutt writes, "Like the critical controversy over optimism and pessimism, it is evidence of the divided stream – of a profound uncertainty as to whether science liberates

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<sup>64</sup> This quotation is from the narrator, but functions as a narrated monologue in Señora Moreno's voice. According to Dorrit Cohn, in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, a narrated monologue "belongs

the human spirit or destroys it" ("New Ideas" 294). Jackson purposefully contradicts Señora Moreno's pessimistic views of the hereditary determinism of "bad blood" with the virtuous behavior of Ramona and specifically attributes certain positive traits to Ramona's Indian blood. Who decides what is good or bad about the blood? What traits are natural while others are socially conditioned or environmentally determined? The complexity of the debate about human nature's positive and negative traits highlights particular rhetorical patterns exemplifying theories of audience identification,<sup>65</sup> which lead readers to identify with certain characters' and their worldviews instead of others. After locating specific instances of commentary on hereditary and social determinism in the texts, I examined each speaker's (narrator's or character's) motivations and attitudes for racist, reformist, or other views. Jackson and Hopkins purposefully employ competing voices with positive and negative associations to hereditary determinism, in order to push readers to examine their prejudices or the supposed scientific basis for their opinions; however, those with racist views (Señora Moreno and Jim Farrar in *Ramona* and Rev. John Thomas and Bill Sampson in *Contending Forces*), receive rhetorical treatment that negatively situates their messages, leading readers to turn against their arguments and favor the views of reform characters (Felipe and Aunt Ri in *Ramona* and Mrs. Willis and Dora and Will Smith in *Contending Forces*); however, to say the two

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to a character's, rather than to a narrator's, mental domain" (494).

<sup>65</sup> See Burke's theories of identification and division or Booth's narratorial distancing.

categories are distinct is problematic; even the reform characters sometimes use racialized language to make their points.

Like Jackson, Pauline Hopkins exhibited a desire to break down racial stereotypes and explore, through non-fiction as well as fiction writing, ways that heredity and society determine human behavior. Hopkins' reform agenda included writing letters and articles for the *Colored American Magazine*, which challenged commonly held prejudicial views. During her time at the magazine (1900-1904), Hopkins wrote two biographical series that presented sketches of African American men and women of distinction: "Famous Women of the Negro Race" and "Famous Men of the Negro Race."<sup>66</sup> Like Jackson's recounting events affecting Native Americans, Hopkins employs real-life accounts of the horrors faced by African Americans of the period,<sup>67</sup> which, again, contributes to the realism of the novels, leading to rhetorical moments of debate about naturalistic theories, moments which sometimes overshadow the romance plot of the narrative, highlighting the importance of the rhetorical techniques and goals. The same issues Hopkins confronts in *Contending Forces* appear even more determinedly addressed in her later non-fiction writing. In *Furnace Blasts*, Hopkins writes,

For all the benefits then, that we dream of enjoying through the propagation of civilization, we must depend upon science and

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<sup>66</sup> See Bloom (*Black American* 44).

evolution. Society and moral practices are growths, not manufactures, and improvement must come to us through the laws of social growth. Spencer tells us, "The end which the statesman should keep in view as higher than all other ends is the formation of character." In the study of the cause and effect reaching into all departments of human life, we find "Combe's Constitution" indispensable, and would recommend it to all young people seeking for the light in the darkness of the present. While marriage is founded on love, that love must be controlled and guided by the fundamental moral laws. The future of the Negro as an individual and as a race lies within the hand of science, and by a just regard for the natural laws we can defy the specious reasoning which now argues so successfully against Negro manhood and womanhood.

*(Daughter of the Revolution 210)*

*Furnace Blasts* consisted of two essays under Hopkins' pseudonym, J. Shirley Shadrach, and were published in the *Colored American Magazine* in 1903. This complex section of the essay extends Hopkins' arguments about the connections among society, morality, and science debated in *Contending Forces*.

In *Contending Forces*, contemporaneous issues about race and heredity center on the lives of those who have "mixed blood," Will Smith, his sister, Dora,

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<sup>67</sup> See the "Preface" to *Contending Forces* for Hopkins' statement about where to find the proof for the real-life events in the story (14).

his mother, Mrs. Smith, and his friend of questionable character, John Langley. When Will falls in love with Sappho Clark, he must contend with the racial past that haunts her. The secrets and questions about Langley's and Sappho's characters form the backdrop for the debates about biological and social determinism (within the frame story of the Pollocks and Montforts, ancestors to Langley and Will respectively). In *Black American Women Fiction Writers*, Harold Bloom claims,

This historical romance of a love affair between a mulatto, Will Smith, and an octoroon, Sappho Clark, is a powerful examination of the life of black women within white society, and touches upon many fundamental issues of black social life. Although it employs many of the conventions of the popular sentimental romance of the period, it probes such concerns as the sexual exploitation of black women, the searing effects of slavery, the need for strong family ties, and other matters. (43-44).

Some of the "other matters" actually take center stage when examining the novel from a rhetorical perspective. Comparing the characters' and narrator's arguments about hereditary and social forces beyond one's control shows that the author's reform agenda is the motivation for writing the romance. The romance plot is a form of feminist negotiation and is the entrance for the female writer into the scientific and cultural debates of the times. Sappho's background allows Hopkins to address the many ways black women's lives were determined

by human nature and cultural scripts. In *Women in Chains*, Venetria Patton writes that Hopkins reveals “the exploitation of black women in order to declare that the perceived promiscuity of black women does not come from within, but rather has been thrust upon them” (83). This is an important distinction between internal and external determinants for people’s lives. Hopkins argues that black women were not promiscuous because of hereditary determinations based on race; it is not even an issue of promiscuity, but an issue of labeling.<sup>68</sup> Hegemonic discourse of the times used this label to justify the brutalization of black women. Although most women’s lives of the times were constrained, Hopkins presents New Woman characters like Sappho (especially since she must overcome this cultural labeling), and Dora to illustrate the hybridization of characters and cultures; according to Hopkins, when human nature, social forces, and intellectual and moral development come together, the positive balances the negative if people are willing to fight the forces against them.

### **Contradictory Rhetoric – Engaging Hegemonic Discourse**

The most conflicting views about determinism in the novels arise from arguments about heredity and race. Through narration and dialogue about determinism, Jackson and Hopkins critique commonly held racialized views about blood as a determinant of human nature and behavior; however, their

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<sup>68</sup> In *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, K. Anthony Appiah examines racial labeling in regard to racial identity and identification.

presentations of these views are not without problems. The authors present the opposing sides in the public debates through competing views of various characters and the narrators. In *Reading Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona*, Karen E. Ramirez examines "*Ramona's Treatment of 'Race'*" when she writes, "Jackson criticizes such deterministic racism through the incoming Americans who indiscriminately think Indians 'are all the same'" (25). The Señora's voice conflicts with Ramona's, Felipe's, Father Salvierderra's, and Aunt Ri's; however, as Ramirez shows, this debate is not clear-cut. While Señora Moreno remains firm in her prejudicial views of the negative traits of "mixed blood," Ramirez shows the fluctuating debate within Ramona about her Indian heritage and within the story about Ramona's biological and adopted heritages. Although "blood" does not foretell negative character traits for Ramona, as Señora Moreno claims, Ramona does at times refer to herself as a "true Indian woman" (151). However, she allows her name to fluctuate between Ramona Ortégna (her adoptive mother's name) and Majella Phail (her Indian name from Alessandro, meaning Wood-Dove, and her father's Scottish surname), but the story ends with her marrying Felipe Moreno and her name becoming Ramona Moreno, leaving her Indian heritage behind and moving to Mexico. Is the final analysis a celebration of hereditary hybridity and the triumph of moral choice in the midst of socially constrained lives? Ramirez claims: "In the end, though, having Ramona come across as Californio, not Indian, does diminish Jackson's critique of race-based antagonism against Indians" and, even more disturbing,

“Ramona’s exceptional qualities are those shared with Jackson’s Anglo-American readers, and since they set Ramona above the rest of the Indians, they reconfirm readers’ belief in their own cultural and racial superiority” (28). Referring to several other scholarly articles on the problematic presentation of Ramona as a “cross-cultural, multiracial character,” Ramirez leaves her readers questioning the power of the novel’s arguments to create sympathy with the Indians (28-29).<sup>69</sup> I argue the rhetorical goal is not only to sympathize with one character over another, but, as with Hopkins’ final argument, to celebrate hybridity, which is significant to the call for social reform based on identification with certain hybrid characters (Sappho, Dora, and Ramona).

The same problems of using racialized language to combat racism exist in Hopkins’ narrative. Scholars Julie Nerad, in “‘So strangely interwoven’: The Property of Inheritance, Race, and Sexual Morality in Pauline Hopkins’ *Contending Forces*,” and John Nickel, in “Eugenics and the Fiction of Pauline Hopkins,” examine Hopkins’ representation of biological determinism and the resulting ambiguities. Nerad claims, “Many readers have criticized Hopkins for creating – as did so many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers – Black protagonists who are visibly white” (364). Nerad continues:

Admittedly, this strategy fails to present positive dark-skinned Black characters, but it succeeds at destabilizing biological race categories. Although the novel rejects the U.S. system of

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<sup>69</sup> See McKee, Gutiérrez-Jones, and Martí.

biologically based race classifications, it does not altogether reject the notion of biological inheritance . . . . In fact, the novel represents many traits, including intelligence, morality, and character, as inheritable. (365-365)

Nickel concurs, "Hopkins' promotion of eugenics for racial uplift, however, was problematic. Given the racial, gender, and class prejudices of contemporary eugenics, her assimilationist agenda had the unavoidable effect of reinforcing its demeaning logic" (47). Although these sources point out the ambiguity of the rhetoric, they do agree that both authors sought to negotiate theories of biological determinism; however, they do not cite the significance of the rhetorical choices the authors make to create identification or division with the reader toward certain characters' positions, which place them in the rhetorical movement associated with American literary naturalism.

Whether narration or dialogue, the speaker is either reliable or unreliable, which affects the way the reader processes the argument. The narrators in Jackson's and Hopkins' narratives participate in the debates about hereditary determinism, but when their purposes are examined, racialized language is a clue toward a sarcastic tone, and the language of racial uplift is a clue toward a sympathetic tone; however, both kinds of discourse attach significance to hereditary determinism as laws of human nature for all, whether black, white, or Indian.

## Competing Rhetoric – Challenging Ideological Forces

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of novelistic discourse are particularly applicable to this chapter because the rhetorical moments in these texts are highly charged ideological utterances. All the voices coming together through "stylistically individualized speech of characters" and "stylization of various forms of [. . .] narration" create a sense of heteroglossia (340).<sup>70</sup> Bakhtin writes,

The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its "languages." (340)

The rhetorical situations are chosen with intention, and Bakhtin argues that discourse is "a living impulse," and we should not study it without examining the intentions (348). Hopkins and Jackson make many rhetorical choices – public or private situations, narratorial or dialogic moments, covert or overt moves – that affect the success of the message and the speaker in winning other characters or the implied audience to his or her corner of the ideological arena. Bakhtin writes,

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional

unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (341)

For Bakhtin, “there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms – words and forms that can belong to ‘no one’” (349). The narrators and characters appropriate the language based on their intentions. As Bakhtin argues, “And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property” (349). Language is “ideologically saturated” (Bakhtin 341) and the conflicting voices in Jackson’s and Hopkins’ novels work to have their ideological views heard. This is where Burke and Bakhtin come together:

Bakhtin says these utterances intersect with centrifugal and centripetal forces, “of unification and disunification” (344), what Burke calls identification and division. Are these characters’ satirical or sympathetic comments aimed at opposing the official language of the times? By using dialogue to negotiate among theories about biological and social determinism, the authors highlight the complexity of overlapping ideas and identities to find “a middle voice” (Orr 47) to forge relationships with multiple audiences. The authors create identification and division (through ethical and emotional appeals) which are feminist negotiations of naturalism because they highlight the arguments of women narrators and characters, break down gender stereotypes and boundaries

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70 Bakhtin interchanges heteroglossia with *raznorečie*, which he defines as “the social diversity of speech types” (341).

in addition to racial prejudices, and theorize a synthesis, allowing for ethical choices within determined social and hereditary forces.

### **Marginalized Rhetoric--Subverting Dominant Ideology**

In *Contending Forces*, the references to hereditary determinism become a complex tangle of narrator's and characters' voices and rhetorical techniques that lead the reader to identify with some (usually the marginalized voices) and divide from others (usually the dominant voices). In the "Introduction" to *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture*, Monika Kaup and Debra Rosenthal argue, "The cultural repercussions of race mixture require us to examine this theme: that cultural meanings, metaphors, and negative and positive charges attributed to the union of races, rather than "race mixture" taken as a question in human biology, constitute our real subject" (xii). Kaup and Rosenthal call attention to the terminology between biological and cultural mixing, attributing "mixedblood, miscegenation, or amalgamation" to biological references and "hybridity" to cultural mixing (xvii). Hopkins and Jackson sarcastically present the negative connotations for amalgamation by juxtaposing "superior" and "inferior" and deflating the racialized emphasis on the words. Even though these authors do not use the word "hybridity," their arguments against prejudicial views of mixed blood demonstrate their celebration of not only biological but cultural mixing. To highlight Hopkins and Jackson's rhetorical

techniques for achieving these goals, moments of narrator sarcasm or sympathy expose treatments of naturalistic debates and racialized language.

For instance, in the “Retrospect of the Past” about the ancestors to Will and Dora Smith, the narrator examines references about mixing blood associated with the Montforts. Charles Montfort and his wife, Grace, live in Bermuda and own slaves, but want to move to North Carolina. The narrator’s tone is sometimes straightforward, but at others, when addressing racialized language about mixing races, the tone becomes more passionate and more sarcastic by negatively emphasizing superlatives. For example, the narrator writes about the “peculiar institution” of slavery and recounts historical events as they relate to the mulatto people in Bermuda, claiming, “In many cases African blood had become diluted from amalgamation with the higher race, and many of these ‘colored’ people became rich planters, [ . . . ]” (23), indicating a cultural reference to ideas about the hierarchy of races.<sup>71</sup> When the narrator writes that “there might even have been a strain of African blood polluting the fair stream of Montfort’s vitality” (23), the narrator is speaking, clearly to today’s reader (highlighting the modern aspects of the text), in a sarcastic tone through the adversative emphasis linking “polluting” with the “fair” stream. Word choice with paradoxical intentions must be puzzled out by the reader and leads the

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<sup>71</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word “amalgamation” first references mixing Saxon and Norman blood in 1775. Other nineteenth-century references pertain to mixing traditions or religions. In an edition of the *Baltimore Com. Tribune* of 1837 is the first recognized reference to the “amalgamation” of “a black man and a white woman” who “were lately brought before the Police Court in Boston charged with unlawfully marrying.”

reader to identify positively or negatively with a characters' position opposite to what was normally scripted for the times. For example, whenever Hopkins uses the words "pure" or "superior," the intention is sarcastic and the result negative; other words clustered around "pure blood" such as "diluted," "polluted," and "filtered" continue to highlight the contrary meaning of the words through narrator's sarcastic tone. The narrator uses the negative words sarcastically to celebrate hybridity and subvert dominant racial ideology; by using the word "inferior" sarcastically, the careful reader hears the racialized nature of the language and identifies with characters that do not see one race as inferior to another.

Later in the story, when Charles Montfort's son, Jesse, marries a wife who is part of "the colored people of the community," the narrator says that he was "absorbed into that unfortunate race, of whom it is said that a man had better be born dead than to come into the world as part and parcel of it" (78-79). The words, "of whom it is said," are clues to the narrator's sarcastic (cynical) tone. The use of passive voice leaves the subject unnamed, allowing the narrator the freedom to reject this ideological standpoint without impunity; however, at this point in the story, the reader may still be wondering about the level of sarcasm in the tone of voice that questions terms like "unfortunate" and "inferior." Later in the story, when Dora Smith says she chooses not to be considered unhappy just because she is mulatto, the rhetorical situation emphasizes the continued use of sarcasm as a rhetorical gesture, and then the progress from sarcasm to sympathy

and the desire for cultural reformation. Hinting at the old-fashioned ways of Mrs. Willis and the New Woman ways of Dora, Hopkins sets up the struggle to subvert dominant ideology through a dialogue between the two women. Even though Mrs. Willis is trying to subvert the dominant ideology of men like the Rev. Thomas, she continues to use the racialized language passed down to her:

What an unhappy example of the frailty of all human intellects, when such a man and scholar as Doctor Thomas could so far allow his prejudices to dominate his better judgment as to add one straw to the burden which is popularly supposed to rest upon the unhappy mulattoes of a despised race," finished the lady, with a dangerous flash in her large dark eyes.

"Mrs. Willis," said Dora, with a scornful little laugh, "I am not unhappy, and I am a mulatto. . . There are lots of good things left on earth to be enjoyed even by mulattoes, and I want my share."  
(152)

It is not until the reader realizes Hopkins' main argument is the celebration of hybridity found in Jesse Montfort's descendants, Will and Dora Smith, that these rhetorical moments become clear. In more examples of subverting dominant ideology, Hopkins' narrator uses contrasting binaries of opposing superlatives (exaggerations) as a form of sarcasm. Hopkins' narrator claims:

Man has said that from lack of means and social caste the Negro shall remain in a position of serfdom all his days, but the mighty

working of cause and effect, the mighty unexpected results of evolution, seem to point to a different solution of the Negro question than any worked out by the *most* fertile brain of the *highly* cultured Caucasian. Then again, we do not allow for the infusion of white blood, which became pretty generally distributed in the inferior black race during the existence of slavery. Some of this blood, too, was the *best* in the country. Combinations of plants, or trees, or any productive living thing, sometimes generate *rare* specimens of the plant or tree; why not, then, of the genus homo? Surely the Negro race must be productive of some valuable specimens, if only from the infusion which amalgamation with a *superior* race must eventually bring" (87; emphasis added).

In this long section (in which the first-person narrator builds community by using the collective pronoun, "we"), Hopkins uses scientific terms conventionally ("evolution," "infusion," "specimens," and "genus homo"), but the questioning and contrasting of the binary superior/inferior indicates a sarcastic tone. Hopkins again uses strategies to trap the opposition into listening to her arguments by using their own claims against them veiled in a subtly sarcastic tone. Hopkins argues that nature mirrors elevation of some specimens and that biology shows that African Americans are not inferior; but just in case white readers do not agree, she argues that they cannot disagree that their "best" blood mingling with the "inferior" race produces these "valuable specimens"

through survival of the fittest. The narrator continues to use the dominant ideology against itself through counterexamples. The narrator says that if “grace or accomplishment” is “supposed to be beyond the reach of a race just released from a degrading bondage,” then how has someone like Frederick Douglass “evolved from the rude nurturing received at the hands of a poor father and mother engaged in the lowliest of service” (86)? Hopkins does not refute that biological heritage is a part of what determines a person’s life, but she does refute the idea that race plays a factor in determining who is “a genius in a profession, trade, or invention” (86). The effects are either equally random or equally determined.

Like Hopkins’ narrator, Jackson’s narrator does not refute heredity at least as a partial determinant in people’s lives, but argues for an understanding of the role of external factors like socially learned behaviors through education and civilization. Following the plot from Ramona’s time in the Moreno household to her marriage, the narrator examines Alessandro’s heritage and says, “But he [Alessandro] was not a civilized man; he had to bring to bear on his present situation only simple, primitive, uneducated instincts and impulses. If Ramona had been a maiden of his own people or race, he would have drawn near to her as quickly as iron to the magnet” (54). The narrator is not saying he is biologically inferior, but that being civilized is based on education and socially conditioned responses, and since he has neither, his “primitive,” hereditary instincts control him. “Primitive instincts” are not based on race, but education

and civilizing institutions. Early views on scientific racism often cited uncivilized people as savages because of race (blood, heredity), when that was easily proven wrong as soon as someone of an “uncivilized” group was educated according to the dominant group’s standards. According to examples in several of the literary narratives in this study, animal nature in “civilized” (dominant, white) groups is characterized as brutish, and animal nature in “uncivilized” (racial, marginalized) groups is characterized as savagery; dominant groups blame social laws, marginalized groups blame lack of opportunity.

Hopkins and Jackson address scientific racism, sometimes contradictorily, which exemplifies the difficulty of letting go of old “truths.”<sup>72</sup> According to Lee D. Baker, “The arguments of scientific racism were widely applied in Britain and in the USA to defend, amongst other things, slavery, the denial of the franchise to women and the working classes, and the denial of education to those races for whom it was considered pointless or inessential” (2). In *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, Terry Jay Ellingson writes, “In scientific racism, the racism was never very scientific; nor, it could at least be argued, was whatever met the qualifications of actual science ever very racist” (151). Jackson and Hopkins continue the struggle to battle American racist ideology and comment on aspects of “mixed blood” as both positive (Will and Dora Smith and Ramona) and negative (John Langley), again negotiating theories of hereditary determinism to

arrive at their own theory of the role of race in contemporaneous scientific discourse and in perpetuating cultural fears of hybridity.

### **Narratorial Rhetoric – Creating Sympathy or Skepticism**

Reading texts that advocate social change usually requires recognizing stereotypes and addressing power struggles. The effort to break down common social inequities and power structures usually creates a textual struggle between author, character, and audience. For some authors, the motivation behind the rhetorical methods is to reveal the inconsistencies of power struggles, not just gender struggles but race, ethnicity, and economic class. The author or narrators, as the victims of prejudice and oppression, reveal the prejudice through the language of the oppressor, who then becomes the “victim” of sarcasm, thus cleverly reversing the roles in the power struggle. The target may or may not see the sarcasm. By developing an ambiguous stance, the author becomes critic and exposes the reader to an awareness of the critique of social issues which leads to participation in the critique. Once the reader realizes the ambiguity or verbal conflict, any part of the text is open to an interpretation based on a gendered, racial, or economic reading of the inconsistencies in the text. Through the ethical nature of the subject/other dialectic, both the author/reader and the addresser/addressee, which are sometimes in textual and psychological

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72 See more on notions of scientific racism in Cathy Boeckmann's *A Question of Character: Scientific Racism and the Genres of American Fiction, 1892-1912*, Terry Jay Ellingson's *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, Bob Carter's *Realism and Racism: Concepts of*

opposition, require a significant alteration in self-referentiality depending on the reader's/critic's perspective. We can ask: what questions does the ambiguity invoke the reader to ask when she/he enters the ambiguous interplay. Thus the ethical questions arising from instances of verbal conflicts reveal power struggles and ethical dilemmas. In the ethical questioning underlying the incongruity of social critique, the reader open to understanding the subjective narrator's point of view will reconstruct alternative meanings based on the author's implied vision. In this racialized language, difference suggests superiority. The ethical question is who is superior? Or what or who determines superiority? Although in Hopkins' and Jackson's texts, the narrators' tones of voice are sometimes sentimental, the continuous, covert invitations to skepticism (through the questioning of the binary superior/inferior) combine to create a sustained reformist vision with the comparison between the superior characters of the culturally or pseudo-scientifically labeled "inferior" race. Some of the ethical questions these authors raise include asking who is the fittest for survival. For any marginalized group, the answer to this question is always paradoxical: the poor in spirit, the kind at heart, and the oppressed who are usually at the bottom of the economic standard. Part of the incongruity here is asking, "What is natural? How do we come to conclusions about human nature?" Hopkins and Jackson offer readers their stances as reformers through narration, dialogue,

understatement or exaggeration, and conflicts of belief. The reader may be asked to move from the unstable literal meaning to a reconstructed stable meaning.<sup>73</sup>

The connection between rhetorical techniques and naturalism and the late nineteenth century are significant in terms of narratorial practices. The late nineteenth century saw movement away from heavy narratorial presence in fiction, but the use of narrated monologues and subjective commentary demonstrates the possibility of naturalism's own unique practices. Do these examples of narrated monologues offer glimpses of interiority and signs of free will or lack of it? Do these patterns of skepticism or sympathy as seen in textual struggles mirrored in racial or gender struggles illustrate an ideological stance? The authors' rhetorical strategies follow patterns of clues that create a coherent picture of narratorial control. I argue that the rise in dramatic tension results in the narrator's feelings of skeptical detachment or sympathetic regard. The women writers in this study take on a modern stance, voice, or sensibility to promote, through their choices of narrators, their own visions of social critique. Jackson and Hopkins employ ambiguity of word meaning, to catch the readers'

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<sup>73</sup> In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth claims that authors require judgments of readers, and one is to decide if ironies in the text "are all covert, intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface" (6). Booth also claims, in regard to the difficulties in reconstructing meanings from unstable examples of irony, "What is more troublesome, some modern critics—for example, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, and Kenneth Burk—have suggested that every literary context is ironic because it provides a weighting or qualification on every word in it, thus requiring the reader to infer meanings which are in a sense not in the words themselves: all literary meanings in this view become a form of covert irony, whether intended or not" (7). This view of all contexts being covert ironies goes beyond what I am asking my readers to accept. I argue that Hopkins intended these examples of sarcasm to subvert dominant ideology even if they are covert to some readers.

attention and offer the careful reader the narratorial distance to see the possibilities of reconstructing word meanings and answering ethical questions.

An explanation of narrated monologues is necessary to distinguish the technique from other types of narration. Dorrit Cohn defines narrated monologues as third-person narrative sentences, with no quotations or thought cues, which are in the character's voice instead of the narrator's "mental domain" (494). This technique is also called "free indirect style," according to Cohn (499). Using the technique of narrated monologues, Jackson and Hopkins cause the narrator to recede and move the reader into closer contact with the thoughts and feelings of the character, thus evoking either sympathy (agreement) or skepticism (mistrust). Cohn notes that she studies a German Naturalist story and discovers that in some sections of narration, the narrator slips from the "neutrally reportorial language typical for the narrator of a Naturalist tale" to the character's thoughts and language (493). The narrators are sometimes objective, even clinical, in observations, but many times highly subjective, which causes these slippages into the character's mental domain. For Hopkins' and Jackson's narrators the skepticism (sarcasm) creates mistrust for the racist character's arguments. By evaluating narrated monologues and the close association with subjective narration in these novels, I argue that the narrators' objectivity is diminished, signaling an unstable narrator, sarcasm, or humor. This textual struggle exists because of the conflict between genres/styles of romanticism and realism. This tension not only exists internally for the narrator, but also

externally and structurally for the text. I argue that there is an inherent conflict in naturalism between the complex intermingling of genres. Romanticism and realism, seemingly at odds, exist simultaneously in naturalism<sup>74</sup> causing this internal conflict of the narrator to be present in alternating sections of objective and subjective narration leading to ambiguity of intentions and a study of skepticism and sympathy toward characters and their positions in the texts. Separated by class, race, and sometimes gender, the narrator tries to remain detached, but as dramatic tension rises in the narrative so does the narrator's subjectivity.

Narrated monologues function to bring the reader/spectator into closer contact with the character. Cohn states, "And it is his [the narrator's] *identification* – but not his *identity* – with the character's mentality that is supremely enhanced by this technique" (501). The narrator does not question the inherent conflicts arising between objectivity and social concern, but the reader should be aware of the author's intended message among competing voices. By using the narrated monologue technique, the authors create ambiguity, which allows the narrator's rhetoric to resist analysis and, as Cohn argues, create either irony or sympathy for the character (503). By comparing each author's methods,

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74 In "Zola as a Romantic Writer," (1896), Frank Norris writes, "For most people Naturalism has a vague meaning. It is a sort of inner circle of realism – a kind of diametric opposite of romanticism, a theory of fiction wherein things are represented 'as they really are,' inexorably, with the truthfulness of a camera. This idea can be shown to be far from right, that Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of romanticism after all" (1106). Later in the article, Norris says again, "Naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism," but then he complicates the debate when he

motivations, and results in applying rhetorical techniques of social critique, I argue that the basis of skepticism or sympathy in these texts arises from conflicts of belief creating a forum for the reader's ethical questions and psychological struggle in the process of reconstructing and subsequently accepting, modifying, or resisting naturalistic theories. The women writers in this study limit their subjectivity through narratorial distance and use unstable covert verbal irony to engage readers in a deeper intellectual struggle with issues of social reform. In regard to the subjective stance, Booth argues:

But other authors write from equally firm though highly personal or idiosyncratic standpoints; their characters thus present more elusive mixtures of praise and blame, of sympathy and irony, and of stable ironies and indecipherables. In doing so their works contribute, for good or ill, to the fantastic explosion of controversies about reading that has occurred in the last few decades. (169)

Although Booth's rhetorical approach to narratorial choices has limitations, his systematic study of how authors invite sympathetic or skeptical interpretations allows for the inclusion of subjectivity in a writer's stance and helps clue the reader to various modes of presenting verbal incongruities that lead the reader to question commonly held prejudicial views by questioning word meanings.

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adds, "This is not romanticism—this drama of the people, working itself out in blood and ordure. It is not realism. It is a school by itself, unique, somber, powerful beyond words. It is naturalism" (1108).

Close to the end and summing up her overall philosophy of mixing races, Pauline Hopkins continues the practice of ambiguous tone to lead the reader to ethical questioning of terms and prejudices and possibly a reformist vision. In *Contending Forces*, when the visitor, Mr. Withington, asks Mrs. Smith from where she inherited her “superior intelligence,” she answers: “Yes; there are strangely tangled threads in the lives of many colored families—I use the word ‘colored’ because these stories occur mostly among those of mixed blood” (373-74). Using a narrated monologue, Hopkins presents Withington’s thoughts about Mrs. Smith, “By what art of necromancy had such a distinguished woman been evolved from among the brutalized aftermath of slavery?” (371). Combining “necromancy” and evolution with Mrs. Smith’s answer about heredity creates an unusual blending of naturalistic theories with magic or the supernatural. The explanation of Mrs. Smith’s intelligence and elegance as unnatural in Withington’s mental domain, a man described as distinguished, political, and intelligent, represents the view of many whites of the time. Is Hopkins claiming “superior intelligence” only comes from “mixed blood” (hereditary determinism), or is she arguing that these families must endure many more hardships which influence human nature (social determinism)? Since social and biological determinism are considered by purists as mutually exclusive, what are these authors arguing about the mix of internal and external forces beyond one’s control?<sup>75</sup> Many of these references reflect the unending debate between nature

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<sup>75</sup> A social determinist would argue that ideas about heredity would be socially constructed.

and nurture (hereditary determinism versus social and environmental determinism); through open-ended dialogue, Hopkins and Jackson do not argue all one or the other, but theorize a combination of deterministic forces; however, the combination works positively for some characters and negatively for others. For Hopkins' Sappho Clark and Dora Smith, and Jackson's Ramona the mix is deemed positive because their behavior is positive, for John Langley the mixture is considered negative because his behavior is negative, and the reasoning for both outcomes is mainly the influence of nurturing homes or Christian beliefs.

Similarly, for Jackson's Señora Moreno, the mixture of Scottish and Indian made "alien and mongrel blood" (30). Señora Moreno did not want to be associated with such a mixture of blood: "If the child [Ramona] were pure Indian, I would like it better," she said. "I like not these crosses. It is the worst, and not the best of each, that remains" (31). It is not Señora Moreno's tone that is sarcastic, but the narrator's presentation of the señora's attitudes that reveals the contempt the narrator has for her. Jackson's narrator says of the mixed heritage of Ramona, "And this was the mystery of Ramona. No wonder the Señora Moreno never told the story. No wonder, perhaps that she never loved the child. It was a sad legacy, insolubly linked with memories which had in them nothing but bitterness, shame, and sorrow from first to last" (37). The literal voice is the señora's and the sarcastic tone is the narrator's. Like Hopkins' narrator, Jackson's narrator emphasizes phrases and words to exaggerate the context and shift the blame; by repeating "no wonder," "no wonder," the

narrator shifts the blame to the señora. In Señora Moreno's mental domain this is as a "sad legacy," but by the end of the story, this legacy is what drives Ramona to survive the death of a child to illness and the death of her husband at the hands of Jim Farrar. The narrator claims,

Forces of fortitude had been gathering in Ramona's soul during these last bitter years. Out of her gentle constancy had been woven the heroic fibre of which martyrs are made; this, and her inextinguishable faith, had made her strong, as were those of old, who had trial of cruel mocking, wandering about, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (342)

Women writers of this period often combine natural forces with faith. The connection between "fibre," "faith," and experience illuminates Jackson's theory of "forces of fortitude," which shape some lives. Although Señora Moreno has strong hereditary influences, she lacks compassion that comes with faith, which leads to her harsh, prejudicial views toward Ramona and Alessandro.

In another example of Señora Moreno's racist ideology, she says about certain priests: "No Catalan but has bad blood in his veins" (22). Her answer for anyone who does not bend to her will is to claim that they have "bad blood." Heredity is either a curse or a blessing in Señora Moreno's eyes. Jackson writes, "She [Señora Moreno] was a Gonzaga, and she knew how to suffer in silence," which is ironic since she is rarely silent about her feelings (29). In contrast to

Señora Moreno's prejudices, Felipe says to his mother when Ramona runs away with Alessandro: "Ay, mother, you may well look thus in wonder; I have been no man, to let my foster-sister, I care not what blood were in her veins, be driven to this pass! I will set out this day, and bring her back" (from 1916 version, 334; this section is missing from the 2002 Signet Classic version). The speakers come to this determination of the worst, not the best coming out of a racial mixture based on their worldview and motivations. Señora Moreno's motivations are selfish while Felipe's are selfless or motivated by shame and love.<sup>76</sup>

### **Pragmatic Rhetoric – Engaging Hegemonic Discourse**

In another scholarly study connecting Jackson's and Hopkins' texts, *Reconstituting Authority: American Fiction in the Province of Law, 1880-1920*, William Moddelmog focuses on the ways these texts use domestic novels to enter the public domain to address legal and political issues. Moddelmog writes, "Her [Hopkins'] novel serves as the forum for these exchanges and thereby assumes the functions of both the courtroom and the public arena of political debate" (116-117). Moddelmog demonstrates how Hopkins relies on the courtroom to resolve issues of rightful inheritance, but since she presents that arena to be only an ideal, the public arena is the place to begin changing minds about rights to inherit. Moddelmog concentrates on Hopkins' legal legitimacy of African

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<sup>76</sup> Jackson's letters on Indian rights clearly set forth her support. She uses Señora Moreno's views to undermine the opposition's arguments by contrasting this view of "bad blood" with the resulting goodness in Ramona.

American citizenship, while I focus on Hopkins' establishment of identification with the characters as a single human race and her desire to change attitudes toward race in the hope of changing legal and political systems even though some humans are held back by hereditary influences or social determinants. In *Contending Forces*, Hopkins sets up two important sections of public discourse about the nature of humans and the role race has played in the discourse.

Through the Sewing-Circle meeting and the American Colored League meeting, Hopkins combines race and gender issues, but the goal is the same, to examine human nature as animal, moral, and intellectual, and to argue that individuals—whether black or white, male or female—must understand the biological, social, and economic determinants in life and learn to temper those consequences with moral and intellectual choices, mainly through Christian faith.

### **Sewing Circle Meeting and the Woman Question**

In Hopkins' novel most of the commentary on natural laws and instincts comes from the narrator and Mrs. Willis, exhibiting a transition from the older conciliatory ways to the new, more combative rhetoric, bridging the gap between Mrs. Willis and the next generation of New Woman characters, Dora and Sappho. Mrs. Willis, a widow who forms "clubs for colored women" and speaks to young women about "the great cause of the evolution of true womanhood in the work of the 'Woman Question'" (146-47), often comments on the "fate of the mulatto" (151). The connection between race and gender issues

indicates a feminist negotiation of hegemonic discourse and public speaking arenas. Again, the instances of the narrator's sarcastic tone illuminate moments which engage hegemonic discourse to the purpose of defeating the power of the words and the ideological messages behind them. According to the narrator, even Mrs. Willis, who becomes the voice of education and culture, "must" have white blood. Why did Hopkins not stop with "circles of educated men and women of color have existed since the Revolutionary War"? She goes on to say, "The history of her [Mrs. Willis'] descent could not be traced, but somewhere, somehow, a strain of white blood had filtered through the African stream" (145). The exaggeration of "somewhere, somehow" signals a pattern of sarcasm. As a modern reader aware of the racial tensions of the times, I hear a stronger emphasis on the sarcastic tone than Hopkins' audience may have been aware of at a time because they were desensitized by its use in reality; however, the existence of the ambiguity caused by the disconnect between the message of racial uplift and the use of racialized language supports my theory of sarcasm, which creates sympathy for some characters and mistrust of others. If these words had been written by a white author or assumed to be a white narrator, would the effects be the same? As mentioned before in regard to *Ramona*, Ramirez argues that Jackson's problematic use of racialized language and message about Indian rights is diminished by her attempt to make Ramona more acceptable to her audience. Hopkins' rhetorical goal is to change the audience's perspectives about women and race, and her compelling use of sarcasm and

reversal of meaning behind highly charged racialized language creates enough ambiguity to lead the reader to question beliefs and cultural norms.

In another example of narratorial sarcasm from the chapter entitled “The Sewing Circle,” Anna Stevens indignantly relates an anecdote about a reverend who, in his sermon, “thanked God that the mulatto race was dying out, because it was a mongrel mixture which combined the worst elements of two races. Lo, the poor mulatto! despised by the blacks of his own race, scorned by the whites! Let him go out and hang himself!” (150). This not only allows the reader to emphasize the underlying sarcasm, not in the original speaker’s (Rev. Thomas’) voice, but in Anna’s, and also hear an indictment of religious racism. In reply, Mrs. Willis says, “My dear Anna, I would not worry about the fate of the mulatto, for the fate of the mulatto will be the fate of the entire race. Did you never think that today the black race on this continent has developed into a race of mulattoes?” (151). Mrs. Willis tells Anna not to worry because she obviously believes in the elevation of the race, but does she believe this elevation is from mixing the blood? Mrs. Willis continues:

It is an inconvertible truth that there is no such thing as an unmixed black on the American continent. Just bear in mind that we cannot tell by a person’s complexion whether he be dark or light in blood, for by the working of the natural laws the white father and black mother produce the mulatto offspring; the black father and the white mother the mulatto offspring also, while the *black father* and

*quadroon* mother produce the black child, which to the eye alone is a child of unmixed black blood. (151)

Again, there is much to unpack within this teaching moment from Mrs. Willis to the younger women in her group. Is she putting race back into hereditary determinism when Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson, forty years before, worked so hard to remove it? Where Jacobs and Wilson see one blood, Mrs. Willis sees mixed blood. Mrs. Willis also states, "I will venture to say that out of a hundred apparently pure black men not one will be able to trace an unmixed flow of African blood since landing upon these shores!" (151). While the narrator's tone is usually sarcastic, Mrs. Willis' tone is more ambiguous. She believes she is using logical reasoning and making observable claims, but her character is presented in an unfavorable light, making her comments unreliable. Her tone is almost sermonistic, emphatic and exaggerated. At one point in the story, Sappho feels "a wave of repulsion toward this woman and her effusiveness, so forced and insincere" (155). Although Mrs. Willis is ambitious and manipulative, she is fighting for the same cause—race elevation.

Explaining the complexity and ambiguity of characterization and tone, in the "Introduction" to *Contending Forces*, Richard Yarborough claims, "Hopkins possesses the imagination and insight to see that the connections between personality and ideology are quite complex" (xxxix). The complexity of the characterization of Mrs. Willis arises from the trouble she has letting go of the racialized language of the past even though she is fighting for the elevation of

her race at that moment. The connection between human nature and God is very clear for Mrs. Willis, “Let the world, by its need of us along certain lines, and our *intrinsic* fitness for these lines, put us into the niche which God has prepared for us” (152; emphasis added). Mrs. Willis also negotiates naturalism and Christianity when she connects the “law of heredity” to more than the physical level; she argues that human nature is sinful, but with divine help, humans can control those natural desires. Mrs. Willis says (still part of the Sewing Circle discussion):

With the thought ever before us of what the Master suffered to raise all humanity to its present degree of prosperity and intelligence, let us cultivate, while we go about our daily tasks, no matter how inferior they may seem to us, beauty of the soul and mind, which being transmitted to our children by the law of heredity, shall improve the race by eliminating *immorality* from our midst and raising *morality* and virtue to their true place. (153)

Mrs. Willis reiterates this view when she says to Sappho Clark that “the Christian life gains its greatest glory in teaching us how to keep ourselves from abusing any of our human attributes” (154). By placing women above men in the ability to control natural instincts and desires, Mrs. Willis puts the burden of uplifting the race particularly on women. Mrs. Willis says to Sappho Clark, “Well, if you feel you are right, dear girl, stand for the uplifting of the race and womanhood. Do not shrink from duty” (156). Then she adds, “I am of the

opinion that most men are like the lower animals in many things – they don't always know what is for their best good" (156). Although Mrs. Willis makes this comment about men and animal instincts, Hopkins clearly sets Will Smith and Dr. Lewis apart from the men who are considered brutes, such as Anson Pollock, Bill Sampson, and Hank Davis (the men who kill Charles Montfort), Monsieur Beaubean (Sappho's white uncle who makes her "a prisoner in a house of the vilest character" 260), and John Langley ("This man was what he was through the faults of others" 336). The women's meeting engages hegemonic discourse about race and gender to lead the reader to question commonly held social views. In "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson writes, "Through their intimacy with the discourse of the other(s), black women writers weave into their work competing and complementary discourses – discourses that seek both to adjudicate competing claims and witness common concerns" (263). Mrs. Willis sets up a competition between the men and women of her race, but she also brings all voices together when she says, "From this we deduce the truism that 'the civility of no race is perfect whilst another race is degraded'" (150). The competing voices, even within a particular community, lead to ethical questioning in the reader, which is clearly a rhetorical technique employed by the writers to persuade audiences to challenge the systems that control their lives.

### American Colored League Meeting and Negro Question

Like the women's meeting, the men's meeting becomes a forum for debates about hereditary and social determinism and the contested space for moral choice. Both Will Smith and Mrs. Willis<sup>77</sup> espouse the philosophy of evolutionary optimists who claim humans are influenced both physically and morally. For example, Hopkins' Will Smith claims, "All sorts of arguments are brought forward to prove the inferiority of intellect, hopeless depravity, and God knows what not, to uphold the white man in his wanton cruelty toward the American Ishmael" (265). There is an interesting connection between naturalism and religion in this quotation,<sup>78</sup> but Smith's main point is that natural laws have been used to keep blacks enslaved. In regard to the South, he claims, "She has convinced no one but herself" (266). His rhetorical tactics resemble Harriet Jacobs's appeals to logic by discrediting the opposition's lack of evidence and refuting race as a hereditary determinant. Will Smith claims that the "science of man's whole nature" is "animal, moral, and intellectual" (269). This philosophy is comparable to Joseph Le Conte's claim: "Man is born of Nature into a higher nature. He therefore alone is possessed of two natures—a lower, in common with the animals, and a higher, peculiar to himself" (307). Le Conte, an evolutionary optimist,<sup>79</sup> argues that these natures are in constant struggle of

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<sup>77</sup> The use of "will" in both their names also indicates a negotiation of natural determinants and free will. Even though for Mrs. Willis men are like lower animals, women have the will to uplift their race.

<sup>78</sup> See chapter three of this dissertation for further connections between naturalistic and religious discourse.

<sup>79</sup> LeConte's term is "Evolutional Idealism" (1893).

dominance and humans should work to have the higher nature control the lower.<sup>80</sup> LeConte's theories were as problematic as Hopkins' theories. He argues for the assimilation of races, like Hopkins does in *Contending Forces*, to prevent "petrification" of the human race.<sup>81</sup> Although LeConte's views seemed open-minded, he leans toward racial restrictions when he talks about mixing "extreme types"; however, he returns to a celebration of hybridity when he claims, "the best results of race-civilization" occur when breeding leads to a "human civilization."<sup>82</sup> He comes to the same conclusions in which Hopkins finds herself – that lower forms bring down higher forms – but they both argue that this differentiation between higher and lower forms rests on self-control (civilization, education, morality) instead of pseudo-scientific claims about race variations.

### **Degradation of the Brute**

Since the authors argue the philosophy that humans are physical, mental, and moral creatures through the narrators and several characters, this philosophy applies to both positive and negative specimens. Just as Mrs. Willis supports the role of women in "uplifting the race," she also examines examples of the "degradation of the brute" (222). Both novels present characters with

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80 Reviews of Le Conte's theories appeared in periodicals: "Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought. Joseph Le Conte." *New Englander and Yale Review* (July 1888) and "Le Conte's Religion and Science." *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1874).

81 "Instinct and Intelligence," *Popular Science Monthly*, 7 (Oct. 1875), 664.

criminal natures, leading the reader to explore contemporaneous theories of atavism.<sup>83</sup> The narrators claim these characters become criminals because they allow their animal nature to dominate their mental and moral natures. Jackson's narrator says that James Farrar, the man who kills Alessandro, "was as cowardly as he was cruel: never yet were the two traits separate in human nature" (274). In *Faces of Degeneration*, Daniel Pick argues that nineteenth-century views of human degeneration are "one intellectual current within a far-wider language of nineteenth-century racist imperialism" and "lay in the ideological construction of 'inferiority,' 'savagery,' 'atavism,' 'moral pathology'" (37). Pick also says of the views of the time period, "Degeneration slides over from a description of disease or degradation as such, to become a kind of self-reproducing pathological process—a causal agent in the blood, the body and the race—which engendered a cycle of historical and social decline perhaps finally beyond social determination" (22). Hopkins and Jackson, again employing subversive methods of feminist negotiation, use the discourse of the dominant ideology against itself. If the dominant socio-biological discourse claims race as a determinant for atavistic behavior, then Hopkins and Jackson clearly show this behavior in the white race to illustrate the negative traits in all humans. In the prefatory story about the Pollocks and Montforts, Hank Davis and Bill Sampson (two men

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82 "The Effect of the Mixture of Races on Human Progress," *Berkeley Quarterly* 1 (April 1880), 85-86.

83 The return of a trait or recurrence of previous behavior after a period of absence (earlier biological type).

working for Anson Pollock) are a study in degenerate human nature based on animal instincts and the “poisonous” “fruit of slavery” (42). Bill Sampson is described as an “ill-favored, beastly looking fellow” (56). After Davis has killed Charles Montfort, the narrator claims, “She [Grace Montfort] was soon restored to consciousness, for Hank’s savage instinct for revenge would only be appeased by the victim’s full realization of her sufferings (68). This savagery of a white man upon a white woman was justified by “Sampson’s suggestion of black blood in Mrs. Montfort, to further his scheme for possessing the beautiful woman” (71). For Hopkins, this exemplifies the “uncontrolled bestial passions of humanity” which is the “natural product of such an institution as slavery” (221-222), combining human’s animal instincts with social determination. Blending one generation into another, Hopkins examines the effects of Anson Pollock’s heritable legacy on John Pollock Langley, Will Smith’s supposed friend until he tries to destroy Will’s happiness by exposing Sappho’s past. As Hopkins’ narrator states in regard to the mixture of races in John Langley, “We might call this a bad mixture – the combination of the worst features of a dominant race with an enslaved race” (91). In another reference to Langley’s behavior, the narrator claims that if someone like John Langley had been put in a loving, Christian home as a child, he would have been a better person. The negotiation between social and hereditary determinism ends in a combination of the two that makes John Langley behave revengefully, sensually, and mercenarily (91), but he

might have been changed if by fate or chance had given him a more loving, Christian home. Will Smith argues:

Human nature is the same in everything. The characteristic traits of the master will be found in the dog. Black, devilish, brutal as they picture the Negro to be, he but reflects the nature of his environments. *He is the Hyde who torments the Dr. Jekyll of the white man's refined civilization!* (272)

Because Smith is an evolutionary optimist, he is willing to believe that social evolution may be affected by spiritual growth. The narrator says, "Will contended that religion and the natural laws were not antagonistic" and "The only way to bring the best faculties of the Negro to their full fruition, he contended, was by careful education of the moral faculties along the lines of the natural laws" (167-168). The negotiation between Christianity and naturalism seems to be a technique of feminist negotiation for all the women writers in this study. They all acknowledge forces beyond human control, but also argue for humans' ability to make moral choices within a system of social, economic, and hereditary determination. The inclusion of realistic, even true, stories of brutality underscores their arguments that humans at least have a capacity to make moral choices if they are open to or have been exposed to Christian teachings.

In *Ramona*, Jackson's narrator argues for a similar negotiation of animal instincts, social and environmental determinism, and spiritual wisdom:

The character of the Western frontiersman is often a singular accumulation of such strata, – the training and beliefs of his earliest days overlain by successions of unrelated and violent experiences, like geological deposits. Underneath the exterior crust of the most hardened and ruffianly nature often remains – its forms not yet quite fossilized – a realm full of devout customs, doctrines, religious influences, which the boy knew, and the man remembers. By sudden upheaval, in some great catastrophe or struggle in his mature life, these all come again into the light. (346)

Although the narrator sees some good in human nature, the reader is reminded of Jim Farrar's hardened nature and the way he shot an unarmed man, and then shot him again in the face after he was dead. These contradictory examples, or the use of aphorisms juxtaposed with reality, expose rhetorical techniques these women writers employed to move the reader to ethical questioning and possibly changed attitudes toward prejudicial views of race and gender.

## **Conclusion**

Hopkins and Jackson negotiate theories about hereditary determinism to raise awareness of the ways people claim gender and race as determinants of human behavior to justify abusive institutions like slavery and prejudicial attitudes that deny rights to women, blacks, and Indians; however, these authors'

negotiations are not without problems. In trying to accommodate white, middle-class readers, Hopkins and Jackson sometimes perpetuate the stereotypes, but this is part of the negotiating process. The authors allow the readers to hear the competing voices in the social and scientific debates, in Hopkins' words, the "impartial story" (15). The views on both sides (mixing versus purity) are indicative of an American ideology of race. Through rhetorical appeals, Jackson and Hopkins show that nature as well as nurture, the hereditary as well as the social, play roles in determining human behavior, but they logically remove race as a factor. According to the characters' and narrators' negotiations, humans must be aware of their individual animal, intellectual, and moral natures. By showing how some are overtaken by their animal natures, the authors lead readers to look beyond hereditary determinism and make intellectual and moral decisions that treat everyone equally. However, by showing what the animal nature can do in people like Jim Farrar, John Langley, and Bill Sampson, the authors show the problems, or borderlands of identity, that those of marginalized races must negotiate to deal with these people. On the last page of the novel, Jackson's narrator even says, "Ramona might well doubt her own identity" (362). The doubting arises from the need to justify existence. In the narratives, these people of "mixed blood" (Dora, Will, Sappho, and Ramona) are "crossing over" into the "white" or dominant culture, which reflects the fears of those who embrace racist ideology; however, the authors' goal is to highlight the celebration of hybridity. After Ramona and Felipe are married, the last line of

*Ramona* says that the most loved daughter in the newly “mixed” Spanish and Indian Moreno family is “Ramona, daughter of Alessandro the Indian” (362). This third Ramona comes from a complex combination of biological and cultural mixture, highlighting Kaup’s claims about mixed blood and cultural hybridity. This Ramona has the hope of a future without racial labeling; however, the celebration is tempered by the fact that her Indian heritage may be erased or forgotten as she grows up in Mexico. But then again, Jackson’s narrative is a rhetorical tool to keep celebrating that heritage.

Fiction writers as well as scientists today still battle the racist’s views of hybridization. From a twentieth-century perspective of “mixing” races and cultures, and in defending his writing, *The Satanic Verses*, in his essay, *In Good Faith*, Salmon Rushdie writes:

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with just the sort of great problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics,

movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. (394)

Hopkins and Jackson celebrated the “unexpected combinations” in Will and Dora Smith and Ramona and worked to calm the unjustified fears of those who sought to justify the “purity” of one race at the expense of another race. By acknowledging some influence of hereditary determinism and balancing it with examples of social determinism, Hopkins and Jackson put all humans on equal ground in a deterministic universe, breaking down racist ideology and replacing it with the three-part human nature: animal, moral, and intellectual.

In *Ramona*, Jackson presents a figurative look at mixtures of races and cultures when she speaks about Aunt Ri’s work on a rag carpet for the Indian Agent’s wife, which sounds much like Rushdie’s comments above:

It was of her favorite pattern, the “hit-er-miss” pattern, as she called it; no set stripes or regular alternation of colors, but ball after ball of the indiscriminately mixed tints, woven back and forth, on a warp of a single color. The constant variety in it, the unexpectedly harmonious blending of the colors, gave her delight, and afforded her a subject, too, of not unphilosophical reflection. (349)

After the narrator talks of “mixed tints” and “harmonious blending of colors,” Aunt Ri tells the Indian Agent:

Wall," she said, "it's called ther 'hit-er-miss' pattren; but it's 'hit' oftener'n 'tis 'miss.' Thar ain't enny accountin' fur ther way ther breadths'll come, sometimes; 'pears like 't wuz kind er magic, when they air sewed tergether; 'n' I allow thet's ther way it's gwine ter be with heaps er things in this life. It's jest a kind er 'hit-er-miss' pattren we air all on us livin' on; 'tain't much use tryin' ter reckon how 't 'll come aout; but the breadths doos fit heaps better 'n yer'd think; come ter sew 'em, 'tain't never no sech colors ez yer thought 't wuz gwine ter be; but it's allers pooty, allers; never see a 'hit-er-miss' pattren 'n my life yit, thet wa'n't pooty. (349-350)

These examples show the progression from the negative view of mixing races and cultures to the positive view of pretty patterns to be had from the "hit-er-miss" of combinations. In the final analysis of their arguments, the mixture is more chance than science. Jackson's narrator claims we put things and events "into the keeping of that mysterious, certain, uncertain thing we call the future, and delude ourselves with the fancy that we can have much to do with its shaping" (358). Although Hopkins and Jackson theorize a balance between hereditary and social forces, and physical and moral natures, there is still a "hit-er-miss" pattern to life.

### Chapter Three

“Warring Truths”: Tracking Cultural Tensions and  
Negotiating Theories of Science and Religion in  
Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Margret Howth* and Ellen Glasgow’s *The Descendant*

“Do not call us traitors, then, who choose to be cool and silent through the fever of the hour, --who choose to search in common things for auguries of the hopeful, helpful calm to come, finding even in these poor sweat-peas, thrusting their tendrils through the brown mould, a deeper, more healthful lesson for the eye and soul than warring truths” (*Margret Howth* 5).

In Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Margret Howth* (1862) and Ellen Glasgow’s *The Descendant* (1897), the rhetoric about natural laws and divine intervention is more than characters’ responses to each other and the narrators’ mediations among them; they are cultural negotiations of contemporaneous discourses about subjects associated with naturalism such as positivism, organicism, and determinism and invite the reader to make a variety of connections among science, religion, and morality. These theories were often debated in American periodical literature and associated with many theorists. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) claims, “The primary object, then, of Positivism is twofold: to generalize our scientific conceptions, and to systemize the art of life” (3). Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) is associated with social evolution and organicism, and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) is one of the earlier philosophers associated with one of many types of determinism, in Spinoza’s case, theological determinism.

Importantly, Spinoza's determinism makes the same synthesis of nature and religion the women authors in this study make. Spinoza says,

By the help of God, I mean the fixed and unchangeable order of nature or the chain of natural events; for I have said before and shown elsewhere that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things exist and are determined, are only another name for the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truths and necessity. (40)

Given the timing of the publication of these novels, the reader's experience is enhanced by examining the discourse inspired by Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Auguste Comte,<sup>84</sup> theorists considered important to studies of nineteenth-century American literary naturalism.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, in *Margret Howth*, Davis specifically mentions Spinoza, Fichte, Saint Simon, and Fourier as other philosophical influences on her characters.<sup>86</sup> The characters and narrators present or debate an array of philosophical positions through a variety of

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<sup>84</sup> These theorists' works were often examined and debated in American periodical literature from 1850-1900. Some examples include several reviews of Comte's *Positive Philosophy* and other articles about his work published from 1851-1900, in *New Englander and Yale Review*, *The North American Review*, and *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art*. Reviews of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1860 in *The North American Review*, *New Englander and Yale Review*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Articles and reviews about Spencer's work appeared in *New Englander and Yale Review*, *North American Review*, *Manufacturer and Builder*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1861-1893.

<sup>85</sup> See studies by Bender, Papke, and Pizer.

<sup>86</sup> Mr. Howth and Dr. Knowles debate the influence of Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), German philosopher Johann Fichte (1762-1814), French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772-1837), and Saint Simon, an apostle of Jesus or French philosopher. The Saint Simon mentioned here is probably Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) because he was a contemporary of Auguste Comte, who is also cited in *Margret Howth*.

rhetorical situations and techniques. These strands of discourse intersect, revealing a complex tug of war among religious and scientific doubts and beliefs, which lead the reader through a maze of philosophies and doctrines to sift and cull according to his or her worldview.

Many American women writers in this period (1850-1900) create an unusual balance among naturalists' theories, religious beliefs, and moral codes, initiating the need to closely examine the religious and scientific rhetoric of each character or narrator. Analyzing the arguments about naturalistic theories and religious doctrines illuminates rhetorical patterns and feminist negotiations of positions of power. In *Subject to Negotiation*, Elaine Neill Orr claims that the American women authors in her study "represent their own negotiations of authority and history through their characters' canny oscillations between and across contested political and historical lines" (2). In this dissertation, the authors negotiate "authority and history" through their narrators' and characters' debates about scientific and religious positions. Although the majority of the characters' and narrators' comments in these texts focus on the spiritual or physical progression or degeneration of the characters, the reader should be aware of the negotiations among naturalistic discourses (so widely debated in the second half of the nineteenth century) and moral and religious

discourses, all of which battle for primacy in fiction and non-fiction,<sup>87</sup> and play out in the lives of three characters in each text. In *Margret Howth*, the religious discourse arises from and centers around Lois Yare, the naturalistic discourse is attached to Dr. Knowles, and the moralistic discourse stems from conversations by and about Margret. In *The Descendant*, the religious discourse plays out through Anna Allard, the naturalistic discourse through Michael Akershem, and the moralistic discourse through Rachel Gavin. The moral convictions of Margret and Rachel unite belief in the supernatural (God) with an understanding of the role naturally and socially controlled forces play in people's lives.

By examining physical, mental, and moral impulses, either naturally or socially located, these authors offer a view of a new social order built on moral responsibility or personal spirituality instead of a pure theory of hereditary, economic, social, or environmental determinism. As the stories unfold, characters enter the debates: the moral strength of one character (Margret or Rachel) synthesizes or acts as a link between the religious faith of a more fanatical character (Lois or Anna) and the naturalistic impulses of the more fervent or violent characters (Dr. Knowles or Michael Akershem). This pattern of attaching theoretical positions to particular characters is a common technique, but bringing together the three viewpoints in a dialectical debate is an unusual move. The characterization sounds almost allegorical, but is not so narrowly

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<sup>87</sup> Although readers may examine the dialectical debates in the fictive texts exclusively, perusing the periodical literature emphasizes the proliferation of discourse from 1850-1900 that highlights the connections and contradictions among

obvious when reading the stories. In *Margret Howth*, Margret, clearly a moral person, questions her faith on one hand and her passionate love for Stephen Holmes on the other. Lois, the “crippled,” peddler girl, has a strong personal faith and lives beyond the physical and social limitations in her life with a heavenly perspective. Since Dr. Knowles propounds atheistic views and social reform, he is described by others in naturalistic terms and his intense nature pushes away those around him. While the characters’ basic natures and viewpoints are obvious, the negotiations among the three positions only come into focus with critical examination of specific rhetorical situations. Davis and Glasgow allow the three theoretical positions to “war” with each other in their debates about science, religion, and morality, to create dissonance and questioning, compelling the reader to do the intellectual work required to examine social consciousness and personal faith, in the midst of forces beyond human control.

As an example of this dialectical debate among characters in *Margret Howth*, Lois, representing the religious thread, draws people to her quiet faith throughout the story, while Dr. Knowles argues against formal religion and lives according to natural instincts and desires. Davis, through this strategy of negotiation, exposes naturalism as one pole of a reductive binary – as the antithesis of Christianity. But she complicates not only her fictive representations but also contemporary thinking by suggesting a more

complicated, negotiated model through the integrated character, Margret. Although Margret questions her faith, ponders the futility of life, and experiences the positive and negative effects of fate, she is a conglomeration of her nature, social norms, and her personal spirituality. Davis presents her as the fittest to survive, with a moral responsibility to family and society. Glasgow, while depicting more than one character model, represents a similar dialogical interchange among Anna, Michael, and Rachel.<sup>88</sup>

In *The Descendant* the dialectical debate among philosophies associated with Michael, Anna, and Rachel also plays out as a romantic triangle. Michael as the naturalistic character is the thesis, Anna as the religious character is the antithesis of Michael's views and nature, and Rachel as the hybrid character is the synthesis of the two philosophies (physical and spiritual), and subsequently, the outcome argues that she is the fittest to survive. Even though Anna survives, she is not loyal to Michael or forward thinking enough to be a New Woman example for the times. Rachel is "audacious" and "beholden to no man" (193, 198), while Anna is wholesome and serene (171). To appease his ambitious nature, Michael wants Anna over Rachel, not because he loves Anna better, but because "the esteem of Anna Allard meant the esteem of the other half of the world – the better half, with its trust and purity and faith" (192); however, Anna sees the harm he has done by his "latitudinarianism" and "cannot see that side"

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<sup>88</sup> Bakhtin examines the heteroglossia of literature and the way "ideological systems and approaches to the world were indissolubly connected with these languages" and that one must choose "one's orientation among them" (351).

(172-177). Anna remains true to her beliefs, Michael true to his nature, and Rachel a mixture of both. Rachel, although overly sentimental at times, analyzes her behavior and beliefs and, although they sometimes war within her, continues to try to reconcile them in her art.

Davis' and Glasgow's models may lack "purity," but this represents more rather than less intellectual rigor and imaginative strength. The intersections mediate naturalistic theories and argue not only that naturalism does not negate divine intervention, but also that naturalism and morality should not be separated. These narratives show that even though humans may have little control over natural laws, hereditary patterns, and chance, we, the readers, are morally responsible for realizing our role in "restructuring institutions so as to curb excesses [that] will improve the environment that still conditions behavior" and lead to a type of "reform determinism" as seen in Zola's naturalistic narratives (Mitchell, "Naturalism" 540). Davis argues for the restructuring of economic practices and Glasgow argues for examining social institutions that deny women's rights. In *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke claims, "If you avoid the antitheses of supernaturalism and naturalism, you must develop the coördinates of socialism – which gets us to coöperation, participation, man in society, man in drama" (311). Burke's idea strangely plays out in these novels. Although participation in the liminal space between naturalism and supernaturalism may lead to social cooperation, for Davis and Glasgow that synthesis becomes moralism or social reform; however, theories of socialism play

a prominent role in both narratives through the naturalistic characters, Dr. Knowles and Michael Akershem, and their social theories. By developing and connecting a naturalistic character, a religious character, and a moral character, the authors create a dialectical debate which leads to a synthesis of theories instead of a priority of one over another or the complete exclusion of any thread.

The dialectical debate, perhaps varying to some degree for each reader, encourages participation in the continuous critical exchange. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke describes the dialectical development of key concepts in literature. Burke starts this dialectical process with “a concept like ‘the good.’” Then he claims:

It would subdivide into “good” and “evil,” as with “duality.” The “polarity” of these terms would reside in the fact that the concept of each involves the other. Their “synthesis” might be found in some “higher level” generalization, like “morality,” which unites both. (413)

Dialectics move the reader through a series of theses, antitheses, and syntheses to the development of hybrid philosophies such as natural theology, theological determinism, or evolutionary optimism.<sup>89</sup> Are Davis and Glasgow arguing for a theology based on reason and experience? Are they arguing that all is pre-

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<sup>89</sup> These hybrid theories of reason and religion are associated with many theorists whose works were published before 1860 and were significant to the public debates of the nineteenth century, which so often found their way into fictive texts. Natural theology is associated with William Paley, David Hume, and John Wray; theological determinism is associated with John Calvin and Baruch Spinoza; and evolutionary optimism is associated with Arthur Schopenhauer.

ordained by God, and once casual determinism is set in motion no changes can be made? Even if the characters argued a specific theory, the dialectical process moves the reader to a new synthesis.

To reach a point of synthesis, the reader needs to first understand the separation between naturalism and religion made by most writers and critics of literary naturalism. The reason Davis' and Glasgow's techniques are so unique is because "pure" naturalism rejects supernaturalism. Since "pure" naturalism usually separates the natural from the divine, although a difficult separation to achieve, why do Glasgow and Davis insist that arguments about naturalism intersect with religious discourse? These authors lived in times of sweeping technological and scientific discoveries and economic change that generated profound anxieties and questioning. Lee Clark Mitchell argues, "[A]ll combined to undermine a faith in older religious assurances and to lend to scientific discourse a power that continues in the present" ("Naturalism" 528). In their narratives, Glasgow and Davis realistically portrayed the questioning of faith and formal religions, which was underscored by the existence of urban squalor and the investigation of evolutionary theory. If scholars study the threads (religion, science, and morality) separately in these texts, the ideas seem static when they are actually being negotiated. Most of the contemporary reviews of Glasgow's text acknowledge her dedication to scientific theories, but say little about the juxtaposition of science and religion (see Scura, pages 4-8).

Most studies of literary naturalism highlight the authors' use of plot and character development based solely on natural, social, or psychological forces beyond human control.<sup>90</sup> In "Naturalism and the Languages of Determinism," Lee Clark Mitchell claims, "The 'Naturalists' committed themselves instead to a premise of 'absolute determinism,' and wrote novels in which particular motives mattered less than conditions that dictated events" (525).<sup>91</sup> Mitchell narrows the definition even further by saying, "[A]ny sure evidence of effective choice, of free will or autonomous action, makes a novel something other than naturalistic" (530). Nevertheless, even though the "literary naturalists" propounded this philosophy in theory, their narratives did not sustain its purity.

This inability to maintain a plot of "absolute determinism" leads to what Mitchell lists as three classifications of deterministic plots: "'pessimistic,' 'optimistic,' or 'reform'" (542), and he claims that Dreiser and London proclaimed a "Spencerian optimism" that argued for social reform even when a "determinist premise would seem to contravene possibilities for choice and deliberate effort" (540). Davis and Glasgow are not often considered participants in American literary naturalism<sup>92</sup> because their works do not align with generic

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<sup>90</sup> See Bloom, Papke, Pizer.

<sup>91</sup> Mitchell names Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and London as the most famous American literary naturalists, even though they never became a "self-conscious 'school'" (525).

<sup>92</sup> See Sharon M. Harris' studies about Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margret Howth* and Linda Kornasky's study of Glasgow's *The Descendant* that touch on elements of naturalism in the texts. In the "Introduction" to *Rebecca Harding Davis: Writing Cultural Autobiography*, Lasseter and Harris claim, "[Davis'] pioneering realist fiction with a naturalistic strain was published two decades before that written by William Dean Howells and six years before Émile Zola. Her

conventions of plot, theme, and characterization.<sup>93</sup> Although Davis and Glasgow include religious or sentimental characters, the addition of the naturalistic thread sets them apart within the genres of romanticism and sentimentalism and widens their range of criticism to include aspects of literary naturalism. Even though the canonical writers of American literary naturalism (Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane) wrote tighter plots of deterministic forces, they also included some moral or sentimental overtones or arguments.<sup>94</sup>

While Norris, Dreiser, and Crane did not separate naturalism, religion, and morality by character into a dialectical debate, they did delineate the most naturalistic characters through physical descriptions and plots of decline, especially in the characters of *McTeague*, *George Hurstwood*, and *Maggie*.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, in a similar example, referring to negotiating genres, Donald Pizer writes, "Norris placed realism, romanticism, and naturalism in a dialectic, in which realism and romanticism are opposing forces, and naturalism was

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work anticipates Kate Chopin's portraits of women's lives thwarted by social confines, Stephen Crane's depiction of the individually tragic dimensions of the Civil War, and Upton Sinclair's indictment of industrial capitalism" (4).

93 In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, June Howard writes, "Naturalism is a literary form that struggles to accommodate that sense of discomfort and danger, a form that unremittingly attends to the large social questions of its period" (ix). While Howard clearly demonstrates the chaotic nature of naturalistic discourse, she limits the discussion to a "single literary genre" (ix), thereby including the texts and authors of the "canon" of "pessimistic determinism," while excluding many interesting arguments about naturalism by women writers in novels not focused on a deterministic plot.

94 Acknowledging the narrator's sentimental tone in Norris' *McTeague*, Joseph McElrath claims that it "does not negate the original cause for pitying the characters whose lives are out of control or the reason for fearing that one's life may become as threateningly confusing as those of the characters" (53). Also acknowledging Zola's moral overtones, in the section on "Social Ethics," Lars Ahnebrink says, "At heart, Zola was a moralist, and he depicted repulsive scenes only to arouse disgust for vice" (17).

transcending synthesis" (*Literary Criticism* 69). While Norris and Dreiser generally exclude religious rhetoric from the mix, Davis and Glasgow link natural and divine forces beyond human control in their comparisons of the struggles among the characters and their corresponding positions. Even though Davis and Glasgow do not make naturalism or the naturalistic character the "transcending synthesis" (arising from the intersection of naturalism with Christianity and morality), their negotiation of the theories should be considered an important contribution to American literary naturalism. Davis and Glasgow clearly negotiate hereditary determinism, which is an important characteristic of literary naturalism, and like all the authors in this study make many references to a person's "nature" or "blood." Even though these authors synthesize "warring truths" (naturalism and Christianity), instead of writing naturalistic novels attempting to follow plots of "pure" determinism, Davis' and Glasgow's techniques of feminist negotiation of scientific and social discourse add to the canon and debates about literary naturalism.

### **Glasgow's Theoretical Background**

In *The Descendant*, Glasgow's arguments about hereditary determinism play a central role in the conflicts created by multiple threads of discourse.<sup>96</sup> In

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95 See *McTeague* (1899), *Sister Carrie* (1900), and *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893).

96 Several of the contemporary reviews of *The Descendant*, published between April 1897 and June 1897, clearly acknowledge Glasgow's "working out a problem in heredity," her "study in heredity," and her focus on "heredity and education" (qtd. in Scura 4-8). Even the title suggests the power of heredity to influence one's life.

my examination of words and phrases that signal a naturalistic philosophy, Glasgow's theories indicate the writer's entrance into social and scientific debates of the time and lead to the further examination of rhetorical strategies used to move the implied reader to action.<sup>97</sup> In *A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction*, Glasgow looks back at her stories and claims, "It is true, nevertheless, that even in my efforts and my failures, in my belief and my skepticism, I had arrived at the basis of what I may call a determining point of view, if not a philosophy" (236). Additionally, she writes in regard to Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, "What did interest me, supremely, was the broader synthesis of implications and inferences" (237). She continues:

I believe in evolution, though I do not believe that evolution must, of necessity, mean progress. All change is not growth; all movement is not forward. Yet I believe that life on this planet has groped its way up from primeval darkness; and I believe likewise that, in this bloodstained pilgrimage from a low to a higher form, humanity has collected a few sublime virtues, or ideas of sublime virtue, which are called truth, justice, courage, loyalty, compassion. I believe, therefore, in a moral order; and I believe that this order was not imposed by a supernatural decree, but throughout the ages has been slowly evolving from the mind of man. (242)

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<sup>97</sup> The anonymous reviewer of *Chap-Book 6* (1 April 1897) writes, "Yet, *The Descendant* presents phases of modern thought rarely dealt with in fiction, is both able and daring in its treatment of them, and is readable and worthy of reading" (qtd.

Even though Glasgow makes these claims about her philosophies, how do they play out in her fiction? Why does the novel include a concentration of religious rhetoric among the references to evolutionary theory? Glasgow claims, "It is not that I deny the ordinances of Heaven; but I find it a negligible distinction where humankind suffers under the reign of natural law or under the rule of universal anarchy" (242). In her autobiographical writing, Glasgow clearly works through the same dialectical debate of naturalism, religion, and morality to reach her own hybrid theory of free will and natural law.

In Glasgow's *Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings*, editor Julius Rowan Raper claims, "To work out her bitterness [toward her father's religious views and her mother's death] she finished the second of the novels she had begun, a Darwinian study of New York's Bohemia called *The Descendant* (1897)" (xvii). Glasgow writes about herself, "A young girl in the late nineties, I began life as a champion of the oppressed. As a protest against evasive idealism and sentimental complacency, I made the protagonist of my first novel [Michael Akershem] the illegitimate son of an illiterate 'poor white'" (97). Glasgow also claims:

[*The Descendant* is] an honest, defiant and very immature book, bearing as its motto Haeckel's phrase, 'Man is not above Nature, but in Nature,' and softened here and there to satisfy the reluctant publishers' demands for 'a moral or at least a pleasant tone,'

records, in words that are hot and crude and as formless as the revolt of youth, many of the things I believed passionately as a girl and believe reasonably as a woman. (220)<sup>98</sup>

Although Glasgow clearly examines natural laws in the novel, she does not explain the connections to the highly religious rhetoric in the text and its role in the debate. In the opening of the novel, through the narrator, Glasgow sets out her philosophy: "The facts of organic existence shape themselves in our horizon conformably with the circumstances which have shaped our individual natures" (18). About Michael Akershem she writes, "Self-taught he was and self-made he would be. The genius of endurance was fitting him to struggle, and in the struggle to survive" (19). However, Glasgow clearly sets up the potential for hereditary criminal behavior by commenting on Michael's "brutal grasp" and "yellow rage" (22). Then later, she writes, "He has a genius for destroying" (36), and "a terrible reserve force within his nature, forever salient and forever illusive" (79), and ends the story with Michael's degradation and death.

Glasgow presents the uneasy connection between science and religion when the minister says Christ would have had him, but another villager comments, "But the Lord never lived in such times as these!" (22). All these comments about Michael stem from the initial claims about his "blood" and the influences of heredity and low social status. Since Michael's parents were not married, his mother "an awkward woman of the fields" (7) and his father "a scoundrel" (34),

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<sup>98</sup> Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), German biologist, naturalist, and philosopher.

people, including the minister, say, “with such a heritage” he has “bad blood” (5, 34). Thinking about the people in his village, Michael “saw them, one and all, watching with a vulgar interest for the inheritance to creep out and the blood to show – and he sneered outwardly while he raged within” (18). Glasgow continues this examination of hereditary control over human lives throughout the text, but mainly in relation to Michael’s character.

### **Narratorial Space and Naturalistic Language**

In both novels, the narrators play the role of mediator among the characters’ and society’s views on science and religion. Davis’ narrator challenges the reader to “dig into this commonplace, this vulgar American life, and see what is in it. Sometimes I think it has a new and awful significance that we do not see” (6). In analyzing specific arguments in the novels, like the quotation below from *Margret Howth*, the rhetorical investigation involves making connections among significant terms (“blood,” “races,” “struggle,” and “fate”), strategies (questioning, sarcasm, and identification), and theories (positivism, organicism, and determinism). All these elements come together in a complex mixture of “warring truths” between religion and science. For example, the narrator claims that Dr. Knowles views the world in biological and philosophical terms:

He looked down in that city as in every American town, as in these  
where you and I live, on the same countless maze of human faces

going day by day through the same monotonous routine [. . . ].  
 Knowles looked about him as into a seething caldron, in which the  
 people I tell you of were atoms, where the blood of uncounted  
 races was fused, but not mingled – where creeds, philosophies,  
 centuries old, grappled hand to hand in their death-struggle, –  
 where innumerable aims and beliefs and powers of intellect,  
 smothered rights and triumphant wrongs, warred together,  
 struggling for victory. (89-90)

First, the reader may be struck by key terms associated with naturalism or religion, such as “atoms,” “blood,” “races,” “fused,” “mingled,” “creeds,” and “struggle.” Second, the reader may examine the narrator’s use of the rhetorical tools of invitation and metaphor. Davis’ choice of first-person narration and the narrator’s comment about “where you and I live,” invite identification with the reader; however, the reader may experience division through the dark metaphors of the “maze,” “seething caldron,” and battle. Third, the reader must, as the narrator suggests, examine the “maze” where “aims and beliefs and powers” struggle and determine the theories associated with Dr. Knowles or any other character. Is the narrator arguing, through metaphors of the futility of urban life and melting atoms of blood, that where everything struggles to survive and evolve advocates a naturalistic or fatalistic theory of life? The term “fused” (mixed by melting) instead of mingled (blended by association) reinforces the idea that human lives are forced into molds or determined by

factors of heredity, society, and chance. The first-person narrator rejects the old creeds (a word associated with formal religions) and ponders who or what will survive. However, the analysis is not complete. The investigation must continue throughout the text before a final synthesis of the three threads of discourse may be achieved.

Since the presence of the word "blood" often signals forays into the world of hereditary determinism in these novels, the reader must decide if the narrator or character accepts, rejects, or mediates the idea that blood determines behavior. In *Margret Howth*, Davis includes over 30 references to "blood." According to Davis' narrator a person's blood may be "strong," "dull," "phlegmatic," or "old." The narrator or characters also refer to a region's effects when saying someone has "Virginian blood" (71), "Yorkshire blood" (111) or "High-Norman blood" (150). The variations often neutralize any substance to the claims. For example, blood may be positive ("very pure blood is in her veins," 103) or negative (there is "a good deal of an obstacle in blood," 187), but only "if you care about blood" (103). Knowles' blood is "throbbing" while Margret's is most often "slow and cool" (47). Mrs. Howth claims, "It is in the blood, I think, Doctor" (25), when talking about Mr. Howth's Tory sympathies. Also, the narrator claims that Joel, the Howth's servant, wishes "with a tiger drop of blood that lies hid in everybody's heart," that those who do not agree with his politics should perish (42), arguing that all have violent tendencies hidden deep in human nature. Making a connection between naturalism and religion, the narrator is not sure

which Dr. Knowles' blood serves – God or Satan (13). These contradictions seem to indicate that people make too much of hereditary determinism and should, according to the narrator, “shake off whatever weight had been put on it by blood, vice, or poverty” (259). Most of the instances of naturalistic language about heredity are tied to religious rhetoric but in complex negotiations of accommodation or skepticism.

Just as Knowles' and Margret's views conflict in *Margret Howth*, Rachel's and Michael's natures and ambitions struggle against each other in *The Descendant*. Their natures bring them together, their philosophies drive them apart. The narrator comments, “Some dominant, magnetic force attracted her even as it repelled her” (99). Rachel believes in evolution but often calls on God to change her circumstances (115, 118). However, in view of the ending, this comment becomes ironic as does Michael's desire to commit suicide early in the novel although “his last chance at the hands of Fate” saves him from that demise (32). In the end, Michael dies anyway with the “blood-red seal of fate” on his lips, and according to the narrator, “There was a harder battle to fight before the end would find him” (276). Some could read these key words and phrases, “struggle to survive” (19), “organic existence” (18), and “seal of fate,” without noticing the contradictory philosophies, but by closely examining the intersections, the reader must puzzle through a character's individual philosophy and the narrator's conglomeration or negotiation of all three threads. One contemporary reviewer of *The Descendant* notes that “[Akershem] is the

slave of heredity and of environment in unstable equilibrium, – like the rest of us, – which leaves proof of his creator’s theme unpleasantly suspended” (qtd. in Scura 4). The reviewer does not make connections between science and religion as this “unpleasant” suspension of theme, but does say that “man is left a free moral agent, and the essential sweetness of life remains unimpugned at its close” (qtd in Scura 4). Akershem may repent in the end, but only as he lay dying in Rachel’s arms, and not because his moral will won over his natural instincts; the intertwining threads are much more complex and the ending much more ambiguous than the reviewer claims.

Even though the consensus about the substance of views about hereditary determinism is uncertain, the narrator or characters make claims about “tainted” or “untainted” blood that seem to perpetuate racist views of the day. In chapter one of this dissertation, I argue that Harriet Wilson and Harriet Jacobs create rhetorical situations that present contradictory views about the racist rhetoric associated with hereditary determinism in order to remove race from scientific claims about human behavior and to attribute the behavior to the socially determined influences of slavery. However, the claims about hereditary determinism based on racial prejudices presented in *Margret Howth* are more erratic because of the ambiguous connections to religious rhetoric. In the following passage, the narrator claims, “But he [Dr. Knowles], coming out of the mire, his veins thick with the blood of a despised race, had carried up their pain and hunger with him: it was the most real thing on earth to him,--more real than

his own share in the unseen heaven or hell" (50). The narrator exemplifies the religious questioning of the times. Even though most people grasped onto the idea of "unseen" forces, their experiences with the world around them skewed the view of divine intervention.

When the narrator juxtaposes the example of Knowles' "tainted blood" with a reference to Margret's "untainted blood" (51), the connections go deeper than the physical level. The narrator is presenting Dr. Knowles as the naturalistic character, someone whose life is controlled by natural instincts and desires, but are those instincts based solely on race? Later in the story, the reader discovers to which "despised" race the narrator refers when one of the men in the counting room at the mill "spitefully lisped," "Knowles's inclination to that sort of people is easily explained . . . Blood, sir. His mother was a half-breed Creek, with all the propensities of the redskins to fire-water and 'itching palms.' Blood will out" (85). These descriptions are similar to Glasgow's references to Michael Akershem and his heritage, not from mixing races, although that has been questioned as a possibility, but because of socio-biological ideology that labels some blood as "bad" or "tainted." In these examples of racist ideology how is the reader supposed to assess the narrator's comments when they are echoed "spitefully" by someone who is not to be trusted? One explanation for this inconsistency is that the narrator is often commenting in a character's voice,

through a narrated monologue,<sup>99</sup> a technique that highlights the heteroglossia of literature.<sup>100</sup> Dorrit Cohn cautions, “But there is no doubt that this kind of confusion is responsible for innumerable misreadings – including some in print – of works that employ the technique” (498). Is the narrator racist or just repeating racist views of the times from an unreliable character’s point of view? Or is the narrator unreliable?

Wayne Booth tackles the importance of narrative distinctions in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and claims, “To say that a story is told in the first or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects” (150). From Booth’s list of narrator characteristics, Davis’ narrator is a “dramatized,” “self-conscious,” “observer” and “serves a rhetorical purpose” (153-155). According to Booth, narrators are “reliable” when they speak in accordance with “the implied author’s norms” and “unreliable” when they “depart from their author’s norms through “tone” and “deception,” either conscious or unconscious (158-159). The narrator in *Margret Howth* often contradicts herself, is sometimes serious, sometimes sarcastic, and acts like a

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<sup>99</sup> Dorrit Cohn defines narrated monologues as third-person narrative sentences, with no quotations or thought cues, which are in the character’s voice instead of the narrator’s “mental domain” (494). Cohn points out that the technique is called *style indirect libre* and *erlebte Rede* in French and German, discussed extensively in regard to French and German texts, and is regarded as a “key concept for generic definitions of fiction, typologies of the novel, the nature of narrative language, and the development of modern narrative practices” (498). Cohn notes that she studies a German Naturalist story and discovers that in some sections of narration, the narrator slips from the “neutrally reportorial language typical for the narrator of a Naturalist tale” to the character’s thoughts and language (493).

<sup>100</sup> See Bakhtin.

puppeteer manipulating the characters' thoughts, which engenders a feeling of unreliability. However, even an unreliable narrator can serve a rhetorical purpose in leading the reader to question the many contradictions at work in the text. Today's reader is more likely to question the rhetoric of scientific racism, but what is the final analysis of Davis' views on hereditary determinism in *Margret Howth*? The narrator's analysis rests on a "mixed" philosophy of characterization. The narrator claims, "I was born unlucky. I am willing to do my best, but I live in the commonplace" and "I never saw a full-blooded saint or sinner in my life (102). Everyone has flaws and some come from "Nature" or "animal instincts" (105). According to the narrator, Holmes and Knowles are the "primitive man, the untamed animal man" (107). Even though the narrator makes generic claims about the animal nature in all humans (sometimes more hidden than in others), the comments about race and blood are still troubling because they connect science and religion by questioning hypocritical, racist views by characters or unethical behavior.

Moreover, in *Margret Howth*, not only do the narrator and certain characters make claims about "Indian blood," but also about "black blood." Lasseter and Harris acknowledge that in Davis' autobiographical writings she "does not erase the fact that many of her neighbors – as well as her own family – owned slaves" (15). Participating in the scene, the narrator claims, "[Lois'] eyes, I think, were the kindest, the hopefulest I ever saw. Nothing but the livid thickness of her skin betrayed the fact that set Lois apart from even the poorest

poor – the taint in her veins of black blood” (56). Is the reader meant to experience identification or division with the narrator? Is the narrator trying to heighten the reader’s sympathy for Lois? Only a dozen pages later, the narrator continues to explain that “all the tainted blood in her veins of centuries of slavery and heathenism [was] struggling to drag her down” (69). The narrator claims, “it was the fault of her blood, of her birth, and Society had finished the work” (72). Then again, Lois is “smothered by the hereditary vice of blood” (from her mother’s alcoholism and her father’s criminal behavior) and lives in ignorance; however, all these “hereditary” claims are mediated by the fact that Lois is the most religious character in the novel. Although the claims for hereditary determinism are problematic, they are many and result in a negotiated theory of hereditary and social determinism that is arbitrated by one’s spiritual beliefs (struggle on earth; hope in heaven).

In addition to the word “blood” signaling possible references to hereditary determinism in all its problematic variations, the word “struggle” also appears connected to the naturalistic discourse of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Experiences of questioning and struggling persist in these texts as the authors negotiate the beliefs and doubts of the times. “Struggle” is a key term often associated with evolutionary theories of “survival of the fittest” and “struggle to survive.”<sup>101</sup> Examples from *Margret Howth* include “struggle of

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101 Darwin’s phrases “struggling for mastery” (*The Voyage of the Beagle*), “struggle for existence” (*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 27*), and “struggle for life” (*On the Origin of Species*) affected much of the fiction writing of the times and

years" (58), "deadly struggle with her fate" (59), "struggle for life and death" (117), "thrusting and jostling and struggling, up, up" and "sleeping instincts in the man struggled up" (121). The discourse about struggling and surviving or succumbing not only explores the natural struggle for life, but also the social struggle for rights, which often appears in rhetoric relating to the struggle between faith and futility. Expressions of economic, social, scientific, and religious doubts in fiction highlight the anxieties of the period and give writers many examples of fears and insecurities from which to draw subject matter, which scholars list as themes of naturalism<sup>102</sup> and which appeared in periodical articles throughout the nineteenth century. Anxieties of the characters relate to the ambiguity of existence in a modernized world. The narrator asks about Holmes, "Would he struggle out?" (186). These expressions of hopelessness addressed class conflicts, financial insecurity, women's rights, insanity and mental debilitation, and fears of criminality.<sup>103</sup> All of these anxieties of the times manifested themselves in themes of American realistic and naturalistic fiction.<sup>104</sup> The interchange of ideas, realities, and rhetorics creates a sense of questioning existence to search for meaning and purpose in a naturalistic world where

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American literary naturalism particularly. Herbert Spencer also refers to the "struggle for existence" (*The Data of Ethics*) and "survival of the fittest" (*The Man Versus the State*).

<sup>102</sup> See Bell, Fleissner, and Papke.

<sup>103</sup> For examples, "Women's Rights" (*American Whig Review* 8.4, 1848), "The Discontented Classes" (*New Englander and Yale Review* 11.44, 1853), "Insanity and Crime" (*New Englander and Yale Review* 14.53, 1856), "Woman's Rights as to Labor and Property" (*North American Review* 90.187, 1860), "Ingersoll's Fears for Democracy" (*The Atlantic Monthly* 36.213, 1875), "The Brains of Criminals," (*Manufacturer and Builder* 10.3, 1878), and "What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other" (*New Englander and Yale Review* 42.177, 1883), among others.

instincts rule and the daily presence of God is questioned through a reliance on a Calvinistic predestination philosophy (for Mr. Howth) or seen more as a comforter (for Lois) than as an active participant in changing people's circumstances and nature in this life.

### **Philosophical Questioning and Reform Rhetoric**

Glasgow and Davis pose philosophical questions to their readers for the purpose of changing attitudes and possibly moving them to action for social reform for the poor, those in the most brutal struggle for existence. Even though hereditary, environmental, and social determinism combine to drag people down into "the great seething mire" of urban life (*Margret Howth* 50), is there no hope of redemption and reform? If the atheistic character (Dr. Knowles) is the one with the most active social conscience, what does that say about Christians? Lois' criminal father asks, "Who taught me what was right? Who cared?" (166). In "Casting Out the Outcast: Naturalism and the Brute," June Howard writes, "The terror of the brute includes, certainly, the fear of revolution and chaos, of the mob and the criminal . . . it also includes the fear of becoming the outcast through the social degradation and psychological disintegration depicted in [Norris'] *Vandover and the Brute*" (395). Through observation of the struggle, Davis presents naturalistic arguments about the degradation of humans in an uncaring, industrialized environment. Many studies of American literary

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104 See Bloom, Pizer, and Papke.

naturalism highlight the theme of degradation and plots of decline.<sup>105</sup> Although Davis and Glasgow do not follow clear plots of decline based on causal determinism, they do explore the social determinism that creates the “dregs” and “wretches” of society. Since the outcast is a tool of naturalism, Davis and Glasgow use the examples of brutality to elicit fear and possibly sympathy. Through the dialectical debate, the outcasts or naturalistic characters (Joe Yare and Dr. Knowles) question the power of society to change theirs and others’ circumstances (even Lois’ spirituality could not stop her father from setting fire to the mill), but the moral character, Margret, still has an opportunity to give the reader hope for the future, which signals a type of “reform determinism” or “social evolution.”<sup>106</sup> Margret looks out into the crowd of the city and the narrator claims, “Whatever good there was in the vilest face, (and there was always something,) she was sure to see it” (96). As the reader progresses through the story and dialectical debate among characters, every reference to naturalistic discourse must be examined alongside religious sympathy or skepticism to appreciate the complexity of the negotiations.

Even though Margret has sympathy for the “wretches of society, according to Davis’ narrator, the Church has missed the opportunity to help, or turned a blind eye to the “most real of all, the unhelped pain of life, the great

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105 Papke writes, “The naturalist plot of decline or defeat – its focus on abnormal and pathological economies of desire; its intense scrutiny of the powerful determinants of gender, race, class, and gender [sic]; its seemingly absolute refusal of sustained empathy for and dismissal of moral responsibility toward others – is unmistakable” (x).

seething mire of dumb wretchedness in streets and alleys, the cry for aid from the starved souls of the world" (50). The narrator claims the story is "crude and homely" about "one or two of those people whom you see every day, and call 'dregs,' sometimes picked from the back-streets" (6). Davis' choice of a first-person "self-conscious" narrator who is aware of her speaking and reflecting<sup>107</sup> continues to have a rhetorical effect on the reader's sense of identity when speaking to "you," calling on the reader to take part in the struggles on the pages of the novel, and asking, "Was there no hope, no help?" (90). The lack of distance between the narrator and reader heightens the effects of appeals to fear and the "rhetoric of terror" created by the crowd imagery and criminal activities; however, Davis and Glasgow temper the terrible with references to "religious duty" (189), "highest nature" (217), and "universal sympathy" (266). Even so, descriptions of "a dull, mysterious terror" and "a vague dread of some uncertain evil to come" (170-171) are examples of the sublime in naturalistic discourse and should be considered part of the rhetorical debate.

### **Naturalism and the Sublime**

In *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*, Christophe Den Tandt examines the connection between naturalism and the sublime, which "marks out the visible from the hidden realms of experience" (8). To the

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<sup>106</sup> Darwin believed that "social virtues" or "social instincts" and "moral sense" would evolve through natural selection over time (*Descent of Man* 118).

contrary, in *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920*, David Shi places the realists' and naturalists' focus on facts, but Dent Tandt presents the literary trend of moving away from the idea of mimesis as revealing truth about the urban scene. Arguing that neo-historicists such as June Howard reject the belief that realism can be an objective representation of social conditions, Den Tandt claims the naturalist writer understands the limitations of realist representations and the need to explore the unexplainable. According to this stance, naturalism is not simply a matter of free will or determinism, but of sensed, but not understood, forces (perhaps psychological, environmental, social, or supernatural), which shape and direct lives. Den Tandt analyzes the naturalist sublime and the "blurring of the boundary between city and nature" (10) portrayed in examples of industrialism (which he terms "oceanic sublime") and crowds (which he terms "naturalist gothic"). Den Tandt's claim that the urban sublime (applying Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant's discussions of sublimity originating in romanticism) is an admiration of the terrible ( a combination of "dread and fascination," 5), and offers the reader negative perceptions arising from the "dialogization of the rhetoric of terror" (xi).

In *Margret Howth*, Davis' descriptions often exemplify Den Tandt's naturalist sublime encompassing "the commodity market, the crowd" (8). Presenting Den Tandt's naturalistic symbol of the crowd, "swarming in yonder market-place (7)," Davis' narrator claims the reader wants a story "to lift you out

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107 See Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* (155).

of this crowded, tobacco-stained commonplace, to kindle and chafe and glow in you" (6). Does the "story" mean that reality is only about natural and social forces, and we need stories to imagine supernatural intervention? Den Tandt claims, "The sublime, because it posits the existence of mysterious depths in the social world" leads to attempts to represent the "power of the unseen" (245).

Many of the naturalistic descriptions of the city in *Margret Howth* reflect not only Den Tandt's crowd metaphor, but his theory of the "urban sublime" in American literary naturalism. The narrator remarks, "Let him [Knowles] go to the great city, with its stifling gambling-hells, its Negro-pens, its foul cellars; --his place and work" (50). The rhetorical strategy is an appeal to fear – if we do nothing to change the course of socially determined forces, we could all become outcasts, but doing something means applying ethical business practices and making morally conscious decisions to help those in need; again, these authors argue for social evolution. However, in *The Data of Ethics* (1879), Herbert Spencer establishes his "System of Synthetic Philosophy" as a division of *Principles of Morality* and *Principles of Sociology* (iii) and discusses the difficulties in applying "absolute ethics" to "relative ethics." In Spencer's view, "As with a developed humanity the desire for it by everyone will so increase, and the sphere for exercise of it so decrease, as to involve an altruistic competition . . . ." (287). Even though the overreaching philosophies in *Margret Howth* and *The Descendant*

include elements of social evolution or evolutionary socialism,<sup>108</sup> the reality of the characters' lives is darker and more mechanical.

The authors use more appeals to fear through descriptions of monotony and drudgery of everyday struggle for existence than examples of an organic, evolved society (organicism). These appeals to fear in Glasgow's and Davis' texts often present expressions of religious doubts ranging from minor curiosity to painful soul-searching and focus on social, cultural, and economic anxieties. Glasgow and Davis write about characters' struggles with issues of modernity, which often appear textually through questions of faith in God and doubts about meaning and purpose in life; however, in the final analysis, even when the religious character finds something better beyond this world, the naturalistic and moralistic characters are left to struggle for existence. Professing a fatalistic view of life, the narrator in *Margret Howth* speaks directly to the reader and argues,

You must fight in it; money will buy you no discharge from that war. There is room in it, believe me, whether your post be on a judge's bench, or over a wash-tub, for heroism, for knightly honour, for purer triumph than his who falls foremost in the breach. Your enemy, Self, goes with you from the cradle to the

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108 Although Eduard Bernstein, a German socialist, did not publish *Evolutionary Socialism* until 1899, the ideas and revisions of Marx's materialist determinism were part of public discourse. In *Understanding Dogmas and Dreams*, Nancy S. Love claims, "Bernstein concludes that it is neither possible nor desirable to give socialism a 'purely materialist foundation.' Socialism rests on ethical factors; it is a result of conscious human choice" (84), a type of organic social evolutionism that advocates reform instead of revolution. Dr. Knowles' social experiment adheres to this philosophy, but

coffin; it is a hand-to-hand struggle all the sad, slow way, fought in solitude, – a battle that began with the first heart-beat, and whose victory will come only when the drops ooze out, and suddenly halt in the veins. (7)

The narrator drags the reader down into the monotonous, unchanging existence of Margret's (and everyone's) life of toil, but then makes a connection between naturalism and religion when she adds, " – a victory, if you can gain it, that will drift you not a little way upon the coasts of the wider, stronger range of being, beyond death" (7). Anxieties about "progression or degeneration" in an industrialized, modern world are often coded in the synthesis of scientific and religious rhetoric. This world may be determined by natural and social forces beyond control, but the next will be better.

Moreover, pointing toward this synthesis of discourses in one character, in the "Afterword" to *Margret Howth*, Jean Fagan Yellin writes, "Lois is a powerless victim on earth who is powerful in heaven" (285). Davis may call for economic reform through respect for workers, class reform through equal opportunities and pay, and church reform through realistic understanding of the plight of common beings – not through church creeds to which few have any personal connection or understanding – but the intersection with theories of determinism and various forces beyond human control causes the reader to ponder the futility

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is often questioned by the narrator, Mr. Howth, Stephen Holmes, and Dr. Knowles himself on the basis of atavistic qualities in human nature.

of human action. In *Margret Howth*, Davis repeats the condemnation of the Church for not meeting the poor worker's needs in the "emblazoned crimson of the windows, the carving of the arches, the very purity of the preacher's style" (18). Although naturalism is a philosophy of natural forces without divine intervention, the authors in this study make connections between natural and divine forces by specifically denouncing formal religion and favoring personal faith in the midst of hereditary, economic, and environmental forces beyond human control.

### **The Struggle Between Religion and Science**

Continuing the pattern of struggling for existence and struggling with self, the narrator manipulates or encourages Margret's struggles. The narrator of *Margret Howth* moves back and forth between naturalistic themes and religious yearnings in examples affirming or questioning beliefs and practices of the times: from meaningless expressions about God, "Men have forgotten to hope, forgotten to pray; only in the bitterness of endurance, they say 'in the morning, 'Would God it were even!' and in the evening, 'Would God it were morning!'" (3), to direct, meaningful references to God, "His quiet hand controls us" (4). In a moment of awakening, Margret sees the toil ahead and does not shrink from it. She holds on to her faith and God's promises for the future, but the narrator speaks to her also, "Oh, Margret, Margret! Was there no sullen doubt in the brave resolve?" The narrator tries to force Margret to question her faith and

wins. After more consideration, Margret sees the world as “gray and silent” and “Her defeated woman’s nature called it so, bitterly. Christ was a dim, ideal power, heaven far-off. She doubted if it held anything as real as that which she had lost” (52). Knowles also uses Margret’s faith to manipulate her into helping him with “his scheme” to help the poor (154). He tells her that Gods calls her to the work, “Help me to give liberty and truth and Jesus’ love to these wretches on the brink of hell” (155). The narrator uses Margret’s faith to show her simplicity, often remarking on the “far-off Christ” or “far-off heaven” as opposed to what is real (and “to-day”)<sup>109</sup> in the 1862 world of industrial tyranny and urban development. The narrator’s rhetorical techniques of manipulation includes questioning to provoke doubt: “Do you think that He, who in the far, dim Life holds the worlds in His hand, knew or cared how alone the child was?” (159). Margret continues the struggle within herself, “‘Does God call me to this work? Does He call me?’ she moaned” (155). Even as Margret questions her work in the world, she continues to pray for a life with Holmes.

In *Margret Howth*, the religious rhetoric presents the reader with a steady stream of references to Christ and his example to serve and bear burdens with joy, which are countered with questioning and doctrinal debate. Though Dr. Knowles often denigrates religion, he does so with a thorough knowledge of scripture and church doctrine. Furthermore, the theories of naturalism contradict the belief of divine intervention, which again leads the reader through

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<sup>109</sup> The secondary title to *Margret Howth* is *A Story of To-day*.

a battle of “warring truths” to a negotiated ending. The effects of the battle between science and religion are uneven or inconsistent among characters. Clearly expounding evolutionary theory, Knowles claims, “Out of chaos came the new-born earth” (25) and “I am not a believer myself, you know . . . . In Utopia, of course, we shall live from scientific principles” (188). Margret’s father turns the argument to religious rhetoric: “But its foundations were granite . . . . . When you found empires, go to work as God worked” (25). Mr. Howth’s religious philosophies do not mesh with his political theories, and he has little compassion for the “hearts of the great unwashed” claiming, “Look at the germs and dregs of nations, creeds, religions, fermenting together!” (26); he disdainfully calls them “that class of people” (28). Mr. Howth’s religious rhetoric is not based on a personal faith. He is a classicist and idealist and knows the theories (strangely mixing Comte and Calvin), but has no desire, or is not able (because of old age and blindness), to put them into practice. His enemies are Spinoza, Fichte, Saint Simon (30).<sup>110</sup> Mr. Howth expounds contradictory philosophies, but Knowles still feels the need to condemn Christianity to the old man, saying, “We have something better to fight for than a vacant tomb” (33). Knowles sees

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110 In *Margret Howth*, Holmes has “the faith of Fichte” (244). Johann Fichte, German philosopher, wrote *The System of the Doctrine of Morals in Accordance with the Principles of the Doctrine of Science* in 1798. In a collection of lectures, Fichte claims a five-fold division of the views of the world: Sense, Legality, Morality, Religion, and Science (*Popular Works* 293). Fichte argues, “Neither after our union with God is the World lost to us; it only assumes a new significance, and, instead of an independent existence such as it seemed to us before, it becomes only the appearance and manifestation, in Knowledge, of the Divine Life that lies hidden within itself” (365). Fichte is working out the connections among science, religion, and morality, and Davis, by citing him in her novel, is allowing her characters to work through the same processes.

religion as an “unfeeling mockery to a sick and hungry world” (46). He cannot reconcile the suffering on earth with promises of “To-Morrow” (47).

Davis sets up the battle between science and religion within Knowles and provokes the reader to think about connections between the natural and the divine by having the narrator ask several pointed questions that put the God on trial. The narrator asks, “Could he [Jesus] serve this day? Could he? The need was desperate. Was there anything in this Christianity, freed from bigotry, to work out the awful problem which the ages had left for America to solve?” She adds, “God, looking down into his [Knowles’] heart that night, saw the savage wrestling there” (49). Knowles is the most complicated character in the novel. He is an atheist who has compassion for those who suffer as he has, but then whips those he is trying give a better life; Knowles claims, “Brute force must come in” (188).

Knowles’ “new system of Sociology” (187) is a reformist (as opposed to revolutionary) version of Marxist philosophy of evolutionary socialism, but no one believes the project will succeed. Mr. Howth argues, “Nothing can save such a scheme from failure. Neither the French nor German Socialists attempted to base their systems on the lowest class, as you design” (23-24). Mrs. Howth calls Knowles a “Fourierite,” (29), referring to a utopian socialist whose writing on “social evolution” indicated that humanity had to pass through 36 periods

from savagery to harmony (*Selections* 50).<sup>111</sup> However, just because Mrs. Howth associates Knowles with Fourier does not indicate that he adheres to the man's theories. And to Knowles, Mr. Howth asks, "You sneer at Comte? Because, having the clearest eye, the widest sweeping eye ever given to man, he had no more? It was to show how far flesh can go alone" (27).<sup>112</sup> Comte's *Positive Philosophy* is mentioned erratically in *Margret Howth* by the narrator and various characters. For instance, the narrator, contemplating Knowles' ideas, says, "Truth will not underlie all facts, in this muddle of a world, in spite of the Positive Philosophy, you know" (179). According to the narrator, Knowles is an "intolerant fanatic" and "fanatics must make history for conservative men to learn from, I suppose" (180). Davis was clearly well read in philosophy and was allowing her characters to work out connections among the theories important to the times. But, in regard to Knowles, how is the reader to understand the connections to certain philosophers and in what ways are they associated with naturalism? Comte, Spencer, and Darwin are often associated in discussions of social evolution (Seward 355), and even though Knowles' "scheme" of a "communist fraternity" (83) is a way to reform society for a better future, the naturalistic element of his character and those he tries to help point toward a failed experiment.

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111 Francois Charles Fourier (1772-1837), French socialist. Interestingly, Fourier inspired the utopian commune of La Reunion near Dallas, Texas (1855).

112 Comte coined the term "sociology" (OED).

Creating another example of the dialectical debate and using the rhetorical technique of a public speaking situation in *The Descendant*, Glasgow continues to negotiate the mix of naturalism and morality when, at an emotionally charged meeting that Michael Akershem attends, the speaker at the podium asks, "What has restrained us from feeding man upon man, and caused us to stretch forth a hand of human fellowship?" (129). People in the crowd offer the following responses: "Nothing," "Science," "Religion," and "Wealth," but the speaker answers himself: "Humanity! I ask what has led us forth from kinship with the lion and the tiger . . . Morality" (129). In this one moment Glasgow plays out the battle between science and religion and claims the only solution to animalism is to develop a moral and social conscience. In *From Physics to Politics*, Robert Trundle, examines the "skeptical shift" when he says,

Determinism led to another problem since it seemed incompatible with freedom. But the judgment that "All persons are free agents" was presupposed by religio-moral inquiry and "All events are causes" by scientific inquiry. The inquiries came to be viewed as addressing radically different worlds. (69)

Trundle claims that the nineteenth century continued this mixing (negotiating) the scientific and the "religio-moral" perspectives:

Thus the notion of starting with physics was superseded by metaphysical extremes: an unfettered freedom and exhaustive dialectico-materialistic determinism. The extremes were not

compatible despite their later entanglement in a “Nietzschean Marxism” whose central target was a medieval naturalism. In starting with scientific descriptions of our nature and appealing to an incontrovertible experience of ourselves for a limited freedom and determinism, a revitalized naturalism is not only coherent but leads modally to an uncaused cause which may be understood as Nature's God. (135)

In another mix of “warring truths,” Glasgow says of Rachel, “It was as if a devil and an angel warred within her, one chaining her to the flesh and to earth, the other drawing her upward to the heaven of the mind” (115-116). Rachel is a study in the struggle between mental and physical passions, almost to the point of insanity: “Still they warred and wrestled within her, and she crouched like a hunted thing upon the floor” (116). All of these elements in Rachel’s nature play out as a struggle between love and ambition.

Davis’ dual presentation of hereditary determinism and religious rhetoric sets up an intellectual battle for the purpose of examining the effects of industrialization and heredity on one’s social conscience or personal faith. Davis presents the elements, the natural and the divine, as complementary and contradictory. Then, oddly, through narrated monologues in Knowles’s voice, the narrator comments on God’s purposes for Margret’s life of toil and Knowles’ hand, “to make use” of her. The narrator combines natural philosophies and domestic and religious ideologies and claims, “Nature made her” (22) “for God

and her master to conquer and understand" (23). This philosophy of "no choice" turns people like Margret into machines: "Could this automaton be Margret?" (227) or "She is a machine, for work" (228) Margret is like the "miserable pecking chicken" in the wire cage in the mill office where she works.<sup>113</sup> When Margret looks outside she sees a "dead brick wall" (11, 87)<sup>114</sup> and listens to the "monotonous beatings of a clock" (87), emphasizing her determined existence.

However, Davis' assertion that hope comes from Christ is startling in this realistic tale of hard labor and despair since organized religion is denounced and indifferent environmental forces control the characters' lives. Throughout the story, the narrator questions hope in the future and advocates a fatalistic or deterministic philosophy: For Margret Howth, "perhaps life had nothing better for her" (10), but ends with "Christmas-day" and Holmes' realization of his renewed faith in Christ, but the narrator still questions, "What if it were the last?" (73). This constant battle between "warring truths" plays out until the end of the novel when the religious character (Lois) dies, the naturalistic characters (Knowles and Old Yare) are degraded or pushed aside, and the moralistic character (Margret) survives the struggle with a renewed purpose in life. However, Margret and Stephen Holmes' impending marriage creates a tidy wrap that seems incongruous with the fatalistic arguments in an industrialized, mechanical world.

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<sup>113</sup> References to caged birds appear in several naturalistic texts, such as the canaries in *McTeague* and "Life in the Iron-Mills."

## Conclusion

From the many nineteenth-century debates about science, religion, and morality, Davis and Glasgow develop a synthesis of cultural and literary arguments. The elements of romance and sentimentalism in these texts operate within the realistic tone of their stories, breaking down any absolutes about various scientific and social theories, and developing a uniquely hybridized theory of human nature. With the loss of teleological order brought on by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Spencer's *First Principles* (1862), these authors maintain moral development as the most important aspect of human nature, a nature so often at odds with its instincts and desires, victim to social institutions and environmental forces, and even subjected to instances of chance. The nineteenth-century writer, reader, and critic had to navigate the stream of contradictory and controversial theories, aggravated by the anxieties of a rapidly changing society brought on by industrialization to develop his or her own synthesis of religious and scientific rhetoric. As the novels progress, the characters' rhetoric is sometimes warring, sometimes united, as the authors move the readers toward synthesized theories, negotiated spaces between pure religion and pure naturalism. The most interesting theories are usually found in liminal spaces, where we see reality reflected in negotiation, instead of the subversion of one theory over another.

One example of the synthesis of science and religion is in the character of Lois Yare. Although she represents religious rhetoric in the novel, she is still the victim of forces beyond her control, including industrial abuse and social prejudices. Davis' narrator echoes the rhetoric of scientific racists when she says that Lois is set "apart from even the poorest poor, – the taint in her veins of black blood" (56). However, I have shown the narrator to be unreliable, and two paths result – either the narrator is speaking in a sarcastic tone to ridicule these prejudicial views; or, the narrator accepts the rhetoric of the times and Davis uses the views of Margret, the moral figure, to mediate the narrator's views. Either way, drawing the threads of discourse together at the end, Davis accepts aspects of social and environmental determinism, examines racist views of hereditary determinism, and encourages readers to change the attitudes and actions they can through moral development and reform. Even though Jean Fagan Yellin, in the "Afterword," says that Davis leaves the question of nature versus nurture unresolved in the rhetoric surrounding Joe Yare (is he a criminal because of the effects of blood or slavery?), she brings to light the changes made in the manuscript for James T. Fields, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, changes that Davis made to the end of the story to make it "more cheerful" and "less distasteful" (qtd. in the "Afterword" 288). Although the original manuscript is lost, Yellin pieces together a more probable ending from Davis' letters about "being afraid to touch forbidden subjects," intending to "kill Dr. Knowles at Manassas," and referring to Stephen Holmes as being "drawn from life and in

my eagerness to show the effects of a creed like his, I 'assembled the gloom' you complain of" (288-290). Yellin, and critic William Grayburn, argue that Davis meant for Holmes to die in the fire at the mill and leave Margret to attend to the poor (291). Yellin claims the first two-thirds of the novel support this more realistic ending, which would better exemplify my theory of three characters representing three strands of dialectical discourse achieving a synthesis of science and religion – the religious and naturalistic characters would have died, while the moral character survived as the fittest in the struggle for existence. Yellin argues that Davis proposes “spiritual solutions” to the economic problems of the day (273), but through the dialectical and dialogic debates of the characters, the solutions are more ethical than religious.

Glasgow and Davis had to struggle to advance their artistic convictions and imaginative innovations against the literary conventions expected of women writers. Both authors acknowledge publisher interference, which caused them to tone down the darker side of life in their stories (an exercise not usually associated with male writers of the day).<sup>115</sup> In *Twisted from the Ordinary*, Mary Papke writes, “The immense power of naturalist texts – to repulse, to shock, to unsettle profoundly one’s conceived notions of self, freedom of will, and moral value – lies in their transgressiveness” (ix). These writers were stepping out into uncharted territory for women authors and were somewhat reigned in by male publishers. They were testing theories of naturalism on characters, but may not

have been able to go to the darkest places because of reader and publisher appeasement; however, their religious rhetoric shows that they would not have rejected a moral or spiritual connection to natural laws even if the social restrictions did not exist. Since the authors in this study are literary naturalists, they offer a new look at naturalism as they tangle threads of discourse in unique ways to force the reader to question scientific, religious, and social beliefs and doubts that give women characters (Margret and Rachel) a model of “feminist negotiation,” or rhetorical negotiation, of “contentious middle grounds” (Orr).

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115 See Glasgow's comments in *Reasonable Doubts* (220) and excerpts from Davis' letters (288).

## Chapter Four

“Good Profits”: Exploring Economic Determinism, Ecocriticism,  
and Human Misery in the fiction of  
Rebecca Harding Davis and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton

“Yes, only that good profits which does not represent the misery of others; only that wine should be sweet which is not drunk when the tears of those we have rendered desolate are silently running over pale cheeks from eyes that have kept the vigil of want, mourning for the beloved to whom poverty brought death!”  
(*The Squatter and the Don* 353)

Rebecca Harding Davis in “Life in the Iron-Mills” (1861) and *Margret Howth* (1862) and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) enter the world of literary naturalism by depicting the effects of economic forces that dominate the powerless and intensify industrialization’s battle with the natural world. The use of rhetorical methodology, which highlights key terms and images associated with naturalism in these texts, illuminates the authors’ negotiation of the debates about economic and environmental determinism, thus leading to the acknowledgment of the authors’ participation in deterministic discourse and their inclusion in scholarly studies about American literary naturalism. All the authors in this dissertation examine the role of hereditary determinism in an individual’s life, but this chapter expands the view to explore the influence of deterministic forces on society as a whole.

Pure definitions of “determinism,” which rarely remain pure in application, attribute either primacy to economic forces over all else or

environmental factors over all else in determining the course of human history. Pure economic determinism overly generalizes the focus of all human existence on the economic struggle to survive (economic reductionism); environmental determinism (also called geographical determinism) maintains geography as the determinant of cultural conditions instead of social or economic stimulus; Davis and Ruiz de Burton highlight the battle between humans and nature with a split between ethical and unethical humanity in regard to the economic arena and the effects those determinants have on the environment. Even though these authors place economics above environmental and hereditary factors in determining human behavior, they clearly argue for economic reform not only to uplift those less fortunate, but to protect the environment as well, which highlights the need to examine these texts not only from a rhetorical approach that highlights feminist negotiation, but also from an ecocritical approach that emphasizes the connection between humanity and nature.<sup>116</sup>

At the beginning of this dissertation project, starting with rhetoric about human nature and hereditary determinants, then complicating the analysis by examining the intersection with economic determinants, I realized the economic factors could not be separated from the environmental, which developed into a complex matrix of human, environmental, and economic factors that converge in

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<sup>116</sup> Ecocriticism, the study of ecological concerns in literature, has a relatively recent but prolific canon of scholarly sources, which is highlighted in David Mazel's compilation of works, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*. Athens: The U of Georgia P, 2001. Book titles such as *The Truth of Ecology*, *Green Writing*, and *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the*

these texts as a feminist negotiation of naturalism. "Life in the Iron-Mills" highlights the poverty and powerlessness of mill workers Hugh and Deb Wolfe. *The Squatter and the Don* highlights the powerlessness of the ranchers in the way of progress for railroad conglomerations and state politics, but, in this case, they want the railroad to come; they want industrial progress for San Diego; however, Ruiz de Burton shows that even though the characters are optimistic about economic progress, the reader sees the negative impact of industrialization on both humans and environment. Both Hugh Wolfe and Don Mariano's stories follow naturalistic plots of decline that end in the protagonists' death (to suicide or illness), in an uncaring world.<sup>117</sup> However, instead of an uncaring environment of natural laws, Davis and Ruiz de Burton concentrate on an uncaring economic system that destroys both humans and the environment.

Even though Davis is speaking for the rights of lower-class mill workers, Ruiz de Burton's middle and upper-class settlers and landowners garner almost as much sympathy. Don Mariano's battle with the railroad and legislators leads to his degradation and death, just as with Hugh Wolfe's battle with the mill economy. The chain of economic events ("cruel fate," *Squatter and the Don* 326) appears uncontrollable, which would seem to demonstrate the authors' acceptance of the philosophy of economic determinism; however, Davis and Ruiz de Burton negotiate theories based within sites of power and greed. While

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*Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, focus my analysis, not on a narrow view of nature's value or benefits, but on a broader view of the environment, which the narrator's or characters' attitudes toward nature reveal.

not refuting the deterministic movements of unchecked industrial progress, Davis and Ruiz de Burton mediate pure theory with characters' moral ability to at least fight rampant materialism and the lack of ethics in business. The male characters who lack economic power, even though they have artistic or moral virtues, often follow a plot of decline, including Hugh Wolfe, Don Mariano, Mr. Mechlin, and others. The women (Margret Howth, Deborah Wolfe, Mrs. Darrell, and Doña Josefa) struggle but survive. This is a striking difference between genders and stresses the authors' feminist negotiation of literary naturalism. While the main male characters battle the economic system and lose, the female characters, although scarred by the battle, manage to mediate the system and continue to work for economic reform through spiritual faith and ethical choices, offering the reader a model of reformist vision.

For Davis and Ruiz de Burton, the story is about entering and mediating socio-economic discourse on the naturalistic tendencies of market capitalism as feminist negotiation of male-dominated discourse for the purpose of changing readers' attitudes toward economic agency for marginalized populations and technological destruction of the environment. The purpose of this chapter is not to treat these authors as ecologists, but to treat their texts as part of a growing body of work, which enlarges the picture of nineteenth-century ecological and economic consciousness, or the lack of such consciousness, and offers a point of reference for comparisons of environmental orientations among genres and

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117 See June Howard's *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985.

disciplines as well as decades and centuries. David Mazel, author of *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, defines ecocriticism as “the study of literature as if the environment mattered” (1). As ecocriticism moves *Beyond Nature Writing* to ecofiction, as Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace suggest in their book title, the outcome is not an exploration of how “green” an author’s work is, but what connections can be made among environment, economics, and literary approaches. The goal is to answer the challenge to extend ecocriticism across genres and make unusual connections among economy, ecology, and nineteenth-century romanticism, realism, and naturalism.<sup>118</sup> Evaluating and applying aspects of ecocriticism to works of nineteenth-century American women fiction writers extends the boundaries of an emerging field beyond twentieth-century texts and directs the research into the rhetoric of nature and naturalism in relation to economic concerns of the second half of the nineteenth century.

This chapter of my dissertation examines theories of economic agency and competition as feminist negotiation of the market economy. In *Subject to Negotiation*, Elaine Neil Orr claims,

For many, the possibility of *women’s voice* seemed to reside in textual subversions and cultural separations. Until recently, the metaphor of negotiation received little positive attention, perhaps

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<sup>118</sup> A variety of ecocritical approaches appears in *The Green Studies Reader: Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, including essays by Kenneth Burke entitled “Hyper-Technologism, Pollution, and Satire” and Claude Lévi-Strauss’ “The Environment of Myth.”

because theories of cultural hegemony (whether male or white or heterosexual) have been so persuasively demonstrated. (4)

For Davis and Ruiz de Burton, feminist negotiation does not mean refutation of economic determinism or capitalism's effects on society, but mediation through understanding the value of human choice within a powerful economic system. Through the female characters, who, in Orr's words, "are systematically positioned on more than one side of the fiction's sexual/textual politics" (4), the story "accepts the reality of limits and advances the idea of working between dominant and marginal systems through simultaneous acts of accommodation and critique" (4). In this chapter, the study focuses on the female characters movement inside and outside economic situations and institutions as they negotiate scenes of economic power. Margret Howth may have to accommodate the system by working at the mill for her family's sake, but she can also work to change the lives of those ravaged by the effects of industrialization. Deb Wolfe may steal from the mill owner because she sees no other economic opportunity, but Davis' critique of the system leads to possible reform motivations in the reader. According to Orr, "What may appear in one light as a timid or underdeveloped feminism may, in this light, reappear as a more complex, more advanced feminist method [. . .] dramatiz[ing] the go-between thinking of hybrid subjects" (4). Deborah Wolfe, Margret Howth, Mrs. Darrell, Doña Josefa, among others, work within patriarchal systems with reformist theories. At the end of *The Squatter and the Don*, when an old friend tells Doña Josefa she cannot

speak out against the greed of those whose actions led to her husband's death, Doña Josefa says, "Then it is a crime *to speak* of the wrongs we have suffered, but it not a crime *to commit* those wrongs" and "I slander no one, but shall speak the truth" (336). The female characters will not be silenced; even though Deborah must go to prison, Margret marries Holmes, and Doña Josefa is left to fight alone, their struggles for existence and negotiations of economic and social determinism end in the possibility of reform mindedness in the reader.

Scholarly studies of these texts often use feminist, political, or historicist approaches to analyzing literature.<sup>119</sup> Many nineteenth-century novels delve into the themes of economic and environmental determinism, but are usually classified as working-class novels or political reform novels. However, economic events are the driving force of the text instead of heredity, society, politics, or religion. In "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," David Luis-Brown claims that these novels are "indisputably political novels" (213); however, the political arena is only enacted in the service of the economy. The economic machine overwhelms

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119 Most scholarly articles analyzing *Squatter and the Don* highlight the racial aspects of the text from a political standpoint instead of hereditary determinism as a tenet of naturalism. Examples include David Luis-Brown's "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*" (*American Literature*, December 1997, 813-839); José F. Aranda Jr.'s "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Resistance Theory, and the Politics of Chicano/a Studies" (*American Literature*, September 1998, 551-579); and Jesse Alemán's "Historical Amnesia and the Vanishing Mestiza: The Problem of Race in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*" (*Aztlan*, Spring 2002, 59-94); regarding Davis' texts, "Life in the Iron-Mills" receives much more attention than *Margret Howth*, but the article foci include gender, class, and race, rarely mentioning naturalism with the exception of Sharon Harris's dissertation, *Rebecca Harding Davis in the Context of American Literary Realism/Naturalism* (1988), and *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (1991).

and overtakes social, cultural, religious, political, and environmental experiences and relationships. This economic interpretation of history must be considered in relation to race, class, and wealth. Editors Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita argue that Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* "demands a double reading, both as a romance and as a historical novel" (15). Since economics drive the historical events of the story while the characters' relationships seem flat or melodramatic, I argue that the reading should also focus on Ruiz de Burton's negotiation of theories of economic determinism. Some scholars bring these authors together in coursework on American realism and naturalism or nineteenth-century American women writers, but do not examine the texts together in articles or books. A few scholars make connections between Ruiz de Burton and Helen Hunt Jackson's fiction,<sup>120</sup> but do not make a connection between the economic naturalism in Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's texts. These authors argue the idea that some humans have little or no choice and live in a deterministic world because of economics. The idea is circular: without economic opportunity one is pushed along by uncontrollable economic events, and, since one's life is determined by economic forces beyond control, one rarely has an economic opportunity to rise above circumstances unless chance (another characteristic of naturalism) touches the character's life.

Davis and Ruiz de Burton argue that human nature's aggression in the marketplace should be mediated by moral standards, which illuminates the

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<sup>120</sup> See studies by David Luis-Brown, Anne Goldman, and Kate McCullough.

authors' stance as evolutionary optimists.<sup>121</sup> However, there is a divergence between their presentations: Davis presents the pessimistic urban scene with its encroachments on nature, whereas Ruiz de Burton presents the optimistic vision of industrial progress for the growing San Diego ranching and farming economy. Even though Ruiz de Burton's treatment of economic progress is optimistic, struggles for existence among groups (ranchers, squatters, railroad owners, government officials, etc.) are difficult. The only expression of optimism in Davis' texts is the hope that the reader will process the same negotiations the characters experience but with a different, more ethical outcome for industry's effects on humans and the environment.

Davis and Ruiz de Burton put economic and environmental forces in a struggle with each other for the purpose of exposing the lack of ethical intervention and calling for economic reform for human and environmental rights or progress. In "Natural Law and Natural Right: The Role of Myth in the Discourses of Exchange and Community," Winston Davis argues,

Since the seventeenth century, economic trends have been thought to be as irresistible as gravity and as predictable as clocks and other mechanical devices. Whatever his analogy or root metaphor, the economist-merchant has generally believed that the forces of the market were self-regulating and that the flow of profits into his

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<sup>121</sup> A belief that humans exist in a universe determined by scientific laws and chance, but can still make moral choices "similar to the liberal nineteenth-century optimistic belief in progress" and "akin to the evolutionary optimism of Herbert

own pockets was as natural, and as irreversible, as the movement of the tides. Indeed, so strong was his faith in economic naturalism that his analogies took on religious dimensions. The laws of economics became laws of nature; the laws of nature, the laws of God. The nineteenth century, however, had a profoundly secularizing effect on all of this. (352)<sup>122</sup>

Even though the secularization of nineteenth-century thought applied to economics, Davis and Ruiz de Burton negotiate the secular and the sacred by likening economic degradation to hell and questioning the role of religion in changing the circumstances of the poor in the quickly expanding industrialization of the nation. Davis' Quaker woman in "Life in the Iron-Mills" and Margret Howth and Ruiz de Burton's Mrs. Darrell are spiritual, but not religious, and add the moral element in a world quickly crumbling under the weight of economic determinism. The authors use rhetorical tools such as sympathy to invite identification with these characters, and sarcasm and appeals to fear to encourage division from other characters who are in positions of power to change economic policies but do not. In *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke claims,

The audience is powerless to affect the course of events; at the same time, its sympathy for the characters makes it long to alter the

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Spencer and others" (Drees 74-76).

course of events – and this divided attitude, a sense of being with the people as regards one’s sympathies but aloof as regard one’s ability to forestall the movement of destiny, this awareness of a breach between one’s desires and one’s understanding, this is ironic. (419)

The function of the authors’ appeals to fear is to change readers’ attitudes toward the nature of “progress” in connection to the natural world.<sup>123</sup> Once the authors choose a rhetorical strategy and set up the situation, the narrator’s tone becomes an important part of the rhetorical effect on the reader. For instance, in *The Squatter and the Don*, the narrator, using a tone of sarcasm, claims, “Mr. Stanford says that if he did not cause misery some one else would, for “*misery there must always be in this world!*” Sound philosophy, truly! Why should he recoil from adding to the sum total of human misery when so many others do the same” (297). Applying sarcasm to Governor Stanford’s (a character whose ethical practices are constantly questioned) application of pessimistic determinism distances the reader from the character and seems to imply the narrator’s confidence that misery could be eradicated with human compassion; however, this rhetorical negotiation is part of a complex interweaving of many characters’ actions, thoughts, and words as they play out in the overall outcome of the

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122 See below the mill owners’ comments from “Life in the Iron-Mills” and Governor Stanford’s comments from *The Squatter and the Don*.

123 Herbert Spencer’s “Progress: Its Law and Cause” (1857) was an important influence on many fiction writers of the times, and his theories are specifically mentioned in Ruiz de Burton’s text at least eight times.

narrative, which argues for moral behavior in spite of the influences of hereditary, economic, and social determinism; nevertheless, the endings are ambiguous as to whether that is possible.

Although all the characters struggle in the maelstrom of economic and social forces, the rhetorical choices encourage the reader to identify with the moral characters; thus, the authors accommodate readers while acknowledging the degradation of humanity in an indifferent economic environment. Winston Davis describes this nineteenth-century focus on economics without ethics as the “discourse of exchange” and “an operant (as opposed to a teleological) naturalism” (350). He claims that the “deethicization” of economics was related to “prolonged exposure to (or belief in) the ‘mechanism’ of the market itself” (353), and he compellingly adds:

An economy which works in a purely automatic or mechanical way can be affected by no amount of thought—ethical, philosophical, or religious. Conceived as a juggernaut of pure ‘motion,’ the self-regulating economy simply pulverizes questions about the *legitimacy* of property, wealth, and power under the massive weight of its own operant naturalism. (353)

Davis and Ruiz de Burton saw this application of economic naturalism as a crutch for lawmakers’ and businessmen’s greed. However, they argued through fiction that even when an economic system is in place, those in positions of authority in business and legislation have opportunities to make ethical choices

within the system, pursuing optimistic views of economic reform. However, this liminal space between pessimism and optimism is a difficult point to negotiate. In these stories, those in positions of authority are male and most choose greed over compassion, allowing economic determinants to continue unchecked. By setting up situations that exemplify the pessimism of materialistic determinism but leave the reader desiring the optimism of reform, these women writers negotiate evolutionary optimism by calling attention to the degradation of humans and the destruction of the environment in relation to the progress of society and the economy.<sup>124</sup> However, since the writers do not end with a resolution of the economic problems, the optimism extends only so far as in achieving identification with the reader. In order to achieve further results, readers would need to have economic independence and access to positions of authority or influence over those in positions of authority, which for most, especially for women of the second half of the nineteenth century, was a dim possibility; thus the authors reaffirm the belief in economic determinism. Davis

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124 This argument recalls similar arguments made about New Woman novelists since most of the novels end in the women's failure to find both independence and happiness, and this culmination can help make the case for necessary social reform. For Deb Wolfe, Margret Howth, and Mrs. Darrell (the female protagonists in Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's stories), their struggles for economic and personal independence end in frustration; however their struggles may impact readers' attitudes as well. In the "Introduction" to *A New Woman Reader*, Carolyn Nelson writes, "In their novels and stories the New Woman writers began to explore for themselves the lives of women, removing the definition of what was woman's nature and the true feminine from the hands of male writers and replacing it with a more complete and complex view." Then she adds, "While the New Woman writers were primarily realists and naturalists, many of them experimented with the forms of fiction, altering them in a variety of ways to represent what they believed to be a more authentic picture of woman's true nature" (3). Although Nelson situates the New Women writers in the 1890s and none of the contributors mention Davis or Ruiz de Burton, the women authors in this dissertation exhibited characteristics of New Woman fiction in their work.

and Ruiz de Burton cultivate this dichotomy between pessimism and optimism through the binaries of environment versus economy and feminine versus masculine, which encourages the reader to question the boundaries between determinism and reform.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, another nineteenth-century American writer who pursued economic independence for women in the context of social evolution, sheds light on the views of women of the times in her non-fiction study, *Women and Economics*, first published in 1898. Even though Davis and Ruiz de Burton published their narratives before this time, Gilman used non-fiction to expose many of the same tensions and feminist responses to economic conditions that Davis and Ruiz de Burton propagate in fiction. For Gilman, “The course of social evolution is the gradual establishment of organic relation between individuals, and this organic relation rests purely on economic grounds” (101-102). However, she also adds, “Our one great blunder in studying these things lies in our failure to appreciate the organic necessity of such moral qualities in human life” (324).<sup>125</sup> Do Davis and Ruiz de Burton argue for women’s economic independence or present the futility of the idea? In *Margret Howth*, by taking a job in the mill to support her family, Margret is only fulfilling a duty, not relishing her independence; Lois Yare seems to be more independent

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<sup>125</sup> In her 1898 nonfiction study *Women and Economics*, Gilman argues for the economic independence of women, examines social evolution, and argues, “The true and lasting social progress, beyond that which we have yet made, is based on a spirit of inter-human love, not merely the inter-sexual; and it requires an economic machinery, organized and functioned for human needs, not sexual ones” (142).

as a peddler, even though she is doubly disregarded by society as a cripple and mulatto. However, these women characters are often compared to the “dregs” or “wretches” or “beggars” of society even though their lots are somewhat better. Dr. Knowles shows Margret the unfortunate of society and says, “Women as fair and pure as you have come into dens like this, – and never gone away;” and adds, “So much flesh and blood out of the market, unweighed” (151). Likewise, in *The Squatter and the Don*, women must struggle in the economic arena. Mrs. Darrell claims, “I love my country, as every true-hearted American woman should, but, with shame and sorrow, I acknowledge that we have treated the conquered Spaniards most cruelly [. . .]” and “I am the one to blame for the purchase of the land which has given so much offense” (235-236). The market economy affects everyone, but women and minorities more profoundly.

In analyzing the rhetoric of naturalism in these texts there is an inseparable matrix of negotiation among the presentation of economic and environmental theories. Connecting a feminist approach with an ecocritical approach, I argue that these authors present a framework of duality, dividing nature into conceptions of value, either ecocentric or anthropocentric, categories which are usually gendered feminine or masculine respectively. However, these categories are not absolutes. The boundaries between nature-as-art (Hugh Wolfe’s view of the beauty in nature) and nature-as-use (the mill owners’ or railroad owners’ views of profit in natural resources) blur for some characters and are nonexistent for others. The narrator in “Life in the Iron-Mills,” says, “To

think that God put into this man's [Wolfe's] soul a fierce thirst for beauty," but when he cannot express this need, "his nature starts up with a mad cry of rage against God, man, whoever it is that has forced this vile, slimy life upon him" (48-49). The narrator firstly argues that human nature is determined by God but secondly argues that economic forces hold him down and starve his soul, in the same way industrialization starves nature's soul. Even characters whose attitudes toward nature include protection and admiration must acknowledge instances of their own use, and sometimes abuse, of the natural world, arising from a lack of control over economic forces; however, theories of economic determinism are mediated by the possibility of economic reform as a desire for common good.<sup>126</sup> Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's narratives do not follow an ecocentric focus like that of Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* and "A White Heron," but examine the effects of an anthropocentric view toward the environment, which for Davis' text is a much darker direction. Davis' descriptions of economic determinants and their effects on nature exhibit an eco-dystopian orientation, while Ruiz de Burton's are an eco-feminist study of the

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126 Theories of economic determinism (my term not theirs) vary according to Karl Marx's philosophical materialism, and Thomas Robert Malthus's principle of population. Marx claimed, "We see here how a consistent naturalism or humanism is distinguished from both idealism and materialism as well, and at the same time is the unifying truth of both" (Writings 325). For Marx, "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness" (*A Contribution* 11). Malthus's principle of population accounts for "much of that poverty and misery observable among the lower classes of people in every nation, and for those reiterated failures of the efforts of the higher classes to relieve them" (*An Essay* iv). Malthus argues that if people do nothing through "moral restraint or vice" to check population growth, "[. . .] we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that the poverty and misery, which prevail among the lower classes of society are absolutely irremediable" (ix-x).

connection between land and economy. These differing orientations correlate with the pessimistic/optimistic binary that applies to Davis' view of economic destruction and Ruiz de Burton's ambiguous presentation of economic progress. Ruiz de Burton's study of competing voices is questionable because even though most of the characters want economic growth for San Diego, the results are devastating for many.

The struggle between economic and environmental forces highlights the negotiation among deterministic factors for both Davis and Ruiz de Burton. This idea of an environmental orientation, a more encompassing concept for nature's place in a text, envelops the existence and determination of the dualities of nature. In his 2000 *ISLE* article, "Ecocriticism—What Is It Good For," Robert Kern argues that "all texts are at least potentially environmental" and that texts are "environmental without necessarily being environmentalist, and one major aim of ecocriticism, [. . .] is precisely to expose and facilitate analysis of their orientation, whatever it might be."<sup>127</sup> The reality of an environmental orientation does not signal a consensus on ecological perspectives, policies, and issues, but an awareness of the diversity of opinions on nature and the implications of such attitudes in fiction. This examination of the duality of nature links benefits, according to each character's viewpoint, with larger environmental concerns and leads the way to applying ecological approaches to literary criticism. However, an ecological approach to Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's novels cannot be

separated from theories of economic determinism, which take the reader beyond the ecological focus of Thoreau's nature writing or Mary Wilkins Freeman's and Sarah Orne Jewett's ecofiction.<sup>128</sup>

The ecological perspectives, intended or not, in these works lead the reader to a better understanding of environmental issues of the nineteenth century and actually urge action for various environmental policies or attitudes, which over 100 years later continue to concern nature writers, general fiction writers, and environmentalists today. Looking at ecocritical publications over the last few years, including the journal *ISLE*, I find that the critics rarely if ever mention Davis or Ruiz de Burton; however, the field of study is relatively new and this application of ecocritical principles to works of these authors shows environmental concerns as an important consideration in their representations of nature and economics. This connection may seem strange, but since the eco-dystopian and eco-feminist views of nature in the texts are tied to the negotiation of economic determinism and reform central to a naturalistic study of the works, this literary as well as rhetorical approach is a significant mechanism for delving into new areas of study for these texts.

Narrators' and characters' arguments about the natural world and economic forces expose either a pessimistic view of industrialization or a falsely

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127 *ISLE – Interdisciplinary Studies in Language and the Environment*.

128 Ecofiction focuses on nature as a controlling force or character in the text to the purpose of preserving a threatened environment or, like nonfiction nature writing, highlighting human's connection to the natural world. *Breaking*

optimistic view of progress. Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margret Howth* are examples of an author using fiction to garner support for industrial reform, two areas which are inextricably linked to environmental concerns. In "Life in the Iron-Mills," Davis places a poor Welsh puddler with the heart of an artist in the dirty confines of an iron mill while clearly paralleling the economic destruction of lives to that of the environment. In *Margret Howth*, Davis examines a woman's role in helping lower-class working people who have little or no voice in social reform, often using animal imagery to symbolize the economic machine's destruction of nature and humanity. In "Life in the Iron-Mills," with the narrator's realistic descriptions of the environment and Wolfe's artistic descriptions of nature's beauty and allusions to judgment day, the connection between industry and environment is an eco-dystopian (maybe even eco-apocalyptic) vision.<sup>129</sup> The contrast between nature's beauty and nature's misuse, the duality on which I am focusing, speaks loudly and clearly for nature's preservation and, in turn, humanity's. As an example of the realistic rhetoric of nature, the narrator describes the pollution of the "great chimneys of the iron-foundries" (39), including a "foul vapor" in the air, a "coating of greasy soot" on homes, trees, and people, and a "stagnant and slimy" river. However, even though the river "rolls sullenly," and "drags itself sluggishly along"

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*Boundaries: New Perspectives on Women's Regional Writing* examines the ecocritical perspective toward Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Zitkala Sa's *American Indian Legends*, and others.

<sup>129</sup> See Lawrence Buell's discussion of "environmental apocalypticism" in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

through the industrial waste, it “knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight” (40); the river has the hope of moving beyond the pollution to clean “air, and fields, and mountains,” while the narrator’s “dirty canary’s”<sup>130</sup> old dream of “green fields and sunshine” is dying.

The tug-of-war between Davis’ realistic and romantic representations of nature reflects this resistance of nature’s power to be confined by words and the modernizing impulses of the world itself. The realistic rhetoric of nature contrasts sharply with the romanticized personification of nature. In *Beyond Nature Writing*, the editors claim that several authors, “make the case that fiction, rather than nonfiction (the traditional ecocritical focus), is the genre that most effectively conveys nature’s resistance to narrative” (16). In *The Truth of Ecology*, Dana Phillips reinforces this resistance when she claims, “the history of ecology has been one of discovering how much unlike an organism and just how non-obvious the natural world can be” (51). Furthermore, Phillips shakes the foundations of ecocriticism when she writes, “Of course, to refer to environments is also to avail oneself of a trope (a synecdoche, perhaps, since the whole is made to stand for all of its parts), but we have got to call environments *something*, even if properly speaking ‘they’ aren’t ‘things’ at all and therefore should not be referred to as if ‘they’ were” (19). Although describing elements of the natural world may be difficult, the attempts are thought-provoking and useful to

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130 The canary as symbol for the determined existence shows up in “Life in the Iron-Mills,” Norris’s *McTeague*, and in other naturalistic texts. Canaries are mentioned as pets in *The Squatter and the Don*, but the reference does not hold the

understanding the inseparability of nature and economy in the rapidly changing landscape of industrialization during the second half of the nineteenth century, which helps the reader to look at the texts through a different lens and moves the discussion beyond generic or political examinations. For Davis, the artist is gendered feminine, and the beauty of nature is part of that vision, while the economy of the mill is gendered male and the power struggle between these visions is also a struggle for individual rights. For Ruiz de Burton, the landscape is gendered feminine and the monopoly is gendered masculine, but the struggle is the same as Davis'.

While the rhetoric of nature reveals a dystopian vision in "Life in the Iron-Mills," the narrator carefully contrasts the anthropocentric views of the mill owners with Hugh Wolfe's ecocentric view, exposing nature's lost beauty through the lens of his artist's eye. The narrator remarks, as Wolfe looks up at the clouds:

The fog had risen, and the town and river were steeped in its thick, gray, damp; but overhead, the sun-touched smoke-clouds opened like a cleft ocean, --shifting, rolling seas of crimson mist, waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet, inner depths / unfathomable of glancing light. Wolfe's artist-eye grew drunk with color. The gates of that other world! Fading, flashing before him

now! What, in that world of Beauty, Content, and Right, were the petty laws, the mine and thine, of mill-owners and mill-hands? (63)

Wolfe's connection to nature is physical and psychological, freeing and oppressive, and the beauty of nature has the ability "to rouse him to a passion of pain," a beauty which illuminates not only his despair for the human condition, but also his despair for the damage to the natural world. Davis continues to set up the imbalance between nature and economy with Wolfe's last question. Her character's questioning seems to be more for the reader than the character.

Wolfe wants to believe there is no connection, that beauty trumps money, but the reader sees the whole story and hears the indictment of personal inaction on behalf of the Hugh and Deb Wolfes of the world.

While Davis' rhetoric of nature presents a dystopian view of the effects of industrial waste, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* presents an eco-feministic orientation. Ecological feminism is a term whose origination is often debated by scholars;<sup>131</sup> however, according to Janet Biehl, "Indeed, no matter what ecofeminists regard as the proximate cause of environmental dislocations – the Scientific Revolution, Christianity, the classical Greeks, the 'Kurgans' – for most, the ultimate and continuing cause is patriarchy and the oppression of women" (47). In the "Introduction" to *The Squatter and the Don*, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita write, "Women are commodified, part of

the landscape, and from the beginning, for the squatters at least, seem to have exchange value like land" (45). Sánchez and Pita also claim that the romance narrative is about a quest "not merely for the love of a maiden, but also for land and justice" (7). This feminist negotiation of economic determinism is an unusual blending of nature, women, and commerce. Even the narrator equates nature with women when saying, "In vain did Mercedes scan the broad bosom of the Pacific Ocean in search of something to say that would be soothing to Clarence's feelings" (127). Mrs. Darrell, wife of one of the squatters, is the voice of reason as she, and her son (portraying the hope of a new generation), insist on not taking land from the "rightful" owner (36). The squatters and the don argue over ownership of the natural world, and lose sight of nature's place in relationship to industrial, technological, and social development. Rarely do the squatters describe nature in anything but legal and materialistic terms (unlike Wolfe's artistic, even "feminine" view), which distances them emotionally from the natural world: "All we have to do is to take their lands and finish their cattle" (71) because the land is "better soil" or "good enough soil" for farming (73). Most often when land is mentioned the phrases include "land claims," "land titles," and "land grants." Gasbang, one of the squatters, does describe the city of San Diego as "a most healthy little city," but then Hughes, another squatter, adds, "All we want now is a little stimulus of business property, and

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131 The term "ecofeminism" is highly debated and often used in ways not applicable to the study of literature and the environment; however, the examination of land gendered feminine is important to the understanding of Ruiz de Burton's

the railroad is sure to bring us that. Then San Diego will be the best place on the coast for a residence" (71) but only "the best" because of industrial progress. However, the narrator in *The Squatter in the Don*, as the competing voice, does engage in descriptions suggestive of the unrepressed beauty of southern California. The narrator says, "The golden rays of a setting sun were vanishing in the west, and a silvered moon was rising serenely over the eastern hills" (106); and another time when describing Yosemite, the narrator writes, "The memory of the lakes, with their gorgeous borders of green, their rich bouquets of fragrant azaleas" is like "a cherished souvenir" that "for the fatality of human joys, all is evanescent in this world" (153); even though the narrator sees beauty in the landscape, the final analysis is that it will not last.

The possibility of prosperity from railroad development for the squatters and landowners overrides any concern for the damage to the natural world. In this materialistic world, Don Mariano, among others, holds an anthropocentric conception of nature as valuable for the progress of industrialization and the transportation of products by railroad. Arguing against the "no fence law," Don Mariano claims, "But now no money will be made by anybody out of cattle, if they are to be destroyed, and no money made out of land, for the grazing will be useless when there will be no stock left to eat it" (89) and as one character dryly comments, "As the cattle don't know the law, they eat the crops and get killed" (135), which the respondent in turn considers hard on the landowners, not the

cattle. Although, in some instances in the novel, Ruiz de Burton also genders government female (like Don Mariano seeing the government as “maternal” and “a cruel stepmother” 84), she usually presents the land as a tool, something to be subordinated to man’s needs and prosperity, clearly favoring economic determinism to environmental. As a technique of feminist negotiation, Ruiz de Burton presents these gendered descriptions from male points of view to the purpose of evoking women readers to question standard views of nature. In “Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature,” Kate Soper argues,

If women have been devalued and denied cultural participation through their naturalization, the downgrading of nature has equally been perpetuated through its representation as ‘female’ [. . .] Feminized nature is not therefore emblematic simply of mastered nature, but also of regrets and guilts over the mastering itself; of nostalgias felt for what is lost or defiled in the very act of possession; and of the emasculating fears inspired by her awesome resistance to seduction. (141-143)

The word “beauty” is used in two ways in the novel: to describe women and land untarnished by men. The untamed, interior Mexican landscape for George Mechlin and Clarence Darrell is “of the transcendent beauty – the sublimity of scenery” and “so large and picturesque that it looks like an ocean set apart by the jealous gods so that men may not defile its beauty and break its silence with the hurry scurry of commercial traffic” (284). Like the previous example of the

vision of Yosemite's lakes as "a cherished souvenir," Ruiz de Burton presents the duality of nature as art and tool with a sadness toward nature as something to be lost as humans continue to tame or populate the land. Economic determinism is only one of the many facets of determinism as a characteristic of American literary naturalism, but Davis and Ruiz de Burton highlight this kind of determinism to emphasize the need for reform in a rapidly changing industrializing society, but also to highlight the need for feminist negotiation of male-dominated economic and political discourse.

While nature is gendered feminine and under attack, most of the female characters have some economic independence, even though Mary Darrell has to buy land without her husband's knowledge and Mrs. Mechlin loses her lawsuit after her husband's suicide because of the "indecentcies [which] thrived like water-reptiles growing huge and luxuriating in slimy swamps" (312). Many of the male characters' lives are degraded by economic determinants; however, the initial orientation toward the economy is different. The narrator claims, "If San Diego had been permitted to grow, to have a population, her administration of the laws would have been in other hands" (314); however, the lack of ethical behavior ("their feverish greed" 298) from the monopolists and lawmakers makes this comment seem naïve and highlights Ruiz de Burton's negotiation of economic determinism as a key factor in shaping the history of society.

Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's characters fall into distinct categories of rich versus poor, good versus evil, native versus interloper, and government versus

citizen. In these texts, the juxtaposition of the natural with the industrial results in messages that offer more complex negotiations of naturalism. The mixture of narrators' and characters' competing voices participating in the discourse on determinism (hereditary, environmental, or economic) causes confusion and forces the reader to negotiate or puzzle through the various theories to better understand the characters, the times, and the patterns and contradictions intrinsic to presentations of naturalism.<sup>132</sup> For example, Governor Standish's voice of unhindered capitalism competes with Don Mariano's voice of ethical economic progress.

Does Davis' Hugh Wolfe participate in the economic destruction of nature as much as the mill owner? Does Ruiz de Burton's Don Mariano participate in the economic destruction of nature as much as the railroad owners? Are worker and owner equally responsible or are the forces of economics beyond everyone's control? These questions highlight the difficult if not impossible negotiation of pure theories of determinism. As stated before, the complexity of the relationships among forces beyond or within human control causes ambiguity and sometimes even chaos among the form and content of texts attempting to negotiate these theories. The authors' experimentation with contemporaneous discourse and a variety of genres may be seen as clumsy stylistics, while actually daring the reader to engage in the discourse. In "Chaos Theory, Systems Theory,

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<sup>132</sup> June Howard, Donald Pizer, and Mohamed Zayani, among others, discuss patterns of chaos or disorder in form in relationship to contexts of naturalism.

and the Discourse of Naturalism," Mohamed Zayani writes, "The pursuit of ludic elements and chaotic trends in naturalism is exciting insofar as it opens up lines of analysis which are unthinkable within a traditional perspective anchored exclusively in the philosophy of determinism." The idea that these negotiations have "ludic elements" provokes a sense of humor associated with the awareness of the "indeterminacy in naturalism," which is related to Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's use of sarcasm in a character's or narrator's tone when negotiating deterministic theories. Zayani also states:

Other critics have tried to avoid the shortcomings that are inherent to the conception of naturalism as an all-encompassing totality or a total system but have not succeeded in profoundly altering our basic conception of this movement partly because the attention to indeterminacy is more a methodological posture than a polemic stance. (364)

Since I am envisioning American literary naturalism as more inclusive of texts negotiating naturalism without naturalistic plots or themes controlling the texts, the indeterminacy of determinism is understood and clearly a "methodological posture" for Davis and Ruiz de Burton instead of a "polemic stance." These authors are negotiating the scientific and sociological discourses of the day and applying them to an analysis of the economic progress or destruction brought on by industrialism for the purpose of provoking the reader to examine over which forces humans may have control – moral, economic, and social, and, in the

process, possibly change audience attitudes toward economic and ecological policies.<sup>133</sup>

For Davis and Ruiz de Burton, the economic determinants of the urban scene are in direct conflict with the spirit of nature upon which the urban scene encroaches, again connecting ecocriticism to literary naturalism. In *The Urban Sublime and American Literary Naturalism*, Christophe Den Tandt claims (about canonical writers Dreiser and Norris), “It is precisely through these unresolved tensions that the texts reveal their inability fully to map the urban economy and to utter consistent sociological pronouncements about it” (71). Den Tandt returns to Charles Child Walcutt’s division of naturalism along the lines of positivism and transcendentalism<sup>134</sup> and claims, “While it appropriates the deterministic outlook of positivism, naturalism inherits from transcendentalism a reluctance to deny the existence of free will, and, one might also add, the nostalgia for a world view that accommodates a presence of an encompassing spirit” (61). Den Tandt examines the chaotic nature of naturalistic texts and the idea of the totality of naturalism through the lens of sublimity or “terror and wonder” (4). According to Den Tandt, “[T]he spectacle of the metropolis stirs emotions of sublimity anchored in memories of overwhelming nature” (4). According to Den Tandt, tropes of urban sublimity such as crowd and ocean

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133 In “Science, Anti-Science, and Ecocriticism,” Glen A. Love argues, “Ecology and evolutionary biology have always been inextricably linked as sciences” (561).

imagery blur the boundaries between city and country, man and nature. For Ruiz de Burton crowd imagery often arises when someone speaks of lawmakers in Washington. George Mechlin says:

There seems to be a settled purpose with our law-givers to drive the natives to poverty and crowd them out of existence. If we don't turn them all into hardened and most desperate criminals, it will be because they are among the most incorruptible of the human race. But there is no denying that our laws are doing all that can be done to drive them into squalid hovels, and thence into the penitentiaries or the poorhouses. (135-136)

The imagery of crowding equates with herding animals in this sense, and, in another example, "the freedom of man to crowd and crush his fellow-man" (335). How do these images connect with American literary naturalism? Den Tandt, James Giles, and David Shi, among others, stress the importance of the urban landscape in naturalistic stories. The crowds associated with increasing urbanization and the waste associated with increasing technological development evoke a rhetoric of terror in texts. In *Margret Howth*, the terms reveal the "rhetoric of terror" associated with tight places and little air – "surging crowd," "dense crowds," "dusty crowds," and "wretches that crowd" – and in "Life in the Iron-Mills" the imagery becomes more sinister with the mill town

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134 See *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream*. For Walcutt, "The one is rebellious, the other pessimistic; the one ardent, the other fatal; the one acknowledges will, the other denies it. Thus "naturalism," flowing in both streams [. . .]"

crowded like “a street in Hell” (45). Den Tandt claims, “I have therefore worked from the outwards manifestations of the naturalist sublime – the commodity market, the crowd – down to more deeply imbedded issues like primitivistic genealogies or artistic empowerment” (8). While Ruiz de Burton and Davis touch on aspects of man’s primitive being and natural instincts, they more often show the effects of economic determinants on creativity and the artist’s spirit, especially that of Hugh Wolfe. This example may be tied to feminist rhetoric because Hugh is feminized in the text, but also as a commentary on the female artist and the economic factors that determine a writer’s ability to reach an audience with a story and possibly a message.

Even though the texts analyzed in this chapter are rarely discussed in connection to literary naturalism, comparisons should be made to the canonical male writers of the genre (Norris and Dreiser) to examine how these women writers were using many of the same rhetorical techniques for negotiating deterministic theories. The comparison not only brings women writers into the discussion, but also illuminates aspects of the canonical writers’ texts that do not meet the majority of the criteria for naturalistic novels, including the lack of references to specific theorists and the inclusion of spiritual and moral elements in addition to forces beyond one’s control. Because almost all the articles on economic determinism in the field of American literary naturalism are about the

canonical male writers,<sup>135</sup> I apply some of the analyses to Davis and Ruiz de Burton strengthening their connection to American literary naturalism. Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* and Frank Norris's *The Octopus* are uniquely connected novels and present an interesting comparison between a female author writing in the genre of historical romance and a male writer positioning himself in what he calls the romantic language of naturalism.<sup>136</sup> These novels offer a unique comparison between a male and female writer of the same time period, same region, and about the same historical struggles between the government, railroad, and landowners. In "The Signs and Symbols of the West': Frank Norris, *The Octopus*, and the Naturalization of Market Capitalism," Adam H. Wood writes, "*The Octopus*, for the first time in Norris's work, marks material considerations as the central influence on the characters within" (107). The use of deterministic theories is never uncomplicated. In *The Octopus*, Norris illustrates this theory in conjunction with economic determinism, when Vanamee argues, "The social reformer writes a book on the iniquity of the possession of land, and out of the proceeds, buys a corner lot. The economist who laments the hardships of the poor, allows himself to grow rich upon the sale of his book" (*The Octopus* 377). Davis and Ruiz de Burton negotiate hereditary, economic, and environmental determinism, ending with a synthesis of the three that leaves

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135 See Giles, Heckerl, Hoeller, Michaels, and Wood.

136 In the "Introduction" to *The Squatter and the Don*, Sánchez and Pita discuss the similarities between Ruiz de Burton's and Norris' treatments of the dispossession of landowners by the railroad and the loss of life at the Mussel Slough massacre of 1880 (9).

economics not in total control but in the lead, drawing attention the growing economic control over people's lives in the nineteenth century and featuring the complex negotiation of deterministic factors by these women authors.

Comparing Davis and Ruiz de Burton to another canonical writer, Theodore Dreiser, emphasizes a similarity among the authors of American literary naturalism in employing male characters to exemplify the effects of hereditary, economic, and social determinism. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, like Norris' *The Octopus*, presents the realities of the economic struggle for male characters as downfall and for female characters, again, though scarred, as survival and independence. George Hurstwood in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* falls from wealth to poverty, degradation, and death, while Carrie Meeber manages to survive; other than the main female character in *McTeague*, Trina, being murdered, the women characters in these tales usually survive while male characters follow a plot of decline due to economic, hereditary, and social forces beyond control. Norris's *McTeague* falls from a lower level, but, nonetheless, falls. Can I call this feminist negotiation when the male writers are writing the same plots of decline for the male protagonist? Even though the male characters seem to be the focus of a study in animal instincts, degradation, and amoral behavior, Davis and Ruiz de Burton's treatments of the female characters' fitness to survive is different than Dreiser's and Norris' outcomes for women characters. Dreiser's Carrie Meeber is as amoral as Hurstwood; she just seems to have the luck or chance events, or more cunning, to survive. Some of Norris' female characters also follow plots of

decline (Mrs. Hooven, Hilda, and Minna), but, more importantly, are not the focus of the story. The critical difference is that Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's female characters survive because they have a strong sense of self and moral aptitude. Even though Deb Wolfe steals the money that leads to Hugh's imprisonment, she atones for her mistakes. When Ruiz de Burton's Don Mariano loses his land and life, his wife thinks to herself:

Doubtless they say that they earned the money in BUSINESS, and that allegation is all sufficient; that one word justifies in the pursuit of riches everything mean, dishonest, rapacious, unfair, treacherous, unjust, and fraudulent. After a man makes his money no one cares how he made it, and so those people dance while I mourn for my beloved. (335)

Davis' and Ruiz de Burton's texts are not attempts to create characters blown around by the winds of chance and hereditary instincts, but to show that unchecked industrialization determines behavior and devastates nature.

Similarly, in *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton utilizes theories of economics to examine the effects of capitalism on human nature. Several characters refer to Herbert Spencer's negotiation of economics and ethics. For instance, Mr. Mechlin comments, "If our legislators could only be induced to adopt Herbert Spencer's view of *the duties of law-givers*, there would be far less misery in the United States" and "'the inferences of political economy are true, only because they are discoveries by a roundabout process of *what the moral law*

*commands'*" (200). When visiting the governor, Don Mariano refers to Herbert Spencer's theories in order to place blame on legislators for offering "a premium to one class of citizens to go and prey upon another class" (161). The authors lead the reader question commonly held beliefs about the nature of humans and their roles in a quickly changing industrialized nation. In *The Squatter and the Don*, the governor scoffs at Don Mariano and his moral view of economics, but through Ruiz de Burton's use of appeals to fear, she, like Davis, uses apocalyptic imagery to persuade readers of the dangers of allowing economic forces free reign: "These men – this deadly, soulless corporation, which, like a black cloud, has shut out the light from San Diego's horizon – will evermore cast the shadow that will be our funeral pall" (296). Davis and Ruiz de Burton's characters must live with the consequences of these deep changes; however, the authors' rhetorical goal, whether through pessimistic or optimistic means, is to change the readers' attitudes toward ethics in economics. Ruiz de Burton does this by offering a critical view from the Hispanic perspective, silenced for years by the same economic forces that Davis critiques.

Highlighting the pessimistic view of industrial progress in "Life in the Iron-Mills," throughout the opening and closing description of the mill town, Davis illustrates an apocalyptic vision of nature in the hands of industrialization, which is an important rhetorical strategy in calling attention to the effects of industrialization. The narrator opens saying,

The idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke. It rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets. Smoke on the wharves, smoke on the dingy boats, on the yellow river, --clinging in a coating of greasy soot to the house-front, the two faded poplars, the faces of the passers-by." (39)

These examples from both Davis and Ruiz de Burton connect images of the ravages of animals and nature to industrialization's effects on humans.

Although the stories try to end on a note of hope (perhaps sarcastically), the plots are basically what June Howard calls "plots of decline" often associated with literary naturalism.

In "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margret Howth*, even though both men and women in these texts fail to overcome the economic "machinery," the men, Hugh Wolfe and Dr. Knowles, are degraded or pushed aside. When Davis' Hugh Wolfe asks, "What am I worth?" (59), he does not question that value is monetary in a materialistic society, but Davis does. Through Deb's illegal actions, stealing money from Kirby, she resists the lack of concern of the employer for the employee. Davis' use of naturalistic theories leads the reader to question a human being's natural state apart from a market economy. Both "Life in the Iron-Mills" and *Margret Howth* are economic reform platforms even though the outcome of the negotiation leaves economics in control of the characters' lives. Even with the contradiction between the "choice" to resist or

not to resist in the texts, the ambiguity leaves the reader with a clear understanding of Davis' call to action. Although the characters fail to resist economic forces and live in a deterministic world, Davis persists in exhorting business owners to take seriously the responsibility to employees even if the employees' lives are determined by economic forces.

Setting up this relationship between owner and worker, Davis brings several characters together at the mill including the overseer, the son of one of the mill-owners, a doctor, and a journalist. Hugh Wolfe notices these men watching him, and asks himself, "What made the difference between them?" Kirby, the mill owner's son, continues to set the groups apart, othering the workers by calling them "hands" and "a desperate set" (50). The overseer talks of "net profits," "annual business," and "fair estimate," exhorting capitalist control of finance and production. He laughs in amusement, but the narrator's tone sets him up as a fool. Mitchell, Kirby's brother-in-law, "knows" Kant, Novalis, and Humboldt (51).<sup>137</sup> As Davis presents the class distinctions, she presents the dual pattern of animal versus gentleman: "At every sentence, Wolfe listened more and more like a dumb, hopeless animal, with a duller, more stolid look creeping over his face, glancing now and then at Mitchell, marking acutely every smallest sign of refinement, then back to himself, seeing in a mirror his filthy body, his more stained soul" (52). This reference highlights the degradation of workers when economic forces are left unchecked by business

ethics. Ruiz de Burton also addresses the animalism of those affected by hereditary, social, or economic determinism. Talking about Peter Roper, the shifty lawyer with a greedy nature, a young woman eccentrically says, “He is of the genus *hoodlum*. A bird aboriginal of the San Francisco sand dunes, resembling a peacock” and “it must be natural to him to act like a monkey” (104). The Indians are considered “savages” (163) and “stupid” (240). The landowners are supposed to be protectors of the land and animals, but the laws are allowing the squatters to kill the cattle and take land from rightful owners. The struggle for existence becomes an economic struggle as well as a moral one.

Davis makes the same connections and tosses around comments about economic forces and workers: “a world gone wrong,” “social riddle,” “social ladder,” “degraded souls,” “should be machines,” (52-54). Kirby answers for capitalism: “I wash my hands of all social problems, – slavery, caste, white or black. My duty to my operatives has a narrow limit, – the pay-hour on Saturday night.” Then he adds, “I am not responsible” (55). Davis uses Kirby’s “*ne pas mon affaire*” comment to shock the reader, not to persuade the reader of its truth. The doctor asks then who is. Kirby replies, “What has the man who pays them money to do with their souls’ concerns, more than the grocer or butcher who takes it?” (55). Mitchell exclaims, “Money has spoken!” Wolfe asks, “That is it? Money?” and the answer is “yes.” For Mitchell, to give them rights means they will “strike for higher wages” (57). Kirby seems to think that helping workers is

a religious issue, and is not a financially sound practice. Wolfe resigns himself to the idea that Kirby is “crowned by Nature” and there is nothing he can do but cry out in futility. Deb buys into the system, saying, “Money, money, – that wud do all?” Deb asks if Hugh heard the man. Several times more she asks, “Money ull do it!” and “It is money!” (60). For Deb money means “out” where sun shines, heath grows, silken gowns, God, where “Hugh could walk there like a king!” For Deb money is the freedom to enjoy nature.

### **Conclusion**

In *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke advises the critic to look at literary images in their particular contexts. By this, he means not simply the "context" of a single document (as New Criticism would stress) but with an understanding of the social, historical, and cultural circumstances that have helped create or enable a discourse: words, for Burke, are "grounded in . . . 'contexts of situation'" (*Philosophy* 96). From an examination of the patterns of thought and imagery around these key images, two main threads develop: a connection between nature and economy and economy and reform. Through the use of key words and imagery, the authors advance connecting or conflicting notions of nature for the reader's interpretation. Davis' Hugh Wolfe “dreams of improved existences” in a cleaner, more egalitarian environment, while the anthropocentric attitudes of the industrial elite, admittedly oversimplified, drain the color and life out of the natural world, mirroring Wolfe's own devastation. Ruiz de

Burton's characters talk about how they should "utilize the wilderness" for cattle grazing and fruit-growing, but problems arise when the government takes "millions upon millions of acres" for the railroad companies (163). The ranchers and farmers have their own battles over trespassing and fencing laws, but the real enemy is the railroad monopoly. Characters' or narrators' arguments about altering the effects of economic forces must be analyzed because the authors leave the endings ambiguous with regard to any possibility of economic change; actually, the narrators' tone of voice arguing for any lasting hope of economic reform is sarcastic, upholding a belief in economic determinism, at least with regard to industrialization's effects on nature.

The authors use the same kinds of rhetorical tactics to end the novels, asking readers questions to draw them into the debate. In *Margret Howth*, the narrator asks, "What is To-Morrow until it comes?" She says at that moment the "air thrills with a purple of which no painter as yet has caught the tint," but also, "Here is work, life." She says the "Child-souls" like Lois do not worry about the past or future, but "we, who are wiser, laugh at them" (266). In the last few paragraphs, as in "Life in the Iron-Mills," Davis connects work and nature, hope and despair, and ends with a question about what is to come. Both narrators are wise, cynical, and sarcastic, but they still hope the reader (inviting identification through questioning) will consider the possibilities amidst the futilities – the indeterminacy of determinism. At the end of "Life," the narrator looks around

her library and sees the Korl woman,<sup>138</sup> the sculpture made from the refuse of metal ore, sculpted by Hugh Wolfe, and says the “wolfish face” of the Korl woman asks, “Is this the End? they say,—“nothing beyond?”—no more?” The “groping arm” of the Korl woman points “through a broken cloud” in the “flickering, nebulous” light to the “promise of the Dawn” (74). I argue that the negative connotations of the words associated with the “wolfish,” “groping,” inanimate woman through something “broken” and “flickering” could only be a cynical view of the future; however, again, Davis asks her readers questions that may possibly lead them to change their attitudes towards the “dregs” of society and how economic factors affect people and the environment.

Similarly, Ruiz de Burton ends the novel with questions: “Thus, merchants and farmers are hushed and made docile under the lash, for what is the use of complaining?” and “What more can be said?” The narrator considers the “pitiless rigor of the monopoly” and the futility of economic determinism. With the loss of lives at Mussel Slough after “this sandy swamp had been converted into a garden” by the farmers, the railroad was “given a subsidy, a gift,” of their lands. The narrator cannot hide her sarcasm, her disdain for the “lofty brow of the great and powerful monopoly” (343). Davis and Ruiz de Burton do not separate man from nature, or economics from environment, but

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138 Earlier in the “Life,” the narrator says, “Korl we call it here: a light, porous substance, of a delicate, waxen, flesh-colored tinge. Out of the blocks of this korl, Wolfe, in his off-hours from the furnace, had a habit of chipping and moulding figures,—hideous, fantastic enough, but sometimes strangely beautiful: even the mill-men saw that, while they jeered at him” (48).

they leave the reader with questions, a rhetorical strategy used to lead the reader to search for answers. There are forces beyond Hugh's, Margret's, and Don Mariano's control, but those forces could have been modified by someone else's ethical behavior in the urban environment: the unethical practices of the railroad owners and the government toward the ranchers and their lands, the mill owners toward the mill workers and the pollution of the river and mountains. An ecocritical approach highlights the rhetorical presentations of the battle between man and nature, economic naturalism and social evolution. For many nineteenth-century American women writers, the changing face of nature at the hands of industrialization paralleled changes in family structure, individual rights, and psychological development.

## Conclusion

I argue that Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, Pauline Hopkins, Helen Hunt Jackson, Rebecca Harding Davis, Ellen Glasgow, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton employ patterns of rhetorical tools in literary narratives to negotiate theories of determinism (hereditary, social, economic, and environmental) and develop their own hybrid theories, which is significant because they are rarely included in discussion of American literary naturalism. The title of my dissertation is inspired by a quotation from Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*, which sums up the unique connections these authors make among "tangled threads" of discourse. While Mrs. Smith focuses on tangled threads of hereditary history, I examine the way these writers tangle threads of scientific, social, and religious discourse about how much of human nature is beyond our control.

## Scholarly Concerns and Problems

I want to alter the way genres exclude discussions of texts that do not fit the model. The narratives in this study are not "naturalistic novels." The texts fit into many different generic classifications (realism, sentimentalism, reformism, etc.); however, they treat contemporaneous scientific and social discourse about determinism in highly rhetorical ways, which deserve further study and

comparison to canonical writers of American literary naturalism. Reading literary texts with a rhetorical lens meets with some resistance, but the results illuminate the authors' use of literature as a platform for debating and exposing the need for economic, political, and social changes.

As I have argued for the women writers in this study to be considered participants in American literary naturalism, Linda Kornasky, in her dissertation, "Women Writers of American Literary Naturalism, 1892-1932," argues that Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) and Susan Warner's *Diana* (1880) contain "many naturalistic elements." About *The Morgesons*, Kornasky writes,

The novel is superficially a standard love story with a marriage as its closure, but it also includes a profound acknowledgement of social, biological, and psychological constraints upon individual self-determination, making the ending happy only to a limited degree because most of the female characters, even the newly married protagonist, have been hurt deeply by emotional and material hardship" (39).

The same could be said about the literary narratives in my dissertation. Kornasky claims that American literary naturalism tended to "take on a political mission as it evolved" during the 1920s and 1930s (230). I have clearly shown the novels in my study to be part of a rhetorical movement calling for individual and industrial reform.

In her 1994 dissertation, Kornasky wrote that she hopes future studies about women writers and American literary naturalism have been made “more conceivable” through her analysis. Unless we are willing to accept the deterministic with the sentimental or religious, these studies will continue to falter. I find the interrelationships among religion, science, and morality infinitely more challenging and interesting than a carefully constructed plot of decline based on naturally and socially determined forces. I hope to see more studies analyzing connections between science and religion in nineteenth-century women’s writing.

As we continue to examine women’s literary narratives that enter contemporaneous scientific and social debates about deterministic theories, I would add *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck (1931) to the discussion. Buck uses rhetorical strategies to make arguments about naturalism, intertwining the two threads of science and religion, as do the authors in this dissertation, to lead the reader to question commonly held beliefs and practices. While naturalistic novels tend to be described as pessimistic, *The Good Earth* qualifies the argument with a chance for future good, although O-lan and Wang Lung’s lives are predominantly painful and destructive. The savagery of life is clear in episodes of infanticide, murder, thievery, infidelity, cannibalism, and more. The image of “the tide of the fullness of savage desire” (128) exhibits the qualities of the “oceanic sublime” described by Christophe Den Tandt. The scientific examination of life on the land, the objective view of childbirth, the harshness of

poverty are presented crisply or through free indirect discourse (narrated monologues) of Wang Lung's voice, which exemplifies a journalistic tone and asks the reader to look at life through the dialectical debate among naturalism, spirituality, and morality.

The rhetorical power of these texts by women writers is the employment of literary space to negotiate male-dominated scientific and social discourse for the purpose of shaping cultural, economic, or social ideas and reform. In *Rhetorical Power*, Steven Mailloux, argues,

But a rhetorical hermeneutics has more to do: it should also provide histories of how particular theoretical and critical discourses have evolved. Why? Because acts of persuasion always take place against an ever-changing background of shared and disputed assumptions, questions, assertions, and so forth. (17)

The rhetorical history of American literary naturalism includes authors debating public discourse about philosophies of the causality of human lives, including economic, social, religious, and scientific theories, long before American literary naturalism was labeled a genre. The work of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson to break down racial stereotypes associated with hereditary determinism is part of that history, along with the rhetorical gestures of Pauline Hopkins and Helen Hunt Jackson later in the century. The work of Rebecca Harding Davis, Ellen Glasgow, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton to examine the effects of economic determinism from an ecological standpoint is part of that history. These literary

and rhetorical examples enrich discussions of the genre and lead to more examinations of New Woman novelists and social-reform novels of the nineteenth century.

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## VITA

Diann Smith Ainsworth was born September 5, 1963, in Pampa, Texas. She is the daughter of Duggan and Ruth Smith. A 1982 graduate of Irving High School in Irving, Texas, she received her Bachelor of Business Administration with a major in Marketing from the University of Oklahoma in 1986. Deciding to pursue a career in the education, Diann continued coursework at University of Texas at Arlington and received certification to teach secondary English, history, and business courses.

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In August, 2001, she began graduate study at Texas Christian University. While working on her doctorate in English, she was a Graduate Instructor from 2001-2004, and received the TCU Department of English Graduate Instructor Award in 2003. Since August, 2005, she has been a full-time English Instructor at Weatherford College, Weatherford, Texas. She is a member of the Modern Language Association, Conference on College Composition and Communication, and Society for American Women Writers.

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ABSTRACT

“STRANGELY TANGLED THREADS”:  
AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS NEGOTIATING NATURALISM, 1850-1900

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Using the primary lens of rhetorical criticism to examine eight literary narratives by American women writers from 1850-1900, this dissertation argues that the inclusion of arguments by narrators and characters regarding theories about naturalism is a feminist negotiation of contemporaneous social and scientific debates leading to rhetorical choices which mediate, hybridize, or refute specific aspects of deterministic theories; moreover, these negotiations of theories about naturalism lead to the conclusion that the authors expected to

change readers' attitudes or beliefs toward commonly held racial, gender, and class prejudices.

The writers in this study, Harriet Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Rebecca Harding Davis, Pauline Hopkins, Helen Hunt Jackson, Ellen Glasgow, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton are rarely associated with American literary naturalism; however, even though their texts would not be considered naturalistic novels (novels in which characters' lives are determined by hereditary, economic, and social forces beyond control), their rhetorical approach to debating various kinds of determinism establishes these writers as precursors to or participants in the genre of American literary naturalism. In chapter one, I argue that Wilson and Jacobs negotiate naturalism in literary narratives for the rhetorical purpose of changing attitudes toward commonly held pseudo-scientific views of race. In chapter two, I demonstrate that Hopkins and Jackson theorize a balance among biological and social forces beyond one's control to put an end to cultural fears of hybridity. In chapter three, by examining physical, mental, and moral motivations, either naturally or socially located, Davis and Glasgow offer a view of social order built on moral responsibility or personal spirituality instead of a pure theory of hereditary, economic, or environmental determinism. Chapter four shows that Davis and Ruiz de Burton argue human nature's aggression in the marketplace, although affected by heredity and economic forces beyond control, should still be mediated by moral standards.

