

The Fascination of the Working Girl: Dorothy Richardson's *The Long Day*

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Women with peculiar bleached yellow faces passed by. They had bright eyes. They looked like beautiful moving corpses; as if they might be the skeletons among the statues that were dug against the face of day. Miss Kelso had noticed them since she first came out. "What are they?"

"Cotton-weavers. You can tell a weaver by the skin."

— Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Silent Partner* (1871)

In *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* (1905), Dorothy Richardson describes her struggle to survive as a factory worker in New York City.¹ According to *The Long Day*, which cryptically alludes to "a new-made grave on a wind-swept hill in western Pennsylvania" (4), economic necessity forced the genteelly raised former teacher into factory life. Some critics contend that Richardson was hired to research the lives of factory workers:² *The Long Day* is typical of the Progressive era's tide of texts written by investigators exploring the world of those they pretended to be.³ Regardless of whether she entered the working world out of necessity or choice, Richardson records in *The Long Day* her experiences searching for jobs and housing, working in box, jewel-case, garment, and artificial flower factories, living in boarding houses, and interacting with other working women. Describing low wages, long hours, industrial accidents, and sexual harassment, her text paints a detailed portrait of the difficult lives of early twentieth-century women workers—or rather, according to the

parlance of the day, “working girls.”⁴ It concludes with an epilogue suggesting such reforms as working-girl hotels, greater church involvement, and instruction in “the difference. . . between ‘working’ and ‘being worked’” (278).

With its rich detail and explicit reform agenda, *The Long Day* has been read primarily as an early twentieth-century document either of the labor reform movement or the lives of working-class women in America. I would contend, however, that the text is even more valuable as a portrayal of the emotional investment of the middle-class reformer in her objects of reform, which suggests her need for renewing a female community perceived as lost. *The Long Day* well supports Mark Pittenger’s observation that texts recording incarnations as “down and out” are marked by a “peculiar dialectic of attraction and repulsion” towards their working-class subjects.⁵ Richardson expresses a predictably condescending attitude towards the working girls who surround her. Less predictable, however, is her revelation of a longing for intimacy with them, a longing that her professed identity as an objective reformer does little to gainsay.

Richardson largely manifests her interest in her fellow workers through her preoccupation with the way they *look*, expressing throughout *The Long Day* an aesthetic fascination with working girls that approaches erotic intensity. Her fascination is partially generated by the sheer concentration of workers to which factory life exposes her; the reputation of “women adrift” for sexual or at least emotional availability, coupled with the promise implicit in their massed numbers of an endless supply of anonymous, interchangeable “girls,” rendered the spectacle they made a titillating as well as awesome sign of industrialization.⁶ Just as much as from the sight of working girls *en masse*, though, Richardson derives pleasure from her connoisseur-like scrutiny of individual working girls. She is especially captivated by those who, despite the ravishment caused by their hard lives, retain traces of beauty in their faces or bodies.

Richardson was not alone in her interest in such appearances. Working girls were the object of almost obsessive attention in the late nineteenth century, as Laura Hapke and Joanne Meyerowitz record in *Tales of the Working Girl and Women Adrift*, and various literary texts of the time focus on the sight that these workers offered. Whether their lot was read as one of freedom or drudgery, racy independence or imperiled innocence, accounts of working girls converge in their attention to the spectacle they made.

Such accounts include Harriet Robinson and Lucy Larcom’s reminiscences of life at the Lowell textile mills and boarding houses, an environment Robinson names a “lost Eden.”⁷ Declaring factory life a haven for female sociability, Robinson explains in *Loom and Spindle* (1898) that despite the rooms in their boarding houses reserved for “gentleman callers,” the girls preferred each other’s company: “When not at their work, by natural selection they sat in groups in their chambers, or in a corner of the large dining-room, busy at some agreeable employment, or they wrote letters, read, studied, or sewed.”⁸ She suggests that such accord was made possible by a similarity of background, exemplified by many who had a “nasal Yankee twang” or “old-fashioned New England name[s]”

such as Plumy and Leafy.⁹ Robinson and Larcom both include accounts of the pleased surprise of visitors over felicitous factory scenes. Larcom especially is aware of the picture that the workers composed for the outsider's eye, as she described in *An Idyl of Work* (1875):

The door, swung in on iron hinges, showed
 A hundred girls who hurried to and fro,
 With hands and eyes following the shuttle's flight,
 Threading it, watching for the scarlet mark
 That came up in the web, to show how fast
 Their work was speeding. Clatter went the looms,
 Click-clack the shuttles. Gossamery motes
 Thickened the sunbeams into golden bars,
 And in a misty maze those girlish forms,
 Arms, hands, and heads, moved with the moving looms,
 That closed them in as if all were one shape,
 One motion.¹⁰

Making its strange progression from precise movements and sounds to visual blurrings ("threading" and "click-clack" give way to "gossamery motes" and a "misty maze") to its closure of "one motion," this verse idealizes factory work, portraying even the noise of machinery as merely a purposeful "clatter." In *A New England Girlhood* (1889), Larcom includes a similar description of workers "moving backwards and forwards among the spinning-frames, sometimes stooping, sometimes reaching up their arms, as their work required, with easy and not ungraceful movements." Larcom concludes "the effect of the whole was rather attractive to strangers"¹¹; the workers' "attractive" appearance derives not from the beauty of any one girl but from the beauty of the group

Herman Melville's "The Tartarus of Maids" (1855) predates Larcom's work as one of the earliest American literary depictions of a group of factory women. Melville describes the "rows of blank-looking girls, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" that the narrator of the story sees on his visit to a paper factory. Since they are unmarried, he is told, "in most factories female operatives, of whatever age, are indiscriminately called girls, never women." In response he exclaims,

"Then these are all maids". . . while some pained homage to
 their pale virginity made me involuntarily bow.
 "All maids."
 Again the strange emotion filled me.¹²

In contrast to Larcom's idyllic depiction, Melville paints an eerie portrait of the bodies of wrecked and spiritless working girls. The end effect, though, is curiously similar: Larcom and Melville unite in describing working girls as

asexual, although Melville asserts that their asexuality derives not from innate virtue but from the sacrifice of sexuality to machines.

As the “strange emotion” of Melville’s narrator may suggest, were working girls themselves not portrayed as sexual beings, their massed numbers were often depicted as having a sexual effect on middle-class observers. Even as Robinson insists on the Lowell workers’ purity and close homosocial bonds, for example, she also suggests the sexual appeal that this purity and unbroken femaleness held. Quoting from Charles Cowley’s *History of Lowell*, Robinson describes Andrew Jackson’s reaction to the workers:

On the day the President came, all the lady operatives turned out to meet him. They walked in procession, like troops of liveried angels clothed in white [with green-fringed parasols] (*sic*), with cannons booming, drums beating, flying handkerchiefs waving, etc. The old hero was not more moved by the bullets that whistled round him in the battle of New Orleans than by the exhilarating spectacle here presented, and remarked, “They are very pretty women, by the Eternal!”¹³

Cowley, and through him Robinson, portray Jackson’s pleasure as generated by the “exhilarating spectacle” of the mass, which presents the pleasing contrast of military form (“like troops”) and exquisitely feminine “angels,” clothed in white and carrying parasols. It is the girls’ absence of sexuality, their angelic aspect, that “exhilarates” and “moves” Jackson.

Further privileging the male gaze turned upon working women, Robinson quotes the poet John Whittier’s similarly appreciative response to the display of women workers. Whittier figures them not as soldiers but as plants: “Acres of girlhood, beauty reckoned by the square rod,—or miles by long measure! the young, the graceful, the gay—the flowers gathered from a thousand hillsides and green valleys of New England.”¹⁴ With no men in sight, the girls appear wholly unclaimed—ripe for the picking, as it were. It is not the mass of humanity in and of itself that grips the observer, but that the mass is exclusively female. Although large groups of military or working men might have been a relatively common sight, such a group of women would have been much rarer.

In the 1909 story “The Third Ingredient,” O. Henry too suggests the pleasure derived from an encounter with massed femininity. The story describes a young man’s experience of interviewing candidates for a sales-girl position:

The phalanx of wage-earners formed a bewildering scene of beauty, carrying a total mass of blond hair sufficient to have justified the horseback gallop of a hundred Lady Godivas. The capable, cool-eyed, impersonal, young, bald-headed man whose task it was to engage six of the contestants, was aware of a feeling of suffocation as if he were drowning in a sea of

frangipanni, while white clouds, hand-embroidered, floated about him.¹⁵

This passage is a dense configuration of the charged and sometimes contradictory attitudes held towards working girls. O. Henry emphasizes the girls' femininity by contrasting it with the rational masculinity of the "cool-eyed, impersonal" man. Like Robinson, his use of the word "phalanx" evokes the military, while the image of whiteness suggests their virginal nature. O. Henry sexualizes the observer's experience by depicting him as "suffocat[ing]" and "drowning" in this whiteness.

In describing the applicants as "carrying a total mass of blond hair sufficient to have justified the horseback gallop of a hundred Lady Godivas," O. Henry not only associates working girls with "native," Anglo-Saxon Americans, but also invokes the upper-class woman (multiplied a hundred times to do justice to the mass she obliges) who campaigns for women of the working class. The allusion to Lady Godiva is thick with erotic implications. In this depiction of aspiring workers, O. Henry—like Cowley and Whittier before him—glosses over the economic reality of the girls' lives even as he invokes them.¹⁶ His text describes a situation in which job applicants grossly outnumber the jobs available, and yet at the same time presents the applicants not as economic subjects but as aesthetic objects. Instead of one of desperation, ferocity, or pathos, a crowd of women vying for a limited number of jobs creates an atmosphere of suffocating sweetness.¹⁷

Richardson's 300-page text writes large these relatively brief middle-class representations of the working girl, as it alternates between descriptions of the working girl *en masse* and descriptions of the individual worker. Throughout the length of *The Long Day*, Richardson never loses sight of appearances.

At moments, Richardson's text resembles Larcom's in describing the aesthetic pleasure provided by the spectacle of a body of girls performing identical tasks in agreeable surroundings. Richardson suggests this pleasure is further enhanced by the beauty of the goods produced, as in this description of an artificial flower factory imaged as a lush "flower-garden":

I passed down a narrow path between two rows of tables that looked like blossoming hedges. Through the green of branches and leaves flashed the white of shirt-waists, and among the scarlet and purple and yellow and blue of myriad flowers bobbed the smiling faces of girls as they looked up from their task long enough to inspect the passing stranger. Here were no harsh sounds, no rasping voices, no shrill laughter, no pounding of engines. Everything just as one would expect to find it in a flower-garden—soft voices humming like bees, and gentle merriment that flowed musically as a brook over stones. (181)

Such a depiction of an “idyl of work” is not characteristic of *The Long Day*, however, and by later describing an expert rose-maker’s deformed hand Richardson refutes her original suggestion of an edenic work site. In contrast to the girl’s romantic prettiness—her “hair was fluffy and brown, and her eyes big and dark blue”—her hand makes Richardson “excla[im] in horror,” being “calloused and hard as a piece of tortoise-shell, ridged with innumerable corrugations, and hopelessly discolored” (191). Likewise, rather than relating the beauty of the girls and their handiwork, Richardson more usually contrasts the pretty stuff with the strain of making it. “Every face, tense and stony, bespoke a superb effort to concentrate mind and body, and soul itself, literally upon the point of a needle,” Richardson wrote. “Every form was crouched. . . . And piled between the opposing phalanxes of set faces were billows upon billows of foamy white muslin and lace” (204).¹⁸

Far from robbing her of aesthetic interest, though, for Richardson the working girl’s exhaustion, pain, weakness, or even outright deformity actually enhance her appeal. Richardson’s descriptions of her fellow workers Eunice, an unnamed one-eyed laundry worker, and Henrietta Manners indicate how beguiling she found warped beauty to be. Eunice, “was no common waif or stray,” Richardson states. “There was an elusive charm in the glimpse of profile and in the delicate aquiline features, a certain suggestion of beauty, were it not for the white, drawn look that enveloped them like a death-mask” (201). Similarly, in contrast to her Italian co-workers—“all stupid, uninteresting-looking girls”—the one-eyed girl is described as “a thin, narrow-chested girl, with delicate wrists and nicely shaped hands, who seemed far superior to her companions, and who might have been pretty had it not been for the sunken, blue-black cavity where one eye should have been” (236-37). Richardson declares herself most “horribly fascinated” with the appearance of Henrietta Manners, who she later suggests is addicted to opiates:

beautiful Henrietta was—beautiful with a beauty quite her own and all the more potent because of its very indefinableness. I watched her as one horribly fascinated,—that high, wide white forehead, that weak chin, those soft, tremulous lips, on which a faint smile would so often play, and those great, wide eyes of blue that now looked purple in the lamp-light. (125)

These descriptions reveal Richardson’s interest in the “elusive” and “indefinable” traces of beauty available for the consumption of the discerning observer, that are inscribed on the faces and bodies of working girls despite or because of their ill health (30). Richardson here participates in a broader cultural discourse that reads the bodies of suffering women as beautiful; the nineteenth-century valorization of womanly submission, passivity, and self-abnegation contributed to an aesthetic appreciation of the imperiled bodies that were read as expressing

such traits. Images of sickly, dying, or dead female bodies carried romantic and even erotic charges. Elisabeth Bronfen argues that western culture as a whole is marked by an obsession with the “conjunction of femininity, death and aesthetics” expressed by Edgar Allan Poe’s proposition that “the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.”¹⁹ Bram Dijkstra locates more specifically in Richardson’s era the valorization of “woman in a state of sickness unto death” as an “icon of virtuous femininity,”²⁰ stating, “Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, parents, sisters, daughters, and loving friends were kept busy on canvases everywhere, anxiously nursing wan, hollow-eyed beauties who were on the verge of death.”²¹ By “eating arsenic. . . , wearing corsets, avoiding exercise,”²² late nineteenth-century American women pursued the ideal of beauty exemplified by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s portraits of Elizabeth Siddall as “a languid, aloof, withdrawn woman, with almost translucent pallor, in the weakness and flickering febrile flightiness of the consumptive ill woman, supportive of the conventional notions of the transitory nature of feminine beauty, femininity as virginal and vulnerable, ideal and tainted.”²³

The pervasiveness of this aestheticization of women’s suffering is revealed not only by the era’s art but also by its literature, particularly the domestic or sentimental fiction that was so popular in the United States. Although this fiction offered various and conflicting models of womanhood, including those of “Real Womanhood,” “Female Womanhood,” and “Able-Bodied Womanhood,” one of the most sanctioned was the “Cult of Female Frailty.”²⁴ One need go no further than the death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to see how beautiful feminine fragility, illness, and death could be made to appear. Not just domestic fiction, of course, but also numerous nineteenth-century male-authored texts such as Poe’s “Ligeia” and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” represent this aesthetic.²⁵

As opposed to imperiled and subsequently “classy” beauty, robust health was seen as “the working woman’s mark.”²⁶ It could also be a mark of foreignness, as Albert Wiggam indicates with his appalling description of powerful but distasteful immigrant women:

We want ugly women in America and we are getting them in millions. . . . Examine these women as they are unloaded at Ellis Island. I have studied thousands of them. . . . They are broad-hipped, short, stout-legged with big feet; broad-backed, flat-chested with necks like a prize fighter and with faces expressionless and devoid of beauty.²⁷

By Richardson’s time, healthy women were increasingly valorized. Developments such as the emergence of the “New Woman,”²⁸ reform in women’s dress, diet, and exercise, and the discovery of “germs” all contributed to making the tubercular look less fashionable.²⁹ As Richardson’s text itself reveals, however, this look still constituted a prevalent ideal of womanly beauty.³⁰ Abba Goold

Woolson complained in 1873 that “our fine ladies aspire to be called *invalides*,”³¹ and Richardson makes the same equation between American ladyhood and weakness.

Working from the “Cult of Female Frailty,” largely associated with the private, domestic woman, Richardson in *The Long Day* reads the frailty of some working girls as a marker of their refinement. Such frailty reveals a worker as “no common waif or stray” but rather a being “far superior to her companions.” Like the domestic woman who sacrifices her health to home and family, the working girl who sacrifices hers to the workplace and machinery is deemed superior. The working girls in the new all-female communities created by work, whom Richardson admires, could be read as recreating the family served by the “Angel in the House.”³² Richardson lauds working girls for their support of each other, not for their independence or their work skills.

Indeed, since weakness renders a working girl far less able than her baser sisters, her very incompetence at work can serve as a further sign of “superior worth.” Richardson bases her impression of Henrietta Manners’ superiority on the girl’s ineptitude as well as her fairness, and the statement that her “pathetic industry. . . seemed to augur well for the superior worth of this tall, blonde, blue-eyed girl” (95-96) can be read in two ways. Richardson often finds the proficient working girls not only unappealing but also profoundly alienating, with their muscled bodies, superhuman capacity for hard work, and indifference to Richardson herself. Richardson suggests, moreover, that like the one-eyed girl’s “stupid, uninteresting-looking” Italian co-workers, many of the workers she perceives as competent but repulsive are immigrants.³³ She describes the proud “lady-buffer” (“a lady what buffs!”) of the “mighty biceps,” high wages, and hefty savings—a woman who regards Richardson herself “with pity for [her] ignorance” and, one suspects, with pity as well for her lack of material assets and skills—as “stupid and uninteresting,” with “English so sadly perverted and her voice so guttural that I could make out her meaning only with the greatest exercise of the imagination” (53-55). The woman’s poor English causes Richardson to depict her as subnormal and even animalistic,³⁴ as opposed simply to someone struggling with a second language.

In contrast to the lady-buffer’s strength, for Richardson the bright eyes, pale skins, and delicate bodies created or enhanced by malnutrition, exhaustion, and sickness transform the working-class female body into a semblance of a middle-class one. This transformation renders less foreign (often literally) the working girl whom in health she finds distasteful. Richardson reads the imperiled worker as more akin to herself; as she depicts in detail, Richardson’s body, too, suffers from factory work.³⁵ Furthermore, such weakness causes the working girl to need, or seem to need, Richardson in a way that the healthy worker does not. The working girl’s suffering makes her appear to Richardson not only more attractive but also more available for charged encounters.

Bessie and Marie Van Vorst’s *The Woman Who Toils: Being the Experiences of Two Gentlewomen as Factory Girls* (1903) preceded Richardson’s *The*

Long Day.³⁶ Like Richardson, the Van Vorsts reveal in their undercover account a fascination with the traces of beauty perceptible to the discerning observer of the working girl. Marie Van Vorst figures these traces as an “apparition” in describing one worker as “a ghost of girlhood. A tall, slender creature, cheeks like paper, eyes, sunken. She, too, had the smile of good-fellowship—coin freely passed from work woman to work woman.”³⁷ She portrays another exhausted worker as noteworthy for having “an ear like a sea shell, a skin of satin.”³⁸ Similarly, her sister Bessie comments on a “strange little elf not more than twelve years old,” who manifests the eerie ghost in a shockingly beautiful voice “carrying sympathy from its purest source.”³⁹

Like Richardson and other female investigators,⁴⁰ both sisters emphasize the “sympathy” and “good fellowship” between workers, “coin freely passed from work woman to work woman,” and marvel at its currency in such brutal environments. Marie Van Vorst asserts that as a worker she experienced “Fellowship from first to last, fellowship from their eyes to mine, a spark kindled never to be extinguished.”⁴¹ Bessie Van Vorst describes two incidents of such solidarity. In one, a worker approached her to exclaim, “‘I know how you ache. . . . It just makes me feel like crying when I see how you keep at it and I can guess how tired you are.’”⁴² In another, Van Vorst accompanies a fellow working girl to a “ball”—which along with other heterosexual activities she and her sister decry as a squandering of precious time, money, and energy—and afterwards enjoys a romantic walk home with her companion: “The moon had gone under a cloud. The wooden sidewalks were rough and irregular, and as we walked along toward home I tripped once or twice. Presently I felt a strong arm put through mine, with the assurance: ‘Now if you fall we’ll both fall together.’”⁴³ The Van Vorsts reveal themselves as gratified to find a place within this homosocial world, far more so than by becoming the “mouthpiece for the woman labourer”⁴⁴ to which they aspired.

With its emphasis on the emotional connections made with other workers, the Van Vorsts’ text resembles Richardson’s. The Van Vorsts, however, do not appear to be on the hunt for poignant moments in the way that Richardson is. Richardson reveals a profound emotional appetite for working girls, investing her driving motto of “WORK OR STARVE!” with more than just literal meaning. At the beginning of the text, Richardson describes entering a working-class church out of a desire more for sociability than for spiritual uplift. In the church she studies a pair of female friends: “they passed a little bag of peppermints back and forth, and I envied them the friendship which the furtive bag of peppermints betokened” (22). The desire Richardson here expresses for making connections with other working women, connections that are perhaps somewhat illicit and “furtive,” reappears again and again in her text.

Richardson begins and ends her narrative by discussing her meetings with Minnie Plympton, who, Richardson “felt instinctively, was a very nice and agreeable girl” (11). Richardson explains that like herself Minnie was forced into work by a death in the family, and like herself portrays Minnie as of a higher class

than the “cattle” who inhabit the boarding house where the two first meet (12). From the onset of their acquaintance, Richardson reveals a fervor for Minnie that appears oddly one-sided. At their first meeting she is strongly drawn to her, and the two retire to Minnie’s room for a long heart-to-heart that ends only when a neighbor demands quiet. The next morning, after “remember[ing] the girl on the floor below,” Richardson “dressed with a light heart” and was “eager to hurry down” (16). Without warning or farewell, however, Minnie had left their boarding house to search for another job. After this departure Richardson “found [her]self longing for [Minnie] more and more as the week wore away” (17-18), and describes finally sighting “a patch of dim white on the floor that sent a thrill of gladness all over me. I lighted the lamp and tore open the precious envelope before taking off my gloves or hat. It was a note from Minnie Plympton” (45). The note notwithstanding, Minnie does not reappear in *The Long Day* until the text’s final pages, when she causes the narrative to conclude by delivering Richardson out of factory life. Richardson describes in detail her fortuitous reunion with Minnie, which comes just as she is about to lose consciousness from overwork and malnutrition:

Then a little cry, and two arms were thrown about me, and I looked up into the smiling face of Minnie Plympton—Minnie Plympton as large as life and unspeakably stunning in a fresh shirt-waist and sailor-hat. She was smiling at me like a princess issuing from her enchantment in a rose-bush; and lest she should vanish as suddenly as she had appeared, I clutched wildly at her arm, trembling and sobbing at this delicious awakening from the horrible nightmare that had been my existence for so long. . . . I was half dazed as Minnie Plympton bundled me into a passing electric car; and then, with my head leaning comfortably on Minnie Plympton’s plump shoulder, and with Minnie Plympton’s strong arm about my aching body, I was jolted away somewhere into a drowsy happiness. (264-65)

The sexual overtones of this passage need little explication—Richardson’s description of herself as “clutch[ing] wildly,” “trembling and sobbing at this delicious awakening,” “half dazed,” and “jolted away somewhere into a drowsy happiness,” suggests her experience of a kind of orgasmic swoon.⁴⁵ Richardson’s delight in and dependence upon Minnie’s vitality contrasts with her usual penchant for the weak, as does her admiration for “The Queen,” a laundry worker whom she declares “a superb, handsome animal. . . . an untidy, earth-chained goddess, mirthful, voluptuous” (252). Both these depictions of vital workers, Minnie and the Queen, occur at moments in the text when Richardson is utterly wretched, suggesting that she is drawn towards a different working-girl aesthetic

only when she herself embodies her usual preoccupation. Acutely conscious of the bodies of working girls, Richardson never portrays native-born working women in a neutral state of health—they either enjoy bodily vitality or suffer bodily travail.

Framed within Minnie's disappearance and reappearance in *The Long Day* runs a continual parade of working girls, with whom Richardson connects briefly but intensely and who then disappear from the text. The brevity of these relationships notwithstanding, if Minnie's appearances serve as a frame for Richardson's narrative, then it is this parade that is its pulse. Even prior to her immersion in working life, Richardson foreshadows her delight in encounters with working girls by describing the bonds she forms with "Little Lottie." Little Lottie is a stove. Richardson recalls,

I drew close to the most fearfully and wonderfully mutilated little cook-stove. . . . There was something whimsically, almost pathetically, human about it. This, it so pleased my fancy to believe, was because of the sufferings it had borne. Its little body cracked and warped and rust-eaten, the isinglass lights in its door long since punched out by the ruthless poker, the door itself swung to on the broken hinge by a twisted nail—a brave, bright, merry little cripple of a stove, standing on short wooden legs. I made the interesting discovery that it was a stove of the feminine persuasion; "Little Lottie" was the name which I spelled out in the broken letters that it wore across its glowing heart. And straightaway Little Lottie became more human than ever—poor Little Lottie. (27-28)

The stove's "sufferings" attract Richardson: her affection for Little Lottie originates from its "most fearfully and wonderfully mutilated" condition and is strengthened by her "interesting discovery that it was a stove of the feminine persuasion." This response initiates Richardson's pattern of forming passing attachments to embattled female workers who, far from blooming and "unusually big" (11) like Minnie, are frail, broken, and despite their forbearance not long for the world.

Once Richardson begins factory work, the contrast between the delicacy of the girls and the powerful machinery they use renders them eerily beautiful to her. In describing her first impression of a box-making factory, she states, "I got vague, confused glimpses of girl-faces shining like stars out of this dark, fearful chaos of revolving belts and wheels" (64-65). When the machinery is stopped for the lunch break, Richardson relates, "the vibrations that had shaken the whole structure to its very foundations now gradually subsided; the wheels stayed their endless revolutions. . . . out of the stillness girl-voices and girl-laughter echoed weirdly, like a horn blown in a dream, while sweeter and clearer than ever rang

Phoebe's soprano 'Hot air!'" (72). Richardson reveals more fully her enchantment with the girls' voices in describing the songs they sing. Although Richardson claims to be disgusted by the bathetic lyrics of pieces like "The Banquet in Misery Hall" and "The City of Sighs and Tears," hearing them moves her to tears. In markedly sexual language, Richardson describes the songs as providing "relief" from the "terrific tension" of frantic work:

Every effort, human and mechanical, all over the great factory, was now strained almost to the breaking-point. How long can this agony last? How long can the roar and the rush and the throbbing pain continue. . . Three o'clock, a quarter after, half-past! The terrific tension had all but reached the breaking point. Then there rose a trembling, palpitating sigh that seemed to come from a hundred throats, and blended in a universal expression of relief. In her clear, high treble Angelina began the everlasting "Fatal Wedding." That piece of false sentiment had now a new significance. It became a song of deliverance, and as the workers swelled the chorus, one by one, it meant that the end of the day's toil was in sight. (105-06)⁴⁶

As indicated by her assertion that the "piece of false sentiment ['Fatal Wedding'] had now a new significance," Richardson is further intrigued by the incongruity of finding "significance" in that which in her pre-working days would only be an object of contempt. Phoebe's stock response of "hot air" takes on a "sweeter" and "clearer" "r[i]ng" when heard after the din of machinery, and this kind of reevaluation occurs as well in the new acceptance Richardson claims she feels for the working girl's farewell of "so long." After being thanked by Richardson for lending her a comb, soap, powder, nail file, collar, and other items, a cashier at a restaurant replies,

"Don't mention it at all. . . . If we working girls don't stand up and help one another, I'd like to know who's going to do it for us. . . . So long!"

"So long!" It was not the first time that I had heard a working girl deliver herself of that laconic form of adieu, and heretofore I had always execrated it as hopelessly vulgar and silly, which no doubt it was and is. But from the lips of that kind-hearted woman it fell upon my ears with a sort of lingering sweetness. It was redolent of hope and good cheer. (156-57)

Within the context of a universal family of working girls who, though strangers, are willing to "stand up and help each other," "so long" is transformed. It seems all the more significant that this transformation occurs after the girl loans

Richardson a host of personal toilet articles: the intimate exchange turns a phrase “vulgar and silly” into words of “lingering sweetness.”

Richardson’s valorization of working women’s culture and her fascination with their bodies borders on homoeroticism. Throughout *The Long Day* Richardson’s emotional fervor is reserved for women, and men are conspicuously absent from the text. Aside from Henrietta Manner’s elderly paramour, the only men who tend to appear are various foremen differing from each other only in degree of oiliness. The closest Richardson comes to describing a man is in asides such as “he seemed a good-natured, respectable sort of man, of about forty, and was a Jew” (205). Richardson is indifferent to the men who do play a role in her text, remaining strangely unperturbed and disinterested even when the laundry boss makes sexual advances to her and the laundry foreman begins wooing her. In the latter case, she is more interested in the one-eyed girl’s interest in the wooing than in the wooing itself, marveling that in the girl’s urging of the man’s suit “there was gentle solicitude in the voice, and looking up, I was almost startled with the radiance of the girl’s face” (256). Moreover, casting a blind eye to the heterosocial activities and exchanges ubiquitous among working girls,⁴⁷ Richardson not only reveals her own lack of interest in men but also insists on her fellow workers’ similar lack. She presents real men as irrelevant to the emotional lives of working girls, suggesting that the men truly significant to them are just imaginary ones discussed in an all-female environment:

Once or twice there was mention of beaux and “steady fellows,” but the flesh-and-blood man of every-day life did not receive as much attention in this lunch chat as did the heroes of the story-books. While it was evident, of course, from scattered comments that box-makers are constantly marrying, it was likewise apparent that they have not sufficient imagination to invest their hard-working, sweat-grimed sweethearts with any halo of romance. (73)

Richardson records that working girls referred to pairs of close female friends as “lady-friends.” One could read the term as sometimes alluding to lesbian couples, a meaning of which Richardson may or may not have been aware. This reading would account for the preference of employers to avoid hiring “lady-friends” since they “always get to scrappin’” (216), after which they make up and are “as sweet as turtle-doves, walking around the workroom with their arms around each other” (184). It also renders Richardson’s impassioned defense of the term as more than simply one against “vulgar vanity”:

I make no apology for saying “lady-friends.” I know all the prejudices of polite society, which smiles at what is esteemed to be a piece of vulgar vanity characteristic of the working-girl

world. And yet I use the term here in all seriousness, in all good faith; not critically, not playfully, but tenderly. Because in the humble world in which our comradeship was formed there is none other to designate that affection between girl and girl which is as the love of sisters. (197-98)

If one wishes to read Richardson as both sexually attracted to working girls and seeking to gratify that attraction, then her accompaniment of Henrietta Manners to her bleak room in the slums could be seen as an attempted sexual liaison, which would account for the dismay Richardson feels at the unexpected arrival of Henrietta's boyfriend and the pair's open lovemaking. In this context, Richardson's declaration that the man's attentions towards herself cause Henrietta to reveal "a hint of smothered jealousy" (135) might be read as a projection of Richardson's own jealousy, which being of the middle class she smothers instead of expressing with her fists as a true working girl and lady-friend would.

Even if the boyfriend had not arrived on the scene, doubtless some other factor would have prevented Richardson from entering into a lasting friendship, sexual or otherwise, with Henrietta. The climax of *The Long Day* might be considered the interlude in which Richardson unites with Bessie and Eunice to form a triumvirate of "lady-friends." The three work and search for work together and are financially and emotionally dependent upon each other. They have scarcely consolidated their alliance, however, before it is abruptly torn asunder: at work one day, Bessie is dead of diphtheria the next, and immediately thereafter Eunice vanishes into the street, lost either to suicide or prostitution. The connections that Richardson makes with Bessie, Eunice, Henrietta, the one-eyed girl, her cleft-palated landlady Mrs. Pringle (who perishes in a boarding-house fire while Richardson is at work), and the nameless others never last. The fleeting quality of these interactions, arguably, contributes to their allure: one can have a sweet encounter with a working girl, one marked by a "lingering accent of repressed tenderness" (36), without the fear that such contact might develop into a more complex relationship. Although she eventually does do so with the genteel Minnie, we certainly never see Richardson wanting to make a life with someone like Eunice.

The Long Day suggests that the class status of working girls not only makes no more than fleeting contact or brief interludes with them desirable, but also is itself responsible for this impermanence. Richardson presents short, multiple encounters with near strangers both as the norm of urban existence and, more specifically, as the nature of social interaction generated by factory life. Most of the factory workers whom Richardson meets are "semiskilled or unskilled," easily replaced by each other and thus hard to keep track of. Richardson's text depicts an economy in which girls are constantly fired, laid off, or quitting of their own will; after working for a time at one factory, they move on to another. Even if the workers stay long enough to form friendships with each other, the work day

is shown as consuming so much energy that outside of it even “lady-friends” like Bessie, Eunice, and Richardson see and know little of one another. After Bessie is taken sick, Eunice and Richardson realize they do not even know where Bessie lives. Richardson intones, “Thus it is in the busy, workaday world. Nobody knows where you come from, and nobody knows where you go” (225).

Yet the “busy, workaday world” itself offers compensation for the anonymity it creates, in that after one loses one girl there is always a new girl to take her place. This sense of interchangeability and endless supply, I would argue, contributed to the middle-class pleasure that the sight of working women massed together generated. Perhaps, too, the transient and all-consuming nature of their work functioned, for their middle-class observers, to keep working girls working girls, as it were—to keep the focus of erotic intensity tied to the milieu of work and to preclude imagining working women as leading other lives. Indeed, in contrast to the countless work sites she encounters in *The Long Day*, Richardson enters a working girl’s home only once, a terrifying venture ending disastrously.

The era in which Richardson wrote is marked by white, middle-class fascination with “primitives” such as Native Americans, Africans, and African Americans. This fascination often encompassed the notion that in the evolution of civilization something had been lost, and that what was lost could be found in primitive bodies and primitive cultural production.⁴⁸ Class differences rendered working-class men and women a further category of this primitive, an “‘unknown race’ inhabiting ‘a domestic ‘Dark Continent.’”⁴⁹ In his survey of texts written by middle-class investigators posing as workers, Pittenger suggests that these writers were motivated by a desire to access the “raw, unmediated vitality” associated with the poor: they perceived their masquerade as allowing them to access some “reality,” “experience,” and “authenticity” increasingly unavailable to the middle class.⁵⁰

Pittenger’s observation is buttressed by texts written by and about reforming women. Jane Addams, for example, remarked that through settlement work young women who were “simply smothered and sickened with advantages. . . like eating a sweet dessert first thing in the morning” could “learn of life from life itself.”⁵¹ In Phelps’ *The Silent Partner*, through friendship with a young female worker Perley Kelso is similarly rescued from the enervation of a luxurious girlhood. She exclaims to “Sip,” who labors in the Kelso family’s mills,

“You do not understand. . . you people who work and suffer, how it is with us! We are born in a dream, I tell you. . . . You touch us—in such a room—but we dream; we shake you off. . . .”

And now what did she think?

“Who knows what to think,” said Perley Kelso, “that is just waked up?”⁵²

For middle-class women, working women may have constituted a less threatening and more accessible “primitive” for use in “wak[ing] up”; unlike racialized others, such women were different but not too different from themselves. Alliances perhaps seemed even more feasible when workers were white and native born, such as those to whom Richardson was drawn.

Pittenger points out, though, that this desire to access authenticity by means of working-class contacts is not as salient in the records of women investigators as it is in men’s: “Women down-and-outers were less liable to describe or justify their experience in the language of a discourse of authenticity, which typically posited a male subject struggling to reconstitute his subjectivity as autonomous, rugged American actor.”⁵³ Pittenger does not continue on to interrogate how gender affected the motives of women who posed as down-and-out. Richardson’s text, however, may indicate what did motivate, or what additionally motivated, these women: a desire to recover not a lost authenticity but a lost female community. Turn-of-the-century discourse reveals, not surprisingly, that the emergence of young women out of the family and into the public sphere of the paid workplace was generally interpreted as a hallmark of modernity. Yet by virtue of being massed together in both the workplace and their living quarters, working girls may also have been read as hearkening back to an older era, characterized by an ideology of separate spheres that accorded women’s suffering bodies romantic charges and engendered “a female world of love and ritual” conducive to “romantic friendships.”⁵⁴ Ironically enough, even as the mass emergence of women into the workplace contributed to a breakdown of this kind of middle-class female community,⁵⁵ middle-class women may have tried to recoup it from working women, mapping onto their worlds the one they experienced as having lost. Kathy Peiss documents that young working women primarily were oriented to heterosexual pursuits, whereas Lillian Faderman, Joanne Meyerowitz, and Ruth Rosen suggest that working women as well as prostitutes may actually have experienced something akin to this “female world of love and ritual.”⁵⁶ Regardless of the reality of working women’s lives, though, their segregation at work and in their dwelling places may have led some middle-class women to imagine they enjoyed a sisterhood increasingly or altogether absent from their own lives, a sisterhood with a sensual or even erotic dimension.

Such an investment might cause us to read Richardson or others who shared her views as akin to working-girl predators like O. Henry’s “Piggy.” In “An Unfinished Story,” O. Henry describes Piggy as “a connoisseur of starvation. He could look at a shop-girl and tell you to an hour how long it had been since she had eaten anything more nourishing than marshmallows and tea. He hung about the shopping districts, and prowled around in department stores with his invitations to dinner.”⁵⁷ Despite her arguably homoerotic interest in working girls, however, Richardson is less this kind of sexual predator than she is an emotional one, and predator does not seem quite the right word. More so than Piggy, Richardson resembles the character of Willa in Willa Cather’s *Sapphira and the*

Slave Girl.⁵⁸ Although, of course, the dynamics are much differently inflected by race, in this novel the investment Cather reveals in laboring women's bodies and communities is similar to Richardson's. The text describes Sapphira's attempt to bring about the rape of "the Slave Girl" Nancy. Nancy escapes, and the epilogue recounts her reunion years later with her mother. Toni Morrison suggests that through participating in this reunion, both the child character Willa and the author Willa Cather use the black mother and daughter to access the "community of women" from which Sapphira herself was a "fugitive":⁵⁹

Till agrees to wait until little Willa is at the doorway before she permits herself the first sight she has had of her daughter in twenty-five years.

Only with Africanist characters is such a project thinkable: delayed gratification for the pleasure of a (white) child. When the embrace is over, Willa the white child accompanies the black mother and daughter into their narrative, listening to the dialogue but intervening in it at every turn. The shape and detail and substance of their lives are hers, not theirs. Just as Sapphira has employed these surrogate, serviceable black bodies for her own purposes of power without risk, so the author employs them in behalf of her own desire for a *safe* participation in love, in loss, in chaos, in justice.⁶⁰

It may be considered a stretch to compare Richardson's participation in the lives of working girls as akin to that of an affluent white child in the lives of former slaves, since in *The Long Day* Richardson portrays herself as entirely without privilege or power. Despite her longing for and attraction to the working girls who surround her, in the text Richardson appears to have no effect upon her co-workers, either as an individual or as a voice of middle-class authority. Regardless of Richardson's own lack of influence,⁶¹ however, certainly other middle-class reforming women did have the power to affect working women's lives, and these reformers may have shared Richardson's attitudes. *The Long Day* allows us to conjecture that such attraction and fascination as Richardson reveals may have affected the nature of the reforming efforts of middle-class women, in causing them to seek to foster certain kinds of communities among working women. In other words, it may have contributed to their desire to establish all-female working girl clubs and boarding houses, along with institutions such as those Peggy Pascoe describes including the Chinese Mission Home for Chinese prostitutes in San Francisco, the Colorado Home for unmarried mothers in Denver, and the Salt Lake City Industrial Christian Home for Mormon women.⁶²

The Long Day, therefore, further challenges the "social control" interpretation of reform efforts, which although much embattled remains "the conventional wisdom. . . . It is now virtually impossible to think or write about Victorian reform

without confronting this 'social control' interpretation at every significant juncture."⁶³ The shapes of the institutions for working women that female reformers designed may in part have been determined by longing, envy, and nostalgia, as opposed to desire to control the working class. American texts of the period including *Annie Kilburn*, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, *The Silent Partner*, and *The Bostonians* all concur in arguing that reforming women needed the working women they sought to help.⁶⁴ It is intriguing to speculate as to what degree such need encompassed a Richardsonian fascination with the bonds between working girls and with their laboring bodies, bodies both so like and so unlike the reformers' own.

Notes

1. Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl, as Told by Herself* (New York, 1905). Reprinted in *Women at Work*, edited by William O'Neill (Chicago, 1972).

2. Laura Hapke, *Tales of the Working Girl: Wage-Earning Women in American Literature, 1890-1925* (New York, 1992), 53. Even were she hired for such work, though, Richardson might still have once been a "real" working girl. She claimed that in order to write *The Long Days* she "reinforce[d] . . . memory by thorough investigation" in that she "voluntarily labored, a week here, a week there, at various trades allied to those that previously had been my sole means of livelihood" (274).

3. Mark Pittenger, "A World of Difference: Constructing the 'Underclass' in Progressive America," *American Quarterly* 49 (March, 1997), 26. Pittenger explains that he omits Richardson from his study "because her book presents itself as the product of an anonymous worker. She never names herself to the reader as a middle-class person venturing into a different world to study it" (58). Yet although Richardson professes that she entered the working class out of necessity, not curiosity, certainly she insists throughout the text on her higher class status. For example, in one scene she describes a co-worker's criticism of her for having a "high-toned way of talking," standing "so straight," and walking "too light" as if she didn't "touch the ground at all" (117-18).

4. Since they were often young and unmarried, turn-of-the-century working women were commonly referred to as "working girls," a term I will use throughout this article.

5. Pittenger, "World of Difference," 29.

6. "Women adrift" was a common turn-of-the-century term for working women who lived apart from relatives, and Joanne J. Meyerowitz uses it as the title for her study of American attitudes towards them, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1988). Meyerowitz locates the era in which Richardson wrote as a transition point in popular conceptions of independent women workers, maintaining "in the late nineteenth century, women adrift epitomized the purity of women; in the early twentieth century, the same women were among the first 'respectable' women broadcast as sexual objects" (138).

7. Harriet Robinson, *Loom and Spindle: or, Life Among the Early Mill Girls* (New York, 1976), 1.

8. *Ibid.*, 54.

9. *Ibid.*, 39, 40.

10. Lucy Larcom, *An Idyl of Work* (Boston, 1875), 80.

11. Larcom, *A New England Girlhood: Outlined From Memory* (New York, 1961), 181.

12. Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" in *The Apple-Tree Table and Other Sketches* (Princeton, 1922), 193-94, 209.

13. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle*, 50.

14. *Ibid.*, 45.

15. O. Henry [William Sydney Porter], "The Third Ingredient," in *Options* (New York, 1909).

16. In fairness to O. Henry, many of his stories focus on the working girl's economic hardship, subverting romantic notions of the glamour of her life. O. Henry wrote over twenty stories about working girls and was popularly regarded as their champion.

17. In her coverage of the striking shirtwaist workers of 1909, the reporter Sarah Comstock expressed feelings of panic similar to O. Henry's young man: "girls were everywhere: girls, girls, girls. Occasional men were interspersed. 'I understood this was the headquarters of the shirtwaist strikers,' I faltered at last. . . . Lingerie waists were elaborate, puffs towered; there were picture turbans and di'mont pendants." Once again perceiving the girls as a parodic version of the military, even as Comstock mocks her own impressionability she suggests the threatening oddity of being surrounded

by “girls, girls, girls” and their frippery, revealing that the experience is all the more disturbing because the female mass is engaged in “unfeminine” activity. “The Uprising of the Girls,” *Collier’s National Weekly* 44 (December 25, 1909), 18.

18. Like Robinson and O. Henry, Richardson too suggests masses of whiteness and describes the workers as forming “phalanxes.”

19. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (Manchester, 1992), 60, 59.

20. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de Siecle Culture* (New York, 1986), 24, cited in *Ibid.*, 59.

21. Dijkstra, *Idols*, 25, cited in Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 110-111.

22. Herndl, *Invalid*, 111.

23. Bronfen, *Over*, 170. Numerous descriptions of working girls dwell on their paleness, which paradoxically functions as an indicator of both refinement and working-class status. Larcom’s *An Idyl of Work*, for example, makes much of the pallor of “the orphan Eleanor, / Whose only heirloom from rich ancestors / Was slow consumption, hers by sure entail” (13). Melville, of course, accords the working girl’s paleness its most sustained literary discussion: “At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper. . . . So, through consumptive pallors of this blank, raggy life, go these white girls to death” (“Tartarus,” 193-94, 200). For a discussion of popular perceptions of tuberculosis, see Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York, 1978).

24. Herndl, *Invalid*, 25. Herndl describes the differences among cultural historians over whether or not representations of womanly suffering and suffering itself empowered women. In addition to *Invalid Women*, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1830-1980* (New York, 1985); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York, 1985); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985); Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Ann Douglas Wood, “The Fashionable Diseases’: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 (Summer 1973), 25-52, and *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977).

25. Herndl, “(Super) ‘Natural’ Invalidism: Male Writers and the Mind/Body Problem,” in *Invalid*, 75-109.

26. *Ibid.*, 23.

27. Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915* (New York, 1996), 64.

28. See Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1987); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “Home Rule: The Colonies of the New Woman, 47-82, in *No Man’s Land 2: Sexchanges* (New Haven, 1989); Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936,” in *Disorderly Conduct*, 245-296.

29. Herndl, *Invalid*, 157, 111. For discussions of the different ideals of beauty held in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, see Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York, 1983) and Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York, 1987).

30. In her readings of Henry James’ *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), Herndl shows how easily this aesthetic bridged the twentieth century.

31. Abba Goold Woolson, *Women in American Society* (Boston, 1873), cited in Herndl, *Invalid*, 111.

32. Indeed, Richardson particularly admires workers who literally replicate the domestic arena in the workplace, as in this description of a lunch break at the artificial flower factory:

Bacon and chops sputtered, steak sizzled; potatoes, beans, and corn stewed merrily. What had been but lately a flower-garden, by magic had become a mammoth kitchen filled with appetizing sounds and delicious odors. White-aproned cooks scurried madly. It was like a school-girls’ picnic. As they moved about I noticed how well dressed and neat were my shop-mates in their white shirt-waists and dark skirts. . . . Cooked and served at last, we ate our luncheon at leisure, and with the luxury of snow-white tablecloths and napkins of tissue-paper, which needs of the workroom were supplied in prodigious quantities. (188)

33. Which is not to say that Richardson is appalled by all non-native working girls. She mentions, for example, that many of her co-workers at the most genteel of all her work places, the artificial flower factory, were foreign born.

34. Likewise, Richardson describes Rachel Goldberg, who earns prodigious sums for her fine work in muslin, as “crouched sullenly over her machine” (210).

35. As with Richardson, public concern for “women adrift” and prostitutes usually focused on white, native-born women. Ruth Rosen states in *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-*

1918 (Baltimore, 1982), that "The innocent victim [of prostitution] was typically portrayed as the embodiment of agrarian purity: white, native born, and middle class in her manners and attitudes if not her background—potentially, if not actually, a 'lady.' By imagining the prostitute in this way, reformers could empathize with her as a member of their own class and as a woman who had at least tried to conform to the model of proper sexual behavior. . . . It makes sense, then, that the reverse image of the prostitute as sinister polluter was so frequently one of a lower-class non-white or immigrant women" (49).

36. Bessie Van Vorst and Marie Van Vorst, *The Woman Who Toils: Being the Experiences of Two Gentlewomen as Factory Girls* (New York, 1903). Excerpts from this text were first printed serially as "The Woman That Toils" in *Everybody's Magazine* 7 (September, November, October, December 1902), 211-25, 413-25, 361-77, 540-52.

37. Van Vorst, *Woman*, 198. In *The Silent Partner*, Phelps also invokes this "ghost" in her description of Catty, deformed at birth due to her mother's work in the mills: "a girl with a low forehead, with wandering eyes, with a dull stoop to the head, with long, lithe, magnetic fingers, with a thick, dropping under lip,—a girl walled up and walled in from that labyrinth of sympathies, that difficult evolution of brain from beast, the gorgeous peril of that play at good and evil which we call life, except at the wandering eyes, and at the long, lithe, magnetic fingers" (Ridgewood, New Jersey, 1967), 86.

38. Van Vorst, *Woman*, 202.

39. In full, Van Vorst relates "I notice a strange little elf not more than twelve years old, hauling loaded crates; her face and chest are depressed, she is pale to blueness, her eyes have indigo circles, her pupils are unnaturally dilated, her brows contracted; she has the appearance of a cave-bred creature. She seems scarcely human (43)." Given she is described as subhuman, the tender concern she shows Van Vorst comes as a shock: "'Did you hurt yourself?' she asks. Her inhuman form is the vehicle of a human heart, warm and tender. She lifts her wide-pupilled eyes to mine, her expression does not change from that of habitual scrutiny cast early in a rigid mould, but her voice carries sympathy from its purest source" (*Woman*, 42, 43). Van Vorst's wonder over the contrast between the girl's looks and voice is similar to Richardson's over the powerful voice that emanates from the stunted body of another child laborer: "then, in a deep, contralto voice, she spoke. What she said I did n't hear, or rather did n't grasp, in my wonder at the quality and timbre of that great voice, which, issuing from the folds of the checked apron, seemed fairly to fill the big hall below and the stair-well above with a deep, beautiful sound" (Richardson, *Long Day*, 162).

40. Pittenger remarks, for example, that Maud Younger and Frances Donovan "stress their co-workers' . . . sisterly solidarity" ("World of Difference," 51) in their texts *The Woman Who Waits* (Boston, 1920) and "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," *McClure's Magazine* 28 (March and April, 1907), 543-52 and 665-77.

41. Van Vorst, *Woman*, 213.

42. *Ibid.*, 90.

43. *Ibid.*, 89.

44. *Ibid.*, 5.

45. In the epilogue, Richardson's pique over Minnie's marriage is unmistakable. Explaining that after the reunion Minnie "took me home with her to the two small rooms where she was doing light housekeeping, and where we continued to live together until her marriage a year later broke up our happy domestic partnership" (268), Richardson avows that prior to the marriage "the interests of Minnie Plympton's life and of mine were . . . almost inseparable" (266). Although asserting that by marrying Minnie "has been successful. . . in the only real way a woman can [be]," Richardson avoids either describing Minnie as happy or her marriage as good even while, as convention demands, she makes a gesture towards implying both: "It was what the world would call a good match, and Minnie declares she is perfectly happy. And no doubt she is, else that honest creature would not be so bent upon making matches for everybody else" (266-67).

46. Richardson's description of such singing is echoed by Phelps':

There is something curious about that singing of yours. The time, the place, the singers, characterize it sharply,—the waning light, the rival din, the girls with tired faces. You start some little thing with a refrain and a ring to it. . . always, it will be noticed, of simple, spotless things, such as will surprise the listener who caught you at your oath of five minutes past. You have other songs, neither simple nor spotless, it may be; but you never sing them at your work, when the waning day is crawling out from spots between your looms, and the girls lift up their tired faces to catch and keep the chorus in the rival din. You like to watch the contest between the chorus and the din; to see—you seem almost to see—the struggle of the melody from alley to alley, from loom to loom, from darkening wall to darkening wall, from lifted face to lifted face; you see—for you are very sure you see—the machinery fall into a fit of rage. That is a sight! (*Silent*, 75-76).

47. See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia, 1986), as well as Meyerowitz, *Women* and Rosen, *Lost*. Working women

consorted with men not only for pleasure, but in order to supplement their scanty incomes with much needed meals, clothing, and funds.

48. See, for example, Helen Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive: Politics, Gender, and the Representation of Native American Literary Traditions, 1789-1936* (New York, 1996); Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York, 1995); Robyn Wiegman, *American Authority: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, 1995).

49. Pittenger, "World of Difference," 48.

50. *Ibid.*, 36.

51. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York, 1910), 65, 72.

52. Phelps, *Silent*, 127-28. Sip and Kelso both vow not to marry in order to continue their work in women's labor reform.

53. Pittenger, "World of Difference," 38.

54. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (Autumn 1975), 1-30. See also Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, ch. 4 (New York, 1981) and *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, ch. 1 (New York, 1991).

55. Although middle-class women may not have left the home for factories and other such workplaces, the increasing visibility of women who did do so affected the culture of those who did not. Meyerowitz suggests that "women adrift" provided a very visible model of heterosexual pleasure-seeking which young middle-class women may have imitated (*Women*, 124). Relatedly, Michael Denning argues that "the new visibility of class, of working women in the culture" was the most important "force that broke up [the literary genre of] sentimentalism (*Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* [London, 1987], 187).

56. Faderman, *Odd*, 38-39; Meyerowitz, *Women*, 95; Rosen, *Lost*, 104-05.

57. O. Henry, "An Unfinished Story," *The Four Million* (Garden City, 1926), 180. O. Henry claimed he modeled this character upon himself (Hapke, *Tales*, 75).

58. Cather primarily was an early twentieth-century writer, and Toni Morrison notes that although *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* was published in 1940 it "has the shape and feel of a tale written or experienced much earlier," Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, 1992), 20.

59. *Ibid.*, 26.

60. *Ibid.*, 27. Despite revealing such investment Morrison does not censure Cather, stating "In her last novel [Cather] works out and toward the meaning of female betrayal as it faces the void of racism. She may not have arrived safely, like Nancy, but to her credit she did undertake the dangerous journey" (28). Similarly, my intention is not to accuse of wrongdoing Richardson and those who may have resembled her, but to explore the implications of Richardson's stance towards working women.

61. Moreover, regardless of her lack of power as a "working girl," Richardson arguably effected others by publishing a book advocating various reforms including the establishment of hotels and lodging houses for women workers.

62. Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York, 1990).

63. Pascoe, *Relations*, xix. Pascoe states that this theory has been most challenged by historians of racial minority groups, and increasingly so by historians of women.

64. These texts all portray women who attempt to move beyond the accepted maternal relation of middle-class women to their working-class counterparts, a relation embodied by the "matrons" of the YWCA (Meyerowitz, *Women*, 53; see also Pascoe's *Relations*). Suggesting the degree to which erotic investment in the working girl may have been visible in women's reform culture, Henry James parodies such investment in *The Bostonians* (1885) and describes the novel as "a very American tale" (cited by Faderman, *Surpassing*, 190); William Dean Howells, *Annie Kilburn, a novel* (New York, 1899); Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Silent Partner* (Boston, 1899); Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York, 1910).