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Ladies in Log Cabins: Female-Authored Responses to "Reckless" Individualism

A Thesis in English

by

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Abstract:

Tracy explores how novels by Hannah Farnham Sawyer, Caroline Matilda Kirkland and Harriet Beecher Stowe use the multifaceted motif of the log cabin in order to amend the ideology of individualism and promote domesticity as a stabilizing force at a time of national social, political and economic turbulence. Tracy argues that these works represent a thread of individualism that prioritizes the experiences of women and the home over a more "rugged" or "reckless" individualism representing the selfish, exploitative domination of the American frontier in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. In doing so, these works expand the scope of American Individualism to include the experiences of women and critique the selfish motivations behind the burgeoning market economy and the rampant land speculation that sparked a cycle of economic panics. Tracy follows several threads in these novels to examine how they amend and expand the national and cultural narrative of their time: acting as the "fine print" of individualism, upholding and challenging separate spheres ideology, prioritizing and destabilizing idealized domesticity, exposing tensions between public and private space and employing a blend of sentimental and realist rhetoric. Tracy ultimately uncovers the limitations of the turn towards domesticity as a stabilizing force and the circumscribed agency this move allows women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The image of the log cabin has been internalized in American culture as an image that is distinctly "American." Supermarkets across the country sell Log Cabin maple syrup in bottles shaped like stylized cabins. Children play with Lincoln Logs and can build their own wooden and plastic cabins. They are taught in school that Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin, yet grew up to become president. HGTV has aired a variety of shows like *Log Cabin Living* and *Amazing Log Homes* about Americans fed up with city life and searching for the perfect twenty-first century log cabin. This structure, which appears again and again in American culture, is associated with simplicity, nostalgia, humility, hard work and individualism. Log cabins were also an essential part of western frontier expansion and southern slave quarters. In the early-nineteenth-century, the meaning of the log cabin shifted culturally for white, northern Americans. Originally imported from Scandinavian settlers, the log cabin had its origins in North America centuries earlier when European settlers began to push westward into the dense forests of the continent. The English, French and Spanish appropriated and modified these rudimentary structures as they claimed pieces of North America. Log cabins quickly became a staple in early colonial woodland housing (Cooper 78). However, the log cabin was also used as slave quarters, originating in the Chesapeake Tidewater region, before spreading throughout the south as typical housing for slaves (Walston 357-8). From the time of its arrival in North America, the log cabin became indicative of both the optimism of western expansion and the hopelessness and confinement of slavery in the South.

Moving away from the material, physical and utilitarian qualities of these structures, the log cabin breached the collective cultural memory of northern white Americans in the 1830s and took on metaphorical significance. Folklorist Mac Barrick credits writer William M. Thayer with the shift of the log cabin from utilitarian to symbolic objects. At a time when log cabin construction on the frontier was waning in favor of framed construction, Thayer wrote presidential biographies that emphasized their upward rise from a humble log cabin to the White House. Through his perpetuation of the "log cabin myth" in the biographies of American presidents, Thayer "transformed the log cabin from a practical artifact, a cozy habitation, into a national icon with the same affecting power as the eagle, the Liberty Bell, and the covered wagon" (Barrick 3). While initially utilitarian, the log cabin transformed into a symbol of Americanness in the early-nineteenth-century through their association with the presidents.

However, tensions exist between the romanticized, symbolic ideal of the log cabin, the material reality of these rustic frontier structures and their role in the institution of slavery as quarters. According to Laura Smith's essay on the failure of the log cabin to fully facilitate the translation of eastern middle class values to the frontier, some of the dangers of a foundationless log cabin include water damage, dry rot, decay, insect infestation and other potentially harmful health hazards and structural issues (Smith 188-9). The predominantly one-room floor plan also creates tension in the division of public and private spaces. These tensions reveal ideological ruptures in the culture in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time of increasing societal fracture leading up to the Civil War. Novels written around this time captured some of the contradictory associations and

images of the log cabin, particularly the implications of three works that will be discussed in this thesis: Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee's 1844 novel *The Log Cabin, or the World Before You,* Caroline Matilda Kirkland's 1839 novel *A New Home-Who'll Follow?* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly.*

Ladies in Log Cabins: Outlining a Complicated Relationship with Individualism

In addition to the friction between the log cabin as utilitarian domestic space and national symbol for national identity and ideals, the American myth of individualism is inherently unstable and contradictory. Individualism will be characterized here as a complex, traditionally masculine-coded discourse consisting of a variety of competing ideologies that share a few common tenets. These shared traits include resistance to conformity, autonomy over one's thoughts and actions and a certain level of selfishness. Notions of the individual's power have existed in American culture since the nation's founding, but have historically excluded various marginalized and disenfranchised groups like women, indigenous populations, African Americans and others.

One particularly well-known strand of individualist thinking is the intellectual and spiritual band of individualism propagated by transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Its paradoxical nature emerges from the fact that the notion of individual action only works if there is a community of people acting like individuals, in which acting like an individual would become the norm in the community. For example, Emerson also used intellectual public mediums (oratory and essay) to deliver a message to audiences about the private, introspective philosophy of transcendentalism in an effort to convey this

philosophy about the individual to large groups of people. Like the image of the log cabin, the ideologies of individualism are inherently contradictory.

While Emerson disseminated his style of individualism in intellectual New England circles, female domestic fiction writers were talking back to what they perceived to be the reckless byproducts of rugged individualism like capitalism, which played out on the frontier and exposed the cracks in America's still forming national identity. While writers like Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe who are primarily recognized for their literary achievements, writers of domestic fiction like Lee, Kirkland Stowe should also be remembered for theirs, and specifically here for writing texts that expand the scope of individualism and add to a larger national narrative about the frontier and expansion. These female authors deploy gender and domesticity (to borrow the terminology of Lauren Berlant, whose work was essential in the research of this thesis) as discourse that talks back to male-coded individualism in the 1840s and 1850s in an effort to amend this philosophy to include the domestic sphere and the subjective experiences of women.

It is not my intention to degrade the value of Emerson's work or try and knock him off of his literary pedestal in order to hold up Lee, Kirkland and Stowe. Rather, I will argue that better understanding domestic fiction leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the tensions within individualism, which Emerson himself acknowledged in his writing later in his life.[1] The accepted American narrative from the

[1] One of the most poignant examples of this is Emerson's later essay "Experience," which will not be discussed in this essay, but is worth pointing out as a point where Emerson begins to double-back on and introspectively reflect upon his earlier philosophy.

period in literary history that later became known as the American Renaissance is one of white, rugged, masculine individualism, which has trickled through history into contemporary culture. It should be noted that Emerson was not a rugged individualist. However, his writings are clear and useful in beginning to understand some of the central ideals that bound various individualist ideologies and will be discussed here.

The essence of the individualistic narrative that Emerson provides in essays like "Self Reliance" and "Nature" is a precarious state of idealism and optimism in response to the turbulence of antebellum America. These essays reveal aspects of the emotional undercurrent behind western settlement and the economically irresponsible overspeculation and price gouging that went along with it. They do so by laying out a philosophy in which people make decisions for themselves and only for themselves in order to compete for survival and strive for success.[2] Eastern families ventured west for profit and opportunity, but often found hardship instead. Settlers resisted government interference in their lives on the frontier, unless it benefitted them. Passed down in America's cultural consciousness, the stereotypical western American settler is the lone man who dominates the western landscape, epitomized by figures like Davy Crockett. The lone male settler myth manifested itself in the work of nineteenth-century landscape

[2] Throughout this essay, I will explore the implications and politics of the texts themselves, which might not always reflect the politics of the authors. While I will include some information about the possible intent of the author and their motivations for writing, I am largely interested in investigating the broader connotations of the text within its culture. For example, Emerson may not have written "Self Reliance" and "Nature" in response to the turbulence of his time and the economic challenges of western expansion, but the ideas of the text connect to these contemporaneous events and attitudes. This same distinction will apply to my analysis of Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's texts as well.

painters like Albert Bierstadt and late-nineteenth-century Western American landscape photographers like Carleton Watkins. It emerged again in the twentieth-century with photographers like Ansel Adams and reemerged in the late twentieth-century with interest in Davy Crockett sparked by Walt Disney and the space race in pursuit of the "last" frontier. I will position Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's texts in dialogue with this broad narrative of American individualism, resisting its reckless prioritization of the individual over the community and encapsulating the optimistic spirit of the frontier.

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels serve as the "fine print" to the grandiose idealism of individualism and manifest destiny.[3] Their narratives ground the realities of frontier life in the day-to-day experiences of female-coded domesticity. Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's texts uphold the traditional separation of public and private spaces while dismantling their separation by expanding the domain of the private sphere. These texts show how the home can be destabilized by events in the public sphere, which is ultimately harmful to the overall system of society. Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels exemplify new trends in the genre of women's fiction that subtly challenged and disrupted accepted narratives of identity, domesticity and gender that emerged from the period. These three novels reclaim the importance of domestic space[4] in American culture by prioritizing and protecting it in response to the series of societal shifts and

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[3] Manifest Destiny is the term for the belief that settlers were destined by God to spread American settlement across North America.

[4] It should also be noted that domestic space serves as a space of containment. The home contains feminine identity and has historically been used to rhetorically restrict the choices of women. Therefore, while Lee, Kirkland and Stowe reclaim the home's importance and use it to epitomize high moral character, this rhetorical move has its limitations due to the other ideas attached to domesticity. It is helpful to keep this in mind while reading this thesis, as it will emerge in my discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

crises that rocked antebellum America as the young nation continued to formulate a distinct national narrative resting largely on individualism.[5]

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels demonstrate how women, families and home were as crucial to the expansion of the country across the frontier as the individualistic male figure, expanding the scope of this nascent national narrative and extending the scope of the private sphere to encompass the public sphere. The frontier grew through the home, once it had been cleared of Native American populations through laws of displacement and forced removal. American culture and ideas expanded across the continent through the children born and reared on the frontier. Women thus grounded the frontier in the private sphere of the home. The public sphere will be defined in this thesis as shared community spaces and areas within the home in which members of different families interact. The private sphere will be defined as spaces of intimacy, physicality and places. The public sphere is a place of vulnerability, uncertainty, community and collectivity while the private sphere is a place of safety, security, family and, paradoxically, individuality.

In their novels, Lee, Kirkland and Stowe complicate the representation of domesticity as a space of retreat by destabilizing idealistic imagery of the home. For these authors, there is no full escape from the larger forces of the public sphere, even in the home. In Stowe's novel, George Harris rejects the model of domesticity and revised individualism Lee and Kirkland display in their novel. He leaves the country and then the

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[5] While Lee, Kirkland and Stowe reaffirm the importance of domestic space, indicating a fine line, if not a tension, between containment and security. It is not my intention to paint domestic space as a space of retreat that feeds into utopianism either, although the rhetoric of retreat is used and destabilized in each of the narratives as well.

continent with Eliza and his son in an effort to escape what he views as an oppressive form of domesticity as a slave, for the log cabin had white-coded associations of power and control for slaves, for whom log cabins represented oppression and confinement. George thus exposes how Lee and Kirkland's complication of domesticity as a retreat does not extend to all experiences within American culture at the time, a point that will be discussed in depth in chapter four and extended to larger implications for feminism in the conclusion to this thesis.

These three novels feature women and representations of domesticity that are not only partially complicit with social norms of the time (namely separate spheres ideology), but also subtly subversive by resisting the masculine-coded irresponsibility that threatens the insular nature of the private sphere of the home and family. The subversive nature of these novels emerges from the authors' depictions of how male irresponsibility in the public sphere affects women, homes and families in the private sphere through its permeation. Tension emerges in the scenes I will analyze from a rupture of the "sacred" and intimate space of the home, attached to the interactions of men and women as gendered bodies in these gendered spaces. The descriptions and negotiation of these conflations of public and private space expose the extent to which society was still forming on the frontier. These ruptures are used as gateways for criticizing reckless male individualistic behavior like overspeculation, and they establish the home as the "fine print" of individualism.[6]

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[6] Because they serve as this "fine print," all three narratives are complicit with individualism, which they also complicate through critique. However, this is not my main

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe use sentimental fiction to expose these existing tensions in American culture in the 1840s and 1850s. Sentimentality is a hallmark of nineteenth-century female discourse, a "language" that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe use to appeal to their female readers. They create a private discourse with them through the public act of publishing a novel to be consumed by a mass audience. The language of sentimentality, as Berlant argues in her essay "The Female Complaint" and monograph *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture,* creates a sense of belonging among women and constitutes an "intimate public."[7] Lee, Kirkland and Stowe participate within this linguistic system. However, there is also a tension between sentimental rhetoric and realist rhetoric in each of these novels. This tension is most evident in Kirkland's novel through her narrator's declaration of an "honest" and realist approach. Stowe uses sentimentality to create emotional attachment to her slave characters. Lee deploys it in order to feminize Henry's narrative and emphasize the private nature of the idealized home. Sentimentality serves as a multi-faceted rhetorical tool to critique threats to an idealized sense of domesticity and to reinforce what the authors deem as a "proper" state of the home.

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all deploy sentimentality as a rhetorical device to some extent, making them appear to be "conventional" women's fiction at some points. However, each of these novels challenges the norms of female discourse as well, using

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point and is just an important point to make to set up both the texts in my thesis and my argument.

[7] Lauren Berlant's work on the "female complaint" was an inspiration for some of the vocabulary that I use in this thesis such as "intimate public." This is my interpretation of what an "intimate public" means from her essay.

rhetorical tools like sentimentality to critique matters in the public sphere and protect a sense of "sacred" domesticity. These rhetorical modes of critique and protection are in tension. This friction reveals the social and economic instability of their historical moment in which these women were writing, as well as women authors' positions within those contexts.

My analysis of each text will loosely investigate a series of interconnected threads present in each work: critique of economic irresponsibility on the frontier, intersections of public and private space, use of sentimentality and realism to facilitate critique and simultaneous undermining and reinforcement of gender roles within separate spheres ideology. These threads illuminate how each writer deploys feminine rhetoric to dismantle and reappraise the masculine rhetoric of individualism. In my chapter on Lee's novel *The Log Cabin*, I will show how the work concerns itself with the writing of America's process of western expansion. The novel functions as a critique of economic irresponsibility by elucidating the importance of protecting an idealized sense of domesticity and promoting a slight subversion of traditional gender roles. In my chapter on Kirkland's novel, I will analyze how Kirkland deploys a blend of sentimentality and realism in her various vignettes of domesticity on the Michigan frontier, emphasizes the value of community over the individual on the frontier and uses the absence of rugged individualism to critique more romanticized depictions of the frontier. Finally, I will use Stowe's novel to expose the co-existence of two responses to idealized domesticity to raise larger questions about how idealized domesticity can be simultaneously confining and liberating. Because of the lack of scholarship on Lee's novel, I will draw on the work

of older feminist critics to attest to the novel's complexity to supplement my own reading and analysis. The chapters on Kirkland and Stowe will be reliant upon my close readings of the text. I will use my final chapter, on Stowe's novel, as both an extension of the argument I make in my chapters on Lee and Kirkland and a place to show how that argument breaks down in interesting ways when applied to slave domesticity, for which the log cabin has a completely different set of associations centered largely around oppression and white-coded cruelty. I will use the doubleness of the log cabin in her novel to expose the limits of Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's use of domestic rhetoric as a source of power against male-coded irresponsibility, the ways in which their strategy at critiquing this masculine mode is non-self-sustaining but nevertheless still valuable and important to recognize.

Setting the Stage: Historical Context

In this section, I will provide useful historical context to form a foundation for discussing Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's texts. The period in the United States beginning in roughly 1815 and continuing until the Civil War was a time of increasing tensions in the country as it continued to develop its cultural, literary, historical and geographic identity. The nation was shifting to a market economy from a largely agrarian one and was rapidly expanding westward across the continent. The stirrings of early reform and women's rights groups coalesced around abolition as regional tensions between the North and the South steadily increased over slavery, exacerbated by western expansion and the subsequent need to keep a balance between free and slave states in the Senate in addition

to legislation like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Many Americans began shifting into urban centers while others pushed westward into the country's vast territory, guided by the ideology of manifest destiny, the promise of independence and self-regulation and the slippery promise of abundant opportunity. This expansion led to various economic issues fueled by greed and overspeculation. This thesis will focus particularly on this last point of Western expansion, on how the contradictory hopes and realities of frontier life manifest themselves particularly strongly in these three key, but in no way comprehensive, examples of women's fiction.

In the antebellum period, America became increasingly unstable as the Civil War approached. In terms of foreign policy, the country expanded its borders, relocating Native Americans to facilitate the movement of white Americans westward and fighting a war with Spain for more territory (Kaplan 584). Shirley Samuels also notes that authors during this time faced the "national drama of manifest destiny and a rising middle class" (Samuels 3). Expanding on this idea of a rising middle class, Sharon Harris remarks upon the diversity of class status at this moment in American history, driven especially by immigration. She also notes the reform movements that were beginning to change cultural attitudes and the injustices committed against native populations (Harris 60). From the expansion of western territory to manifest destiny to increasing class diversity, the antebellum period was an era of social, cultural and economic turbulence to which authors like Lee, Stowe and Kirkland responded.

Turning to a more specific discussion of the frontier, the late 1830s and early 1840s were a crucial time for the expansion of the western territories, leading to the

negative economic impacts of overspeculation and wildcat banks, which shaped literary responses for years afterwards. During the 1830s and 1840s, many Americans moved out west, leading to increases in speculation and a largely credit-based economy that would lead to country's unstable economy to spiral downwards in a series of panics in the nineteenth century including the Panic of 1837 (Templin 2). As to why this period led to western expansion, literary scholar Mary Templin cites transportation and opportunity as two of the main influences. She writes, "Greater accessibility made western lands even more attractive to investors, who began to visualize the enormous wealth that could be made from the inevitable westward movement of a quickly growing population into regions of untapped resources." (Templin 26). By evaluating the implications of these geographical shifts and their economic consequences, authors reacted to such a disturbance in the social and cultural fabric of the time. Templin notes that "an outpouring of dozens of novels and stories—nearly all by white, middle-class, Northern women—responded to the national threat of financial failure" (Templin 2). Novels and other literary works that respond to moments of economic crisis and panic, particularly in nineteenth-century America, are thus called panic fiction.

The economic crisis that led to the development of panic fiction had its origins in economic irresponsibility in response to a period of economic success and enthusiasm surrounding the frontier. Templin writes, "During the spring of 1836, new access to western lands had sparked an unprecedented economic boom throughout the nation, fueled by plentiful bank credit and rising prices" (Templin 1). In early 1837, economic crisis struck the country when "pressure from foreign creditors and new governmental

monetary policies created a shortage of specie, forcing many banks to contract credit and plunging dozens of credit-dependent enterprises into bankruptcy" (Templin 2). What had begun as a time of promise crumbled under weight of the greed and opportunistic investing. The economic situation spiraled, worsening into the 1840s, and causing widespread financial stress.

The economic crises in America in the 1830s led to political shifts as well; the Panic of 1837 led up to the contested 1840 election between incumbent Democratic president Martin van Buren and Whig candidate William Henry Harrison. The election occurred during a time when the country was in economic peril and the masses were increasingly dissatisfied with Democratic economic policies (Weslager 261**)**. Democratic editor John de Ziska claimed on December 11, 1839 in the Baltimore *Republican* that Harrison would be more content sitting in his log cabin drinking cider than making a bid for the White House (Weslager 262). Harrison's campaign appropriated what was meant to be a derogatory remark, transforming it into political rhetorical success centered on the image of the log cabin, which was already beginning to shift to a more metaphorical meaning in the minds of many Americans (Ganter 260). What resulted was a campaign that adopted the popular democracy of the earlier Jacksonian elections, tapping into democratizing forms of popular culture: "The Whigs composed a book of campaign songs, and even a dance, 'The Tippecanoe, or the Log-Cabin Quickstep'" (Ganter 260). The proliferation of the rhetoric from this campaign into popular culture demonstrates the ways in which writers took these ideas and reacted to these events through their writing.

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all responded to these economic and political events in their writing; this brief historical context forms the backdrop for my discussion of their novels.

Who Was Writing and How: Literary Context

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe were writing during the American Renaissance, a period in American literary history where writers acutely responded to contemporary issues as a way of constructing a national narrative for America that was distinct from Europe and grounded in individualism. It is important to deconstruct what is meant by "renaissance" in this context. Here it refers to a rebirth in literary responses and a period of great innovation and growth in crafting literary responses to a need for a national literature. Harris posits a similar definition when she writes, "Any renaissance is, it seems, in some ways temporally located—it signifies a discrete period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity; though such boundaries should be fluid, the 1830s through the 1850s in American literature still seem to warrant this description" (Harris 59). Kaplan frames this period of literary activity to an astute cultural reaction when she writes that literature from this time provided a "response to crises of confidence about national unity, the expansion of slavery, and the racial identity of citizenship—crises that territorial expansion exacerbated" (Kaplan 584). Many writers during the American Renaissance, including Lee, Kirkland and Stowe, addressed questions of American identity and citizenship. Literature had a part in crafting a national identity for readers across the country, whether it was Emerson writing and delivering his essays, Hawthorne and Melville writing "literary" works or Lee, Kirkland and Stowe writing popular fiction.

The domestic fiction that these three women wrote might not seem impressive or groundbreaking to us today as contemporary readers. Their representations of women and home are largely conventional, with the subversion of society occurring on a subtler level. It might even be easy for some readers to criticize these works for this reason, but this would be to let one's contemporary lens of interpretation interfere with how the literary work would have functions in its historical moment. It is absolutely crucial to ignore one's knowledge of feminism before passing judgment on how women and the home are represented in these works. Lee and Kirkland's novels were written before the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, recognized as the main starting point of the women's rights movement in the United State. Stowe's novel was written in response to and amidst increasingly hostile regional tensions over slavery. This period of national turbulence was not the time for women to be making progressive rhetorical moves in their writing. In fact, a turn inwards to the stability of the home seems perfectly reasonable.

However, Lee, Kirkland and Stowe also push against the conventional sentimentality of earlier women's fiction.[8] They pick away at the harmful aspects of male-coded individualism towards women and extend it to include women and the home. They were not as overtly feminist as female transcendentalist and co-editor of *The Dial*, Margaret Fuller, who is credited with writing one of America's first feminist works with her book *Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller's book extended the conversation about gender beyond the separate spheres structure of men versus women through its original title "The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women" (Coviello

[8] This is not a primary point of my argument, but is worth mentioning for the sake of conveying why these works are important.

par. 20). Fuller's intellectual involvement in the 1840s shows how women used non-fiction writing to critique social and political issues of the day. However, this thesis examines this mode of critique in fiction, beginning with domestic fiction writers like Lee, Kirkland and Stowe. If the history of women's fiction were mapped out, Lee, Kirkland and Stowe represent a step towards later progressive late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century female American fiction writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton. It is therefore important to understand the importance of these writers beginning to challenge not only the conventions of society, but of women's literature in their historical moment.

This thesis focuses explicitly on the genre of domestic fiction, one of the most widespread and popular genres in which women wrote during the American Renaissance. For feminist critic Jane Tompkins, the domestic novel is relevant because it reaffirms the values and strengths of women. She writes, "The popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from a woman's point of view; that this body of work is remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness" (Tompkins 125). Tompkins presents domestic novels as a cultural force with the potential to reorganize beliefs about society and reaffirm cultural values. However, it wasn't only their power to present and potentially affect ideological change that made domestic novels important. They also promoted the further development of women's writing and women's literary cultures. As Nina Baym notes, "This fiction was by far the most popular literature of its time, and on the strength of that popularity, authorship in America was established as a woman's profession, and reading

as a woman's avocation" (Baym 11). Domestic fiction expanded the realm of female authorship, paving the way for writers like Lee, Kirkland and Stowe to extend beyond the conventions of women's fiction and actively critique "public sphere" issues like the economic irresponsibility that ultimately affected women and the home. These three authors are influences by the focus on women's stories in domestic fiction, but then use the conventions of the genre to critique larger, male-coded issues.

As I hinted at earlier, women's authorship fiction was changing at the time that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe were writing. The nineteenth century was a time when more and more women were writing and being published. According to historian Daniel Cohen, the mid-nineteenth-century afforded women new opportunities for publication and literary success. Publications wanted to reach as wide an audience as possible: "Literate and ambitious Yankee girls eagerly supplied much of that heterogeneous demand and, in the process, not only abandoned many of the inhibitions of domestic fiction—and of the broader ideology of domesticity—but also embraced alternative romantic models of female authorship" (Cohen 87). Expanding on this notion that women were fulfilling a need in the market, Harris remarks that female authorship exploded in the 1830s to 1850s in America. Cohen also raises an interesting point that teases out a paradox in the way Lee, Kirkland and Stowe approached writing about domesticity. While these three authors subtly challenged earlier modes of sentimental fiction and larger narratives in their writing, they deconstructed the separation of private and public spheres in a more immediate way simply by writing novels. In the 1820s, very few American women were actively publishing work, and when they did, they wrote primarily poetry and nonfiction.

By the time Lee and Kirkland were writing, the milieu of female authorship had changed to an environment in which women were publishing a broader range of writing, including novels, children's books, philosophy, scientific articles and history books (Harris 60-1).

Despite this step towards more gender diversity in the American literary market, female writers did not usually write out of creative passion, but primarily out of economic necessity. Writing was one of the few viable ways for a woman to financially support herself and her family in the early- to mid-nineteenth-century. Baym notes in her guide to "woman's fiction" that middle-class American women wrote novels out of financial necessity. She writes, "Only middle-class women had sufficient education to know how to write books, and only those who needed money attempted it. However, the unstable financial conditions of American life ensured that there was a sizable group of such women and made their thematic concern with the problems of self-support pertinent to many readers" (Baym 30). For women, writing was often a duty, not an artistic act, and this sense of obligation carried over to the content of their works, in which authors like Lee, Kirkland and Stowe take on a moralizing tone. This will be especially evident in their critiques of economic crisis due to overspeculation.

Building on their authors' economic and moral motivations for writing, some domestic fiction approached issues like the market and financial security, issues typically relegated to the male public sphere under separate spheres ideology.[9] Perhaps part of the

[9] I want to note here that I understand that separate spheres ideology was founded on the notion that both spheres relied on the existence of the other for the system to work. However, since part of my argument is that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe partially uphold separate spheres ideology and part of it is how they critique issues like masculine

reason that female authors handled this topic in their work is because of the moral nature of writing at the time. As Tompkins writes, "The implantation of virtue was the primary goal of nearly everything nineteenth-century Americans read: textbooks, novels, poems, magazine stories, or religious tracts" (Tompkins 157). Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all engage in moralistic rhetoric on some level. Domestic fiction provided a space for women to present lessons of virtues regarding finance. Templin takes this idea of moralism in domestic fiction a step further by describing how these female authors apply a moralistic tone to the economic issues of their day. Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels can all be considered panic fiction on some level. For Templin, the rhetorical innovation in these works lies in the fact that they broke boundaries: "[Female-authored panic fiction] also contributed a distinctive feminine voice to the debates surrounding the antebellum market revolution. Belying nineteenth-century claims of the separation between home and marketplace, panic novels advocate women's expertise in the economic realm and propose domestically oriented solutions to economic problems" (Templin 2). These novels break down the artificial separation between male and female spheres, giving women a voice regarding financial matters, specifically those relating to western expansion and speculation as Lee, Kirkland and Stowe do.

How I'll Show Why It Matters: Expanding My Methodology

My thesis will rely primarily on my close reading of these texts along with some historical context and additional critical sources. A chapter from Hannah Miller's book

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economic irresponsibility, I have found it helpful to discuss the dynamic between the two spheres in this way.

on female subjectivity discusses "overreading" as a technique for feminist reading that will inform my methodology. As I mentioned earlier, I will investigate how the social contradictions in the scenes that I analyze emerge from the disruption of a "sacred" and private space, which is attached to the interactions of men and women as gendered bodies in these gendered private and public spaces. This dynamic derives from the ways in which Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all deploy gender and domesticity. My argument will thus be supported by analysis of how gender and domesticity functions in each narrative. Like Miller, I will strive "to identify the act of this reading as the enabling subjectivity of *another* poetics, a poetics attached to gendered bodies that may have lived in history" (Miller 97). Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all attach weight on the depiction of gender and domesticity in their texts. They actively insert these images into the texts to rhetorically critique issues of history that are attached to the people who lived it on the frontier. All three authors emphasize domesticity as a space that is physical, intimate and material, a space where bodies and ideas intersect in ways that illuminate the ways in which society functions or dysfunctions, and expanding key philosophies in the culture to include women and the home.

Two of the central threads I follow in all three texts are one, the positioning of domesticity as a space that stabilizes the frontier, but then is destabilized by masculine forces on the frontier, and two, the use of sentimentality as a multifaceted tool to construct this dynamic. I will define domesticity as the space of the home, which serves as a site of cultural production within an artistic site of cultural production. Domesticity plays a central role in this thesis because it is a site of cultural reproduction, the place

where a mother passes on knowledge of the culture and society to her children. It is a place that the family unit occupies and examining how family is represented is an effective way of understanding what a culture values. It is also a precariously private space, a bubble that is still constantly influenced and permeated by the outside world. As Kaplan writes, "These novels then explore the breakdown of the boundaries between internal and external spaces, between the domestic and the foreign, as they struggle to renegotiate and stabilize these domains. This negotiation often takes place not only within the home but also within the heroine" (Kaplan 600-1). The home stabilizes American presence on the frontier but the frontier destabilizes the home, and thus the women who ultimately control that internal space, both in their cabins and within their own mental space. These overlapping dynamics between public and private, internal and external, stable and unstable are present in Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels.

In addition to actively using the representation of gendered domesticity within each of their narratives, Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all capitalize on the complicated nature of sentimental realist rhetoric in order to navigate the complicated societal frictions present in their works. It is through this insertion of sentimentality-closely aligned to the genre of domestic fiction-that each novel actively intervenes in its historical moment by critiquing the masculine-coded ideology of individualism, which led to economic irresponsibility on the frontier and the destabilization of the stabilizing presence of constructed domestic spaces. This complex dynamic is how Lee, Kirkland and Stowe do "cultural work," to borrow Tompkins' terminology (which was a fundamental part of the

earlier development of this thesis). These novels do so through a blend of sentimental and realist rhetoric.

Throughout their narratives, Lee, Kirkland and Stowe use both appeals to emotion and a focus on particular, everyday details in order to help their readers consider and contemplate key tensions in American culture at the time like public versus private and individual versus community. Sentimental rhetoric would have been familiar and recognizable to their audiences: "Sentimentality is literally at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture…As a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer, sentimentality produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class and gender boundaries" (Samuels 4-5). Sentimentality is thus an effective rhetorical technique for Lee, Kirkland and Stowe to use to appeal to their female audiences. Each author also blends in realism and a focus on material reality as well, separating their writing from earlier domestic fiction.

State of the Question: Standing on the Shoulders of Other Women Writing About Women

This thesis would not be possible without the groundbreaking work of earlier feminist critics, who have established the importance of women writers and theorized systems of reading these works. Reading this criticism was a fundamental part of my process and allowed me to develop a stronger argument on the modes of critique, subversion and cultural intervention in Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels. Feminist literary scholars like Judith Fetterly and Nina Baym began to question the white male literary canon in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars like Gillian Brown, Mary

Kelley, Lori Merish, Nancy Miller, Shirley Samuels and Jane Tompkins began to theorize ways of reading obscure female narratives and domestic fiction from the nineteenth-century. For Tompkins, being able to affect the culture is a novel's source of literary power. In earlier stages of this thesis, I found this evaluation to be poignant and useful in beginning to dig into the three novels that I am studying.

The most influential scholar on my research and fine-tuning my argument, however, was Lauren Berlant, a post-structuralist feminist critic who investigates how rhetorical communities that she deems "intimate publics" facilitate systems of emotional belonging in literature. Both her 1988 essay "The Female Complaint" and the introduction to her 2008 book *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* were crucial in developing my ideas about Lee, Kirkland and Stowe at a new level and giving me the terminology to fully express the dynamics I have found at play in their novels. Reading Berlant introduced me to ideas like populist feminism, the deployment of gender and circumscribed agency, all of which will be discussed explicitly or implicitly. Berlant's commentary on what sentimentality and women's culture could do was especially powerful. In her essay, Berlant writes, "The female complaint serves in particular to mediate and manage the social contradictions that arise from women's sexual and affective allegiance to a phallocentric ideology that has, in practice, denied women power, privilege, and presence in the public and private spheres" (Berlant "The Female Complaint" 243). Berlant discusses the mode of complaint, which I will argue that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all partially break free from by actively critiquing the "phallocentric ideology" that has historically confined them.

While a complaint is a passive mode of expressing frustration at an unjust system, a critique takes a more active role by dissecting its dynamic and offering some kind of diagnostic analysis of the problem. Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all provide a critique of male-coded individualism that goes beyond passive expression of its detrimental effects.

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's novels demonstrate a complex relationship with oppressive and irresponsible masculinity, but one that tries to critique more than it does to complain. Berlant's point is also helpful in illuminating how feminine discourse is never fully separate from masculine discourse. While they resist or oppress one another, they are ultimately also complicit within one another to some extent. This thesis will be a small step forward in my understanding of this complex relationship. I will inevitably raise new questions as I answer old ones that I have had about the function of gendered discourse in narrative and the broadening of ideologies to include "new" groups.

From Emerson to Lee: The Myth of Individualism

In order to segway into the first content chapter of my thesis on Lee's novel, I will briefly return to a discussion of Emerson and the philosophical, intellectual individualism that he exemplifies in his writings. One of the most prolific American writers of the American Renaissance was Ralph Waldo Emerson, supporter of individualism and father of transcendentalism. In response to the political and economic turbulence of the late 1830s and 1840s, Emerson was an incredibly active voice through the oratory of his essays like "Self-Reliance" (1841), which advocated for individualism and honesty as the guiding principles of a man's life. It is first essential to note the form of Emerson's essays, which also functioned as speeches in their original context. The delivery of these

speeches fostered an essential form of entertainment and philosophical discussion among scholars of the day. As Ganter explains in his essay that argues for an inherent connection between the politics of the time and Emerson's essay, "part of the reason why nineteenth-century audiences responded so enthusiastically to oratory is because it provided a rhetorical occasion, or literary *topos*, where principles of community were explored and shaped" (Ganter 264). Thus, even through its form, "Self-Reliance" intervened in the culture by being used as a catalyst for considering the organization of society at a time when the American economy and society were in crisis.

Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" explores not only characteristics of community, but also the role and definition of the individual, which was an emerging topic of the time as words like "individualism" entered the American lexicon. The term was imported to America from France in the 1840 American translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and first appears in Emerson's private writings in 1842 (Patell 442-4). Originally meant as a criticism of American democracy, believed by Tocqueville to be overly self-centered compared to the more conservative social systems of Europe, the term was quickly appropriated in American culture and championed as a descriptor of American freedoms (Patell 445-6). Individualism centered on the notion of individuals who followed their own ambitions and instincts is a key thread in "Self-Reliance." As the title suggests, Emerson's essay promotes dependence of one's thoughts and impulses as opposed to being completely directed by social and cultural forces, evident from some of the first lines of the essay, when Emerson writes, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is

genius…A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages" (Emerson 1). He stresses the importance of learning to trust one's own ideas instead of the ideas of people deemed to be wise and full of knowledge through a keen sense of self awareness. Emerson pushes for a belief in individualistic inner instinct, but notes that this instinct is applicable to every single man. His individualism is targeted to society, and is thus paradoxically communal.

While Emerson presents a highly philosophical response to the social, political and historical events of the American Renaissance through his orally delivered essays like "Self-Reliance," Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee's domestic novel *The Log Cabin, or the World Before You* instead provides a response through narrative; her novel responds to economic crises like the Panic of 1837 through the model behavior of her protagonist, Henry Green, and emphasizing the stability and value of the home through its consistent destabilization. Henry travels from the Northeast and settles on the frontier out in Illinois. He serves as a model individualist and a role model for the reader through his heightened sense of morality and flawless intentions to do the right thing; over the course of the novel, his character develops from a helpless child left to be raised by his grandmother to an independent young man who has found domestic and economic success through an honest and determined approach to work. After the death of his grandmother and father, Henry decides to set out West to pursue a career as a schoolmaster. Through Henry's journey and development, Lee constructs a domesticity that revises the philosophical individualism propagated by Emerson and applies it to the rugged individualism and

associated reckless speculation of the frontier, in which Henry refuses to participate. Thus, while Lee does not completely denounce the central ideas of individualism, she provides a multifaceted revision of it in her prescriptively didactic narrative, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Building an American Home: Deploying Domesticity, Sentimentality and Gender in Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee's novel *The Log Cabin, or the World Before You*

Part of this internalized "log cabin myth"[10] in American culture involves the lone man who travels out on the frontier and establishes himself in a cabin where he can support himself and his family through the effort of his own labor. However, this idealized narrative seemingly feeds into the economic irresponsibility associated with the frontier in the 1830s, namely the greedy overspeculation of land and involvement of wildcat banks that dangerously inflated the price of land and left many in financial ruin, particularly during the Panic of 1837. However, the narrative can also be used in such a way that uses idealism to critique these economic downfalls. This chapter will investigate the ways in which Hannah Farnham Sawyer Lee deploys domesticity, exploits the sentimental rhetoric and use subverted gender roles in her 1844 novel *The Log Cabin, or the World Before You.*[11] Her frontier tale follows protagonist Henry Green's transition to Illinois from New England after the deaths of his father and grandmother in order to teach. He builds a log cabin for his childhood sweetheart Ellen and woos her to come out

[10] When I use the phrase "log cabin myth" throughout this thesis, I am referring to the symbolic narrative that has become ingrained in American mythology that one has the ability to strike out on his own away from society and establish himself and his family on the frontier through self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. It often involves a male-coded domination of the land and an oversight of the indigenous people who previously lived there who had to be removed to pave the way for white western advancement.

[11] A brief note on methodology: Because there has been little to no scholarship written on this novel, I have chosen in this chapter to put the novel in conversation with earlier feminist literary critics including Jane Tompkins, Gillian Brown and Mary Templin in order to show its value by rooting it in the work of scholars who largely recovered the value of this type of work. I will also be using the terminology and moves that I have learned from reading Lauren Berlant throughout this chapter. Of course, this chapter is ultimately grounded in my own analysis of the text.

west and begin a family. Lee's novel will be read here as a response to the financial schemes that largely led to economic panic. I will argue here that Lee's novel prescriptive, moralistic and didactic novel provides a revision of the traditional male-coded myth of individualism. In order to do so, Lee constructs a narrative that critiques economic irresponsibility and speculation while pushing for a commitment to financial independence and spending within one's means. Her narrative also protects and destabilizes a sacred sense of domesticity.

The Log Cabin represents not only a simulacrum of an Illinois frontier couple, but also the gendering of its female author and her craft within her historical moment of the American Renaissance, as writers used their work to consider, construct and revise America's national narrative. Beginning this chapter with a little context, Lee's novel was informed not just by the social, cultural and economic atmosphere of the late 1830s, but also by the broader literary context of female authorship. As stated earlier, many mid-nineteenth century female authors wrote out of economic necessity and domestic obligation instead of as an expression of their literary skill. Lee is an example of an author within this group of middle class women who wrote out of need, using her craft in order to support herself after the death of her husband. Lee didn't start writing until the age of fifty, suggesting she did so due to the financial stress brought on her family by the loss of her husband (Goldman par. 1). Cohen addresses this need-based compulsion for women to write in the nineteenth-century when he writes, "They published—often ambivalently or reluctantly or apologetically—not to express individualistic genius or literary artistry, but rather as an extension of their domestic care-giving and pedagogic

duties as wives and mothers" (Cohen 89-90). Cohen makes this point in order to demonstrate how the separate spheres ideology that designated women to the home shaped the ways that women writers thought about their own authorship. This trend suggests that Lee possibly viewed her authorship as a crucial job *and* an extension of her domestic obligations instead of a creative passion. Lee's economic obligation to write might thus have an influence on the prominent themes of economic responsibility, speculation and debt in the novel as well as its didactic tone.

A New America: Writing (and Teaching) the Processes of Western Settlement

One of the most direct ways that Lee's novel interacts with its historical moment is through its discussion of the frontier and the movement to western states and territories. Henry Green, the protagonist, moves west to Illinois and becomes a schoolteacher, establishing a reputation for himself in the frontier town of Cassius. His resettlement reinvigorates him, giving him a sense of purpose that he did not have living in New England: "The pale, delicate, effeminate boy was becoming enterprising and confident in his own endeavors. It was no slight thing to quit every being I knew, and enter upon a world of strangers…It was not merely to make money or earn a living which stimulated my onward soul, it was a conviction that I was going to a region where I might be useful" (Lee 29). Lee describes here the optimism of a young man facing the unknown west, which Henry acknowledges when he says that he was "becoming enterprising and confident" despite being on the edge of "a world of strangers." He also defines his value as an individual through his utility and ability to contribute positively to a broader

community. Thus, Lee does not necessarily argue against individualism in her novel, but rather she promotes an amended individualism that is informed by her feminine worldview by promoting the expansion of individualism's ideology to include a broader range of experiences like those of women and those in the private sphere.

A heavily masculine-coded notion of living self-sufficiently off of the land is inherent to the myth of the American west; this type of individualism associated with the frontier borders on lawlessness and exploiting shared resources of the land for personal profit. Henry is not moving out west solely for economic gain or to dominate the land. He is not a "rugged" individualist. Largely an outcast in New England and without any familial attachments left there, he moves to Illinois because he views it as a place where he can prove himself worthy, to himself and to other people. Henry's move demonstrates his own brand of individualism, one that borders on noble and endearing. His system of individualism is built around the narrative of an outcast in the city finding his own strength, initiative and success through his own efforts on the frontier. Through Henry, Lee's novel demonstrates one view of a type of settler that would hypothetically be successful on the frontier. Lee's novel thus involves itself with writing the history of America's process of western exploration, both as transformative for the self and inner psyche as well as emblematic for the nation's move westward as well.

Falling in line with a moralizing style commonly found in domestic fiction, *The Log Cabin* provides commentary on western land divisions and policy that exposes a rhetorical concern with masculine ideas of ownership. The book is littered with short, didactic sections about the particulars of life on the frontier, from the division of land to

the prices that could be earned for various crops grown down to the cent. In one of these passages, Henry describes the system of dividing western land that began with the Land Ordinance of 1785: "Everyone knows that a section is six hundred and forty acres. A purchaser of land may buy a quarter-section, or, if he desires it, it may be subdivided into eighty acres, and then into forty: this is the smallest quantity sold by government. A man may take two forties, one forty of prairie land and another forty of timber" (Lee 62). Like much of the novel, the tone of this passage is even and instructional. While it is curious that he explains something that everyone "knows," it is also of note that there is a focus on the particulars of material life here. This focus reveals how Lee deploys realism in the narrative to make points about how the west "works" in a style that will contrast with the more sentimental passages. These descriptive sections serve to potentially instruct young women reading them about land policy out west or perhaps to raise questions and conversation about the process of moving out west and taking possession and ownership of land, which only men could do. Borrowing terminology from Berlant, passages like this one display the creation of a kind of "intimate public" through this text. Lee uses the public form of the novel to speak privately to her audience, giving them knowledge that will initiate them into a group that is aware of these Western land issues and policies.

Building on this interest in male-coded land possession, Lee's novel also concerns itself with teaching its readers about economics and the importance of living reasonably in the west. Mary Templin identifies a purpose of panic fiction[12] like Lee's novel when

[12] To clarify, panic fiction is a work of literature that provides a narratological response to economic crisis and usually has a moralistic message about financial security. Templin

she writes, "Many panic authors illustrated the dangers of a credit-based economy in their stories of failure and urged their readers to adopt more conservative spending habits and investment strategies" (Templin 4). *The Log Cabin* contains several of these "warnings" against systematic economic irresponsibility and series of reckless investments that led to panic in the late 1830s. Throughout the novel, Henry is terrified of going into debt or making unwise financial decisions that will lead him into debt. He refuses to take out loans or spend more money than he has in his savings. This interwoven financial commentary in the narrative exposes the extent to which this novel serves as an example of panic fiction and promotes a mode of individualism that incorporates this economic critique by being as financially independent as possible.

Throughout the narrative, Henry offers advice on how to fix the economic problems plaguing the western frontier. Two passages in particular demonstrate Lee's warning against overspeculation. First, Henry muses on the topic of financial autonomy: "The man who lives within his means has a feeling of independence which enobles his moral nature…The man who preserves his independence, who neither borrows nor begs, who incurs no debts, has a shield against temptation" (Lee 63). For Henry, freedom comes from spending one's money wisely and not owing money to anyone else. Moreover, one's economic responsibility is also a sign of one's moral character as he avoids being dragged into the world of debt and greed. Henry's language discussing this topic is rich and intense. He refers to a lack of debt as "a shield against temptation," giving financial responsibility a spiritual dimension. He also demonstrates the urgency of

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identifies Lee as a panic fiction writer with her novel *Three Experiments in Living.* Lee's novel *The Log Cabin*, I argue, counts as one of these texts.

spending one's money wisely by suggesting the man who does "preserves his independence" and "enobles his moral nature."

The tone of this passage borders on Emersonian, if Emerson were to apply his philosophy more directly onto real, material issues instead of remaining more abstractly philosophical and theoretical. In a way, Lee's novel applies some of Emerson's key ideas about the prioritization of individual thought to broader contexts than he did and within a fictional narrative instead of an oratory essay. Henry offers the reader advice informed by the turbulence of his time, to spend their money reasonably as a critique of the economic issues of overspeculation that plagued the frontier in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. He encourages them to act as freethinking, individuals with their money instead of feeding into an unstable economic system that inevitably leads to panic.

Henry's commentary on economic responsibility serves as a mode of critique that counteracts the male-coded economic recklessness that existed on the frontier. During another one of Henry's pedagogical monologues, Lee writes, "Their idea is to cultivate and sell out. A farmer who goes upon this speculating plan seldom grows rich or lives comfortably. *Home happiness* hardly comes into his account" (Lee 100, original italics). Henry criticizes the greedy speculators whose goal is to use the land for profit instead of establishing a sense of secure domesticity (which Lee's novel protects) and earning an honest living off of the land. Instead, the land is a means to an end for these speculators, which Henry sees as proof that "home happiness" is not valuable to them. The same notion of "home happiness" is italicized for emphasis in the text of the novel, an indication that it is something Henry values, and is highlighting for the reader.

Demonstrating Templin's point that panic fiction authors often advocated for wiser and less risky spending in their narratives, this passage puts economic greed and domestic security in direct opposition to one another. Lee thus promotes economic safety as a way to protect the domestic sphere, exposing friction between domesticity and economics and showing a need for a sense of stability rooted in the home when Lee was writing. Both of these passages warn against the dangers of speculation and living on credit out west. Lee's novel critiques this corrupted system of greed and overspeculation not only because it led to multiple economic crises but also because that system inhibited the development of secure family homesteads on the frontier.

Both of these moments from the text also depict the private sense of the private home intermingling with the public sphere of economic greed and the market, coalescing in an argument of how to live one's life and spend one's money to achieve economic security and "home happiness." This emphasis on security and safety in the home could be denounced as using domesticity as a retreat, but it is important to keep in mind that Lee was writing in a time of economic and political turbulence in the wake of the Panic of 1837 and increasing sectionalism. Lee's novel also doesn't treat the home as an isolated utopian space. Instead, Lee deploys domesticity as in constant interaction and under constant threat from the forces outside of it. As Templin notes about the interplay between domesticity and economics in Lee's 1837 novel *Three Experiments of Living: Living within the Means, Living Up to the Means, Living Beyond the Means*, "Lee unexpectedly brings the two together, illustrating both the impact of economic behavior on domestic life and the influence (for good or ill) of private character on financial

decisions. In short, she undermines the developing ideology of separate spheres, using the conventions of domestic fiction to engage in economic discourse" (Templin 1). This same conflicted dynamic between domesticity and economics is present in *The Log Cabin.* Lee's commentary on how the overspeculation that plagued the west overlooked the importance of a happy home is radical in the way in which it confrontationally accuses the male public sphere of disrupting the balance that helped the two spheres cohere in separate spheres ideology. Lee simultaneously fuses and fissions the separate spheres in the west, where these boundaries were more fluid to make a statement about the need for a balance between the home and the market on the frontier, and in the country at large as well.

Protecting the Home, Destabilizing the Home: Deploying Domesticity

Besides critiquing the male-coded economic issues in the west, Lee also deploys domesticity by portraying what it means to build a humble and honest home. It logically follows that once one moves west, a way to show one's independence is to establish a homestead. Like Templin, Harris cites *Three Experiments of Living* as an example of this emerging interest in women's fiction. In this tale, the central couple faces financial ruin because of issues like poor decision-making (Harris 64). On the other hand, the central couple in *The Log Cabin* finds domestic bliss and contentment through a series of crucial and reasonable financial decisions made by both Henry *and* Ellen. While Lee's earlier novel demonstrates the consequences of overzealous speculation, *The Log Cabin* acts as a response to the economic crises of the 1830s and 1840s in the United States in a different

way, by affirming and rewarding the construction of a humble and sensible, albeit idealistic, frontier homestead. Lee's depiction of quaint domesticity in *The Log Cabin* stages the conflicts, dramas and discourse of the home on the frontier for the reader.

Forming part of Lee's domestic rhetoric in the text, Henry develops a dream for the perfect quaint dwelling that will allow him to earn the love of his childhood friend, Ellen, and create a family. After Henry becomes established as a schoolteacher, he decides it is time to leave the boardinghouse and establish a homestead, becoming a landowner. He muses, "I would endeavor to develop the true nature and end of my existence: and here, too, I would indulge dreams of domestic happiness, that, as yet, was hardly shadowed out in my imagination" (Lee 65). Henry's thoughts are deterministic. His dream of domestic bliss is something he has led up to and is in a way inevitable. However, his dreams of a home are still vague. It is not until he thinks to woo his childhood love Ellen that Henry is able to put his plan into action.

His domestic goals cannot be completed until he integrates Ellen's femininity into this vision. Henry explains, "I would convince her that I had more energy of character than she had given me credit for—would build a comfortable log house and get my farm under weigh, and then I would say to her, 'Ellen, all this I have done for you: come and take possession'" (Lee 78). Henry strives to create a home-traditionally women's work-in order to court Ellen and invite her to take ownership of it to seal their emotional bond. This moment shows the fusion of male and female interests on the frontier, a necessity because the homes needed to be built and established on the unoccupied land. To start a home on the frontier means to create domesticity for nothing. The log cabin, cheap and

easy to build, was thus a reasonable choice to start with as a dwelling. Furthermore, Henry not only buys the land and helps build the home, masculine-coded activities, but also create the domestic space, a traditionally feminine-coded activity.

Henry's dream of "home happiness" fuses together the realms of men and women to find domestic happiness. Henry differentiates his dreams of a home by distinguishing *his* home on an emotional level. He says, "There are many who have felt as I did the pleasure of a home of their own; but mine was greatly heightened by the hope of its becoming the abode of domestic happiness" (Lee 80). Henry's dream for domestic bliss is fundamentally based on the individualistic emotional level of his aspirations for the house. His home is not just four walls with a roof. It also serves as a container for his ideals about domestic comfort. He thus frames his domestic space as an exemplar of this comfort as the basis for his cabin's-and his own-superiority. This moment represents not only a more balanced fusion of male and female interests in his creation of the space, but also plays with the ideal of individualism inherent to American frontier culture. He creates his home according to his own thoughts and vision, thus demonstrating how Lee's novel is a revision of this philosophical approach to life that was present on the frontier. The text extends the ideology of individualism and the ways it can manifest itself out west to include financially responsible settlers.

Turning to the material description of physical space in the novel, Lee also positions domesticity in her novel through her description of the home through Henry's eyes, exposing his individualistic choices in building his home and commenting on possession and ownership. Falling in line with the overwhelmingly didactic tone of the

novel, Henry also gives the reader insight into the structure of a log cabin: "The general mode of building a log-house consists of one room, which is kitchen, sitting-room and bedroom; but I exercised my ingenuity in having a bedroom separate" (Lee 80). Henry lists the generic spaces of a log cabin and then he demonstrates his individualistic ingenuity in separating the home's public and private spaces. As Gillian Brown notes about the role of individualism in domestic fiction, because it was "welded to the market activities generally available only to white men, possessive individualism obviously reflects a masculine selfhood. Yet in the nineteenth century, this form of individualism comes to be associated with the feminine sphere of domesticity" (Brown 2). Henry's possessive individualism is demonstrated in his traditionally feminine establishment of the domestic, and thus shows this trend to unite the masculine self with the feminized construction of domestic space. He exemplifies this new sense of feminized individualism that emerged in the nineteenth-century with the rise of the market. Ownership and a focus on materiality are inherent to this new sense of individualism, in which Henry participates and the novel thus demonstrates through such commentary.

Henry's demonstration of his domestic sensibility and feminized individualism is further implied-and complicated once Ellen has arrived: "My log house was as neat, as well arranged, as if it had been a palace. Our sleeping room, and eating room, *unlike most log houses*, were wholly distinct; but I am compelled to acknowledge that our eating room was, alternately, kitchen, parlor, and study; yet Ellen so contrived it that one occupation never intruded upon the other" (Lee 107). There is an emphasis on possession here, both through his description and thorough the italics that are original to the text. On

the frontier, it should be no surprise that interest in the material and ownership were important. In her discussion of a novel by Eliza Farnham, Merish implies that a typical "antebellum women's frontier narrative" underscores "the *national* resonances of sentimental ownership as a configuration that designates 'civilized' Americans" (Merish 21). In line with Merish's categorization of how ownership creates a boundary between civilized and uncivilized, Henry distinguishes himself as even more civilized than other log cabin owners because of his innovation. Additionally, he calls it "my log house" but the spaces within it belong to him and Ellen (*our* sleeping room). The structure itself belongs to Henry and Ellen possesses joint-ownership of the interior domestic space. It is also Ellen's responsibility to keep the masculine (the study) and feminine-coded spaces (the kitchen and the parlor) of the home separate, to take control over the home.

Likewise, while it is Henry who primarily creates the domestic space in the novel, Ellen also has an influence on its interior appearance. Towards the end of the novel, Henry muses, "The walls of our house were covered with specimens of my chirography; but I solemnly protest this was not my doing—Ellen chose to have it so, and I could not object" (Lee 107). Not only does Ellen take control over the interior decoration in her realm of the home, but Henry also recognizes that he is powerless to stop her. While this moment of power occurs for Ellen in the private sphere, the way that Henry describes it shows that he values her opinion and her choices in the space that they share, even if he disagrees with the choice that she makes.

This prioritization of domesticity in Lee's novel reflects and reinforces certain attitudes of the time about gender roles that have moral significance. About this,

Tompkins writes, “The notion that women in the home exerted a moral force that shaped the destinies of the race had become central to this country’s vision of itself as a redeemer nation. The ethic of submission and the celebration of domesticity were not losing strategies in an age dominated by the revival movement” (Tompkins 172). As discussed in the introduction, a literary text can engage with its historical moment by reflecting, challenging or interceding into a culture’s thoughts about itself. Tompkins shows this engagement by reaffirming mid-nineteenth-century America’s views of itself as a revivalist state through the dual rhetoric of feminine submission and ownership in the home, Lee participates in this mode of cultural production. Ellen serves as the moral compass in the home, exposing the responsibility of women to guide the honor and integrity of the home. If one positions the home as a microcosm for the nation, this means that women thus have a duty to moralize the nation, either through the reform movements that were gaining ground in Lee’s time or through narratives that critique, amend and expand a national narrative based on individualism.

While Lee’s novel does not have a decidedly reformist bent, it should be noted that Ellen insists on hanging up Henry’s handwriting, the product of his early education. This passage can be read as women promoting the value of education, which potentially has a reformist association. Ellen champions Henry’s education in the space of the home and integrates it into their precious sense of domesticity. The text thus promotes education and does cultural work by interceding in the culture and reaffirming the importance of becoming a learned individual in nineteenth-century America.

Intrusions and Disruptions: Destabilizing the Private Sphere with "Public" Forces

Lee's novel also exposes the extent to which the private space of the home can be interrupted by external forces in the public sphere, thus creating an intermingling of the private and the public spheres, both rhetorically and in the narrative. Lee deploys a stable sense of domesticity created primarily by Henry and then destabilizes it by placing an intruder into that space and throwing a wrench into Henry's dreams of domestic bliss. This is particularly evident during an incident between Henry and the schoolmistress Miss Kent, his co-worker at the small rural school where he teaches. She is Henry's fellow schoolteacher in Cassius and because he consulted her about how to set up his log cabin, she had mistakenly believed that Henry wished to marry her. When she finds Henry's love letter to Ellen inviting her to live in Cassius, Miss Kent is enraged. One day, Henry comes home, thinking he will be able to enclose himself in the safety of his home: "How my heart beat as I hurried home to read my rough copy over! *Home!*—never did that word convey to me such happiness. I could now shut my door upon all the world—not a human being had a right to intrude upon my solitude!" (Lee 83). This description, edged with a sense of sentimentality and saturated sense of sweeping emotion, of the role of home, and the word itself, instructs the reader on home's importance and reaffirms the value of home as a safe place into which one can temporary retreat to tend to one's private matters.

When Henry arrives, the scorned Miss Kent is waiting for him, intruding in his private, domestic space. In response to finding her there, Henry says, "She had intruded herself into the home which I had just considered so inviolable, and where I had so

confidently repaired to read over Ellen's letter which I had just copies. Yet when she turned round I became confused and embarrassed. The secret of my love for Ellen was no longer mine alone" (Lee 84). Henry is startled at the violation of the privacy of his home and of his heart. Ironically, it is a woman who violates the "sacred" space that she would typically be expected to control and protect. The secret of his love for Ellen has been discovered through Miss Kent finding his letter to Ellen. Through the presence of Miss Kent, an outsider, in Henry's home, the public is inserted into the private, breaking yet another social boundary. As Kaplan posits, "These novels then explore the breakdown of the boundaries between internal and external spaces, between the domestic and the foreign, as they struggle to renegotiate and stabilize these domains. This negotiation often takes place not only within the home but also within the heroine" (Kaplan 600-1). This internal negotiation is present in Lee's novel as well. However, it is not within the heroine that this negotiation takes place, but rather within Henry, the hero of the novel, who also negotiates the boundaries between public and private, masculine and feminine on the frontier. In this moment, the lines between public and private break down. The home is presented as a permeable space that while idealized to be a safe haven, is still subject to uncontrollable external forces.

However, the domestic *is* used in Lee's novel to mark the safe place away from the rest of the world, even in the presence of such forces. However, this is a space that is never fully safe or insulated from the outside world. In a particularly sentimental and tender scene towards the end of the novel, Henry muses, "We were enjoying a happiness which wealth cannot bestow. The night was bitter cold without, and still the snow fell

heavily—the wind howled around our dwelling like hungry wolves—but all this made home more precious" (Lee 110). This passage refers back to the opening discussion of economics versus domesticity on the frontier. Henry and Ellen have created a sense of domestic bliss not attainable solely through "wealth." Their happiness instead emerges from the sentiment and familial bond between them. This bond infuses their domestic space with a sense of protection from the threatening wind outside, a threat that only increases the sentimental associations of their home.

Lee does not let this moment stand uninterrupted; instead it is used as an opportunity to show again how external forces in the public sphere and on the wild frontier can violate the safe and private space of the home. Immediately after this scene, a man knocks on the door and brings the couple to the local jail, leading to the closing conflict of the novel. This scene leads to the final confrontation with Henry's longtime nemesis, Leonard Howe, whose fraud and corruption almost cost Henry his savings and led to Henry being jailed in New York on his way to Illinois. The interruption of his domestic happiness with Ellen to negotiate the novel's final struggle thus represents a shattering of the safe and private by the dangerous and the public. Again this boundary between the safety of the warm domestic, a haven from the howling wind and outside dangers of the world, is broken and Lee exposes the permeability of the home. However, in doing so, she makes an emotional case for the value and importance of the safe and nurturing space a home can provide. While Lee blends public and private spaces throughout *The Log Cabin*, moments like this suggest that her text prioritizes the female-coded space of the home as a response to the turbulence and uncertainty of her time.

Expanding on how Lee's text demonstrates this nuanced mixing of public and private, the narrative also exposes the ways that domesticity interacts with and stands for the larger outside world. One of the last domestic scenes in the novel is a highly sentimentalized depiction of family life: "You, perhaps, who read this narrative, can hardly comprehend the pleasures of a log cabin. Imagine to yourself a fire-place like a cavern, filled with logs and pine knots all blazing merrily. Ellen, with her work on one side of a table placed before the fire, and I on the other reading aloud to her, yet often stopping to contemplate the innocent countenance of our first-born" (Lee 109). This tender moment is laden with the emotional imagery of warmth, safety and security. Lee emphasizes the warmth of the fire, the coziness of their inglenook-like space and the sweet affection that exists between mother, father and child. It is a familiar, safe and ordered image. This passage also ties into Baym's discussion of domestic fiction when she writes, "the domestic ideal meant not that woman was to be sequestered from the world in her place at home but that everybody was to be placed in the home, and hence home and the world would become one" (Baym 27). As Baym suggests the home can be, Lee's domestic scene feels specific and universal at the same time. The family, warm and safe in their home, serves a microcosm of the world where everyone is where they are and should be. Thus, it is not just a private image but also a public declaration in the novel of what domesticity and family can do, characteristic of the sense of domesticity Lee's novel constructs.

In addition to constructing a strong sense of domesticity, Lee draws on sentimentality in the text to further respond to its historical moment and emotionally

appeal to the audience who would have read the book in the mid-nineteenth-century. Tompkins recognizes the rhetorical strength of sentimentality to do "cultural work" in domestic fiction when she writes, "The power of a sentimental novel to move its audience depends upon the audience's being in possession of the conceptual categories that constitute character and event. That storehouse of assumptions includes attitudes towards the family and toward social institutions" (Tompkins 127). Lee's novel builds on these assumptions and cultural attitudes, through tender scenes like Henry and Ellen in their cozy home with their firstborn child. She craftily uses these associations and emotional laden images to further create tensions and relationships between the public and private, the internal and the external and domesticity and the market. The sentimental rhetoric scattered throughout Lee's text is likely related to the moment in time that the text was written and published, when domestic fiction was immensely popular and widely read. Furthermore, this drawing from emotional helps the novel to perform the cultural work so central to Tompkins' discussion of domestic fiction. In order to intercede in the culture and attitudes of the time, Lee must be able to play with them effectively and draw emotion from her readers.

Feeding off Emotions: Sentimentality as a Rhetorical Strategy in *The Log Cabin*

Lee uses sentimentality in her novel as a multi-faceted rhetorical device that allows her to one, facilitate further critique of the economic irresponsibility that inhibited domestic security on the frontier, and two, convey a need to protect the sanctity of the family in the face of greed and speculation. This rhetorical technique, a hallmark of

domestic fiction, allows Lee to connect with and convey information to her readers in a way that would have been familiar to them. This is particularly evident when Lee elicits sympathy from her reader. Towards the end of the novel, Henry recounts the experiences of a woman whose husband participated in western speculation: "One woman told me, with tears in her eyes, that her old man, (he was about thirty-two,) had sold out three times—'and now,' said she, 'we've got a-going so nicely, I expect he'll sell out in the Spring.' Thus does this destructive habit of speculation intrude itself into the most remote situations, and…saps the foundation of domestic happiness" (Lee 100). This woman is filled with emotional passion that grips the viewer, marked by the detail that she had "tears in her eyes." Just when she thinks they have established a secure domestic space that they "go a-going so nicely," she expects her husband to self off the land and move somewhere new. This constant buying and selling 'saps the foundation of domestic happiness" and doesn't allow the family to take root or establish itself firmly in the land. Instead, the family remains incoherent as they drift from place to place. Lee's novel interjects in the culture of her time to suggest moving away from this kind of nomadic life on the frontier with a focus on profit and instead advocates for the rooted homestead that Henry and Ellen establish with a focus on family and the domestic.

In addition to drawing on depictions of domesticity and sentimentality, Lee's novel also comments on, critiques and even sometimes subverts nineteenth-century gender norms. During the mid-nineteenth-century, separate spheres ideology, which I have briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, was solidifying in American culture. This notion of social organization designated women to the private sphere of the home and

men to the public sphere of the market, both of which I have already shown to be represented *and* challenged or destabilized in Lee's text. However, Lee also shows and then nuances this separation on the level of individual characters. In general, Lee tends to depict Henry as an effeminate male and Ellen as a masculine female. While some of this blending might be accounted for by the breakdown of traditional gender boundaries on the frontier, this blending is present from the beginning of the novel and might ultimately suggest an overall need to have a blending of these binaries in individuals and families to attain a sense of domestic bliss. Lee assigns Henry traits that would usually be typical of women from the opening pages of the novel. As a child, Henry participates in domestic activities like sewing with his grandmother: "You will smile when I tell you that I sat by her side with my thread-case and thimble, hemming and stitching as diligently as a girl. I never associated with the boys in the street, and I felt no want of society" (Lee 2). Henry addresses the reader directly and calls attention to his sewing abilities, even comparing himself to a girl. He also refers to his alienation from boys his age and his exclusion from their company. Therefore, the hero of this story demonstrates and explains pride in his more "feminine" qualities.

While Lee portrays Henry as effeminate, she also presents Ellen, who serves as a knowledgeable source of advice to Henry regarding coded male matters of finance and economics, as masculine. Early in the novel, after Leonard Howe tries to swindle Henry into lending him money for a business scheme, Henry decides to consult Ellen because he is unsure if he can trust Leonard: "I took the offered pen—suddenly the recollection of Ellen came to my mind; I felt as if it were treachery to take so decided a step without

consulting her; she had shared all my joys and sorrows, and her counsel had always been valuable to me" (Lee 21). Even before Ellen and Henry marry, he finds her to be a valuable source of advice about finance and male-sphere market-related concerns. Thus, Lee bends gender norms in both of the main characters of her novel as a way of demonstrating the favorability of being someone who possesses the strengths or skills of the gender of each sphere.

Henry and Ellen are also aware within the novel that they do not possess the "traditional" qualities of their genders. When Henry consults Ellen for advice after Leonard presents him with that scheme, Ellen admonishes Henry for being so trusting and gullible: "It is a pity,' said she, 'we could not exchange characters; I have all the mistrust and suspicion which I verily believe a man ought to have to get through the world, and contend with other men,--and you have all the confiding trust and generous confidence which ought to belong to a woman'" (Lee 24). From the beginning, Lee shows Ellen to have masculine knowledge of economics and Henry to have the feminine capacity for generosity and emotional trust. When Ellen and Henry are separate, Ellen is isolated and unable to connect to traditionally male suitors and Henry is vulnerable to schemes. When they are together, however, Lee shows them to have a balance that leads to the sense of domestic happiness they share on the frontier. In this way, Lee's novel performs cultural work by interceding in the culture and suggesting that this blend of masculine and feminine is necessary domestic bliss on the frontier.

When Lee does depict women in their societally acceptable domain of the home, they are shown exercising circumscribed agency through their control over the

organization and design of the space. While discussed briefly earlier in this chapter, this idea can be seen especially well in the text when Ellen becomes involved in charting the course of her and Henry's new framed home. After their log cabin survives a fire, Henry decides that the family is ready and in a position to erect a frame house, a sturdier form of housing than the log cabin Henry first established: "I now felt able to put up a framed house, and Ellen amused herself with drawing plans. She had her New England notions, and said she wanted it something in the cottage form. It was built according to her wishes, with a piazza in front, and stands where the log house stood, shaded by the same trees" (Lee 119). Ellen is actively involved in the design of their new home, and she infuses their western frontier homestead with her traditional New England sensibility. Building a framed home is the next step in a family's process of settling down on the frontier. Ellen provides the direction for Henry to carry through and the construction of their new domestic space is a joint effort. However, it is Ellen that was in control of the design and vision of the space. Henry was solely responsible for building it "according to her wishes." Thus, in this final sentimental moment of the novel, Ellen exercises her agency over the domestic space, which Henry helps her to complete. This moment allows Lee's novel to finish its cultural work by interjecting in the culture and advocating for the value and significance of the domestic space in the narrative of a family on the frontier. It is a space that needs to be carefully designed, built and protected in order to secure the family and the American values contained within its walls.

In this chapter, I have argued that Lee positions her novel *The Log Cabin* as a didactic response to contemporaneous social and economic concerns through critique of

male-coded economic recklessness on the frontier such as overspeculation in addition to the deployment and destabilization of idealized domesticity. Lee also uses sentimental rhetoric to draw emotion from her readers and accentuate the critique and didactic moralism with appeals to emotion in her text. The novel features characters that deviate from the traditional divisions of separate spheres ideology and argues for a more balanced power system between public and private space on the frontier. Lee's novel participates in the literary construction of a national narrative during the American Renaissance in order to reclaim the value of the feminine and the domestic in American culture to her audience, namely by critiquing male economic irresponsibility and exposing its threat to the stability of the domestic sphere. Lee's novel reflects several of the shifting aspects of American culture in the early nineteenth-century, including the western expansion inherent to manifest destiny and the overspeculation that resulted in a series of economic panics. Lee's engages with its historical context in these ways through its optimistic, didactic style that prioritizes a sense of domesticity that represents not only the insular and the private, but also the worldly and the public.

However, Lee only presents one perspective of domestic life on the frontier. While Lee present Henry's journey out west to establish a homestead, Caroline Matilda Kirkland's domestic novel *A New Home-Who'll Follow?* presents a woman's "real" experiences of moving out to Michigan and establishing a homestead and interacting with her various neighbors. Through its vignettes of Mary's day-to-day life and her neighbors, Kirkland's novel provides another critique of the male-coded economic irresponsibility that manifested itself in ways like overspeculation on the frontier while also depicting

various types and settlers of domesticities in an attempt to represent the “real” frontier. Like Lee, Kirkland both remains complicit and critiques individualism, especially through her argument on how community is more powerful than the individual on the frontier.

Chapter 3: Visions of American Domesticity through a "Realist" Lens in Kirkland's Novel *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*

A sense of community is not traditionally part of the internalized log cabin myth in American culture. While a novel like *The Log Cabin* idealistically demonstrates how a man can establish a homestead, woo his childhood sweetheart and live peacefully in prosperity, other female-authored frontier narratives aimed for a higher sense of "truth" exposing the gritty realities of day-to-day life and the complexity of communities on the frontier. One such work is Caroline Matilda Kirkland's 1839 novel *A New Home, Who'll Follow?-or, Glimpses of Western Life.* Based heavily on Kirkland's experiences living in the frontier town of Pinckney, Michigan that her husband largely helped establish, the novel follows the process in which narrator Mary Clavers assimilates to western life, having moved there from the eastern United States (Hotz 8). From the opening pages, Mary Clavers commits to transcribing her experiences using realism, infusing the narrative with a sense of authenticity. The text portrays her various neighbors, daily life on the frontier, the process of land speculation from a female perspective and multiple representations of domesticity. Through its descriptive vignettes, the novel amends, confirms and challenges individualism and idealizations of frontier life. While Lee and Kirkland use a moralistic tone and exploit sentimentality as a rhetorical device, Kirkland's novel is more about a woman's experience on the frontier and the various types of people and homes there as a rejection of the idealism found in Lee's novel. Disguised as the digressive musings of a middle class woman new to the frontier, Kirkland's novel challenges romanticized frontier narratives and expands the scope of individualism while largely upholding separate spheres ideology.

A Thin Veneer of Fiction: Kirkland's Commitment to Realism

Like Lee's novel, Kirkland's novel raises questions about the role of female authorship in crafting an American identity that confirms, contradicts and amends the predominantly male national narrative of individualism (acts as the "fine print"), of dominating the land with ease. *A New Home-Who'll Follow?* expands this narrative to include women and the home. In the preface to her novel, Kirkland addresses her role as a female writer, outlining what she sets out to rhetorically accomplish in the text. Kirkland introduces the narrative to the reader and establishes it as a "truthful depiction" of experiences in the west. She establishes the tropes that readers will find in her novel: her claims of realism, her opposition against traditional representations of western life and a construction of her humility as a female writer. She asserts the truth of her writing, but then apologizes for its formal roughness, adding a self-conscious and introspective quality to the text. This tension is evident when Kirkland writes, "I claim for these straggling and cloudy crayon sketches of life and manners in the remoter parts of Michigan the merit of general truth of outline" (Kirkland 3). While she attests to the "merit of general truth of outline," she also concedes that it is a series of "straggling and cloudy crayon sketches." Her intent parallels the forms of the domestic spaces she describes throughout the text. Echoing the paradox between the rugged exterior of the log cabin and the refined and isolated sense of domesticity like she constructs for her visiting friend from the east contained within, Kirkland presents her writing as a series of rough sketches containing deeper truths of western life.

Kirkland expands upon her description of her truthful depictions written in a rough, sketch-like style by emphasizing the honesty in her narrative and her intent to guide other settlers from the east as they acclimate to life in the western wilderness. Kirkland partially positions her novel in the vein of travel writing, arguing that her work can be considered "a veritable history; an unimpeachable transcript of reality; a rough picture, in detailed parts, but pentagraphed from the life; a sort of 'Emigrant's Guide;' – considering with myself that these my adventurous journeyings and tarryings beyond the confines of civilization might fairly be held to confer the traveller's privilege" (Kirkland 3). Kirkland presents her own experiences, which she thinly veiled as fiction, as a guide for other people traveling to Michigan and other unsettled regions on the frontier. She inserts value into the narrative by drawing from "real life" in her narrative. She reasserts the honesty of her narrative repetitively through phrases like "veritable history," "transcript of reality" and "pentagraphed from life." From its opening pages, Kirkland's novel is preoccupied with the truth of American western life. This sets up the novel to intervene into more romanticized constructions of American life on the frontier. While it was published a few years later, Lee's novel features the idealizations of a typical frontier narrative. Henry and Ellen succeed at establishing a cozy sense of domesticity with relative ease, which Kirkland resists in her novel through her representation of the difficulties of everyday life.

In the opening pages of the novel, Kirkland reaffirms this dedication to "truth" and "honesty" through the voice of her narrator, Mary Clavers. Kirkland's narrator starts by addressing the source of her narrative, the curiosity of her friends in the eastern part of

the country about frontier life, and so she chooses to write down the private, unspoken details of her life in a narrative: “I have been for some time past contemplating the possibility of something like a detailed account of our experiences. And I have determined to give them to the world, in a form not very different from that in which they were originally recorded for our private delectation” (Kirkland 7). In the form of a private journal, written with a certain attention to sentimentality and domestic intimacy, Clavers constructs a representation of western life that prioritizes women’s experiences in the west. In doing so, she interestingly minimizes the literary value of her narrative by presenting her work as a sewed together assemblage of stories and sketches. She particularly does so when she writes that the reader “must expect nothing beyond a meandering recital of common-place occurrences—mere gossip about everyday people, little enhanced in value by any fancy or ingenuity of the writer” (Kirkland 8). While Mary Clavers minimizes the rhetorical power of her narrative, the novel itself prioritizes woman’s role in constructing a national narrative, presenting sentimentality and the quaint domesticity as central to the expansion of American society on the frontier.

In addition to her commitment to a deeper sense of truth in depicting western life, Kirkland uses sentimentality in a way that suggests it is not just a mode of feminine expression, but also part of the fabric of the frontier life. I will discuss two moments in which either Kirkland longs for sentimentality or uses it to convey her message to the reader. In Kirkland’s narrative, sentimentality is used to frame Mary Clavers’ worldview. About her initial experience on the frontier, Mary Clavers says, “When I made my first visit to these remote and lonely regions, the scattered woods through which we rode for

many miles were gay in their first gosling-green suit of half opened leaves…I desired much to be a little sentimental at the time" (Kirkland 10). The way in which in the narrative Clavers says that she longed to be sentimental in the moment, but then uses sentimental language ("gay in their first gosling-green suit of half opened leaves") to reflect back on this moment is paradoxical. Because nostalgia is part of sentimentality, this tension amplifies her use of sentimentality in the novel even more. Her descriptions of the woods and the new leaves are tender, but also edged with nostalgia for a "pure" landscape from before white settlers moved into this "pure" and "empty" region. This longing for a purer past is part of the frontier mentality for Kirkland.

Kirkland deploys sentimentality in Mary Clavers' narration of the world in a different way when Kirkland writes, "I consented to accompany her, and our path through the dim forest was as enchanting as one of poor Shelley's gemmed and leafy dreams" (Kirkland 28). Here, Mary is on her way with Mrs. Danforth to the Mrs. Spangler's home, where Mrs. Spangler's son has fallen ill after an alleged snakebite. Mary Clavers projects sentimentality onto the forest around her, incorporating an intertextual reference to British Romantic poet Percy Shelley. The dim light and the shining quality of the leaves add to this tender depiction of the scene of this bonding moment for the two frontier women. Mary Clavers' observations, especially of female relationships and the natural world around her are thus often tinged with sentimental details that she captures through references to a sentimental mode she aspires to or other particularly sentimental writing. The intrusion of sentimental details and references into

her descriptions of the world seems to suggest that sentimentality is somehow a fundamental part of life on the frontier.

Critiquing Economic Irresponsibility with Sentimentality *and* Realism

Moving to a deeper discussion of the novel's commentary of the frontier, Kirkland's novel constructs the frontier through its critique of speculation, its discussion of the difficulties of living on the frontier and its descriptions of the various types of settlers found there. Building on her commitment to realism in the opening pages of the novel, Mary Clavers discusses everyday details about the "highlights" of frontier life, like the abundance of various wildflowers, and its challenges like navigating Michigan mudholes on the rough roads (Kirkland 10). Together, these various motifs demonstrate a focus on the gritty realities of frontier life, resisting idealized notions of rugged individualism and reacting against the same series of economic crises in the 1830s that Lee responds to in her novel and that Templin discusses in her research on panic fiction.

Kirkland critiques masculine economic recklessness by exposing the immoral and foolish nature of overspeculation on the frontier, and she reveals how this preoccupation with money out west destroys families and degenerates men. Like Lee's novel *The Log Cabin,* Kirkland's novel *A New Home, Who'll Follow?* is an example of panic fiction, a novel that critiques the economic irresponsibility behind a historic period of economic crisis like the Panic of 1837. Published just two years after the Panic of 1837, it is highly likely that Kirkland's response to this crisis was encapsulated into her narrative. Kirkland slips in critiques about the effect of widespread western speculation into the narrative. At

one point, she writes, “When every body is buying land, and scarce anybody cultivating it, one must not expect to find living either good or cheap; but, I confess, I was surprised at the dearth of comforts which we observed everywhere” (Kirkland 54). Kirkland quips here that the overemphasis on buying and selling land out west has affected how people occupy it. The land exchanges owners but the lack of lasting ownership means that the land is not being used to its potential, impacting settlers’ standard of living. Like in Lee’s novel, the male practice of speculation is a threat to the feminine activity of homemaking in Kirkland’s novel. However, Lee and Kirkland approached the notion of panic fiction differently in their work. Lee’s idealistic tone partially undermines her critique of overspeculation and financial crisis, even if she also includes didactically ordinary details of frontier life. By committing to a sense of realism in addition to her use of sentimentality, Kirkland creates a more urgent and persuasive critique of economic greed on the frontier.

Neighbors in Log Cabins: Unpacking Kirkland’s Vignettes of Frontier Domesticity

Besides critiquing reckless male economic activity on the frontier, Mary Clavers documents and evaluates various types of settlers she has observed out west. She casts a romantic and sentimental light upon the young newlyweds who come out west, “moderate in their aspirations, and hoarding a little of old-fashioned romance” (Kirkland 229). She describes the ambitious eastern farmers who came out west to gobble up land (Kirkland 230). She condemns the idle settlers who come out thinking life will be easier out west and who are doomed to lives of hardship and disappointment instead” (Kirkland

231). Kirkland provides a kind of human catalog of the various "types" one can expect to encounter on the frontier in her narrative and ties their character closely to the ways in which these people establish their homes and live their lives, establishing a connection between one's moral character and work ethic and the state of their domesticity. This allows Kirkland to critique some of her neighbors and commend others, adding a moralizing thread to her narrative.

Each of Kirkland's characterizations of various settlers facilitates a lesson about frontier life and the principles of living in a small western village like Montacute. Kirkland uses the example of British settlers, for example, to discuss larger issues of popular democracy and personal liberty on the frontier, like when she writes, "Denying themselves all but the necessaries of life, in order to add to their lands, and make the most of their crops" (Kirkland 210). The British settlers are depicted as people who choose ownership and materialism over domestic comfort, and so they become a subject of Kirkland's criticism. This negative view, according to Kirkland, is not limited to herself, but to the community as a whole because of British settlers' refusal to integrate themselves into the frontier community. This is evident when Kirkland writes, "[They] show little inclination to mingle with their rustic neighbors; and, of course, they become at once the objects of suspicion and dislike…of all place in the world in which to live on the shady side of public opinion, an American backwoods settlement is the very worst" (Kirkland 219). In her representation of life on the frontier, she emphasizes the importance of public opinion in order to live peacefully out west, that favorable public perception is vital to one's success. By elevating the importance of public opinion,

Kirkland implicitly claims that the community mentality matters above all the frontier, a challenge to the lofty notion of individualism. She makes it clear that the frontier, or rather "an American backwoods settlement" is not the place to keep to oneself and make one's own decisions, as this only leads to "suspicion and dislike." The novel exposes how this type of selfish individualism is dangerous to one's chances at prosperity on the frontier. Her comments reveal the paradox on the frontier between "rugged" individualism that is normally projected onto popular depictions of frontier life and a collective mob mentality.

Furthermore, Kirkland exposes how the community denounces the free-willed individual by using the "type" of the British settler to illustrate how personal individualism and collective democracy are in conflict on the frontier. She writes, "It is with feelings of angry surprise that they learn after a short residence here, that this very universal freedom abridges their own liberty to do as they please in their individual capacity; that the absolute democracy which prevails in country places, imposes as heavy restraints upon one's free will in some particulars" (Kirkland 210). Democracy is painted as paradoxically liberating and confining. While liberty and freedom allows settlers to take their lives into their hands and move out west, it restricts them once they are there. Kirkland presents the frontier as a place subtly ruled by public opinion and mob mentality. The opinion of the majority decides who belongs in the community and who does not, opposing a romantic notion of the individual living in a bubble on the frontier. Kirkland's representation of Mary Clavers' life conflicts with Lee's depiction of Henry and Ellen's lives because Kirkland's novel resists the notion of the insular, romanticized

couple living happily in their isolated log cabin. This contrast between communal and insular life also exposes the extent to which many depictions of the frontier coexist, emphasizing different aspects of life out west from a variety of perspectives.

Mary Clavers' vignettes of various homes that she visits reveal the conflations of masculine and feminine, public and private, wild and civilized and individual and community that exist on the frontier. Like with her portrayals of types of settlers, Kirkland uses her portrayal of various types of homes to facilitate her commentary on western life and critique of the traditional, more romanticized narratives of it. From the opening pages of the novel, Kirkland uses Mary Clavers' narration to critically comment upon daily western life. Addressing the democratizing effect of the frontier on domestic space and social class, Kirkland writes, "A home on the outskirts of civilization—habits of society which allow the maid and her mistress to do the honors in complete equality, and to make the social tea visit in loving conjunction—such a distribution of the duties of life as compels all, without distinction, to rise with the sun or before him" (Kirkland 8). The mistress and her maid serve tea together in the same space on the frontier. Regardless of Kirkland's personal politics, which Laura Smith suggests were more sympathetic to eastern upper middle class elitism, the text of the novel implies that they are brought to equal levels because the traditional barriers between classes have been erased in the rough domesticity of the log cabin, a space of contradictions. This image exposes the democratizing forces of the frontier, a place where domestic duty requires everyone to work on equal footing and disrupts more typical divisions of class labor.

The domestic environments depicted in Kirkland's novel are used to make the reader aware of the realities of domestic life on the frontier through the representation of these various spaces. Kirkland uses a naturalistic style that exposes the gritty realities of frontier domestic spaces. At one point in the text, her husband and some of the men go on an expedition and on their way back are in need of emergency overnight shelter, which they find in a family's cabin, which Kirkland describes as "like many others which have served for the first homes of settlers in Michigan. It was logs and nothing else, the fire made on the ground, or on a few loose stones, and a hole in the roof for the escape of the smoke. A family of tolerably decent appearance inhabited this forlorn dwelling, a man and his wife and two young children" (Kirkland 44-5). This anecdote fully displays the simplicity of the log cabin. Kirkland's simple descriptive language shows the reader the particulars of their home, which is typical of the kind of home that settlers have when they first move out west. It is a bare log cabin with a fire in the center of the room for warmth and a hole in the roof for ventilation. It is not idealized, but presented as a simple domestic space that provides private shelter and protection for the family from the outside world. This "forlorn dwelling" houses the four average settlers, a starting point for their family.

Other accounts of domestic spaces that Kirkland provides are presented with the clear intent of social critique and commentary and include an overtly cultural or social message about frontier life. In one example, Mary Clavers visits the residence of Mr. and Mrs. B_____. While their home seems idealized and charming on the surface and the family secure, they are struggling to get by with the support of Mrs. B_____'s money

and the charity of her friends because of Mr. B_____'s idleness. When Mary Clavers enters the house, she notes, "There was a harp in a recess, and the white-washed log-walls were hung with a variety of cabinet pictures. A tasteful drapery of French chintz partly concealed another recess, closely filled with books…" (Kirkland 118). The home is neat and appears at first glance to be a manifestation of eastern, upper middle class comfort. There is a place for leisurely music and reading. The walls are painted to brighten the space and art hangs on the wall. However, when Mary Clavers look in the cabinets, she discovers that they are empty and that the couple lacks basic necessities (Kirkland 119-20). Mary Clavers then refers Mr. B_____'s idle character and lack of ambition towards work and farm labor as an explanation for this discrepancy between the outward appearance of their home and their economic status (Kirkland 122). This discussion of this family's struggles to succeed on the frontier rejects the idealized idea that anyone who went out west could succeed. These stories reveal that certain settlers are more likely than others to live a meaningful and sustaining existence out west. They also serve as a warning against romanticization of frontier life.

Mary Clavers argues that Mrs. B_____'s fragile resilience is a response to her husband's stubborn indolence, laziness that exposes how not all men on the frontier were rugged, self-motivated individualists. She paints a portrait of a woman desperate to maintain her class status while struggling to raise her family under impoverished conditions because of her husband's refusal to work. Her husband is lazy and stubborn; he thinks for himself and only for himself, making him more of a lazy individualist instead of a rugged one. Using Mrs. B_____'s tragic life as an example, Kirkland

shows the resilience of upper class women to maintain the appearance of their class status at the sacrifice of properly supporting their families: “Mrs. B_____ had done as women so often do in similar situations, making always a great effort to keep up a certain appearance, and allowing her neighbors to discover that she considered them far beneath her; she had not forgotten her delicate habits, and that they were delicate and ladylike, no one can doubt who had ever seen her” (Kirkland 122). Kirkland uses Mrs. B_____ as a type for women who take on the responsibility of ensuring that their family seems respectable when their husbands fail to fulfill their roles in financially supporting the family because of some form of reckless financial behavior or refusal to work. Demonstrating both a preoccupation and insecurity surrounding her social class, Mrs. B_____ refuses to become what she despises, funneling all of her energy into maintaining a façade of high-class elegance.

While Mrs. B_____ may appear fragile, it is her children who ultimately suffer from their parent’s pride and stubbornness. Kirkland writes, “She had brought up five children on little else beside Indian meal and potatoes; and at one time the neighbors had known the whole family live for weeks upon bread and tea without sugar or milk; --Mr. B_____ sitting in the house and playing the flute, as much of a gentleman as ever” (Kirkland 123). Without crops and without enough money to hire outside help to work their land, the B_____’s are barely scraping by, living on food that just sustains them. However, Mr. B_____ takes on a feminine role within this family through his efforts to stay a gentleman. He isolates himself to the domestic space, occupying himself with leisurely activities instead of meaningful activities.

The lack of effort from both parents has detrimental effects on the children, who have grown up within the paradox of living in a seemingly delicate home that lacks real support and sustenance. Kirkland modifies the traditional frontier narrative by examining the effects of indolence on both women and children in the family. She takes a moralistic tone when discussing the latter. Of the B_____ family, she writes, "Finding themselves growing poorer and poorer, they persuade themselves that all who thrive, do so by dishonest gains, or by mean sacrifices; and they are teaching their children, but the irresistible power of daily example, to despise plodding industry, and to indulge in repining sad feverish longings after unearned enjoyments" (Kirkland 123). Kirkland uses this vignette of the B_____'s to highlight an urgent cultural issue, that families ill prepared for life on the frontier are becoming increasingly desperate and distrustful of those who are able to succeed, and that these parents pass on these suspicions and bad habits onto their children. The B_____'s represent the underbelly of individualism. The way that the B_____'s live is unproductive and idle. Their lifestyle has a negative effect on their children who learn that this type of indolent power is acceptable. They never learn the rugged sense of industry and work ethic, in addition to the commitment to the community, necessary to succeed on the frontier.

Returning to an earlier discussion of the importance of public opinion on the frontier, part of the reason that the B_____'s fail is because of their failure to become involved and well liked within the frontier community, ultimately leading to the stasis and failure of the family. The neighbors all know about Mrs. B_____'s situation and her husband's lack of a work ethic. It also appears from the narrative that because of their

negative view of anything Mrs. B believes to be beneath them, that they receive very little help from the neighbors. The B_____'s have failed in the narrative of rugged individualism. The portrayal of their home reinforces the notion explored in the previous chapter that a balance of male and female responsibility is necessary to have a balanced and secure home, but complicates it with the idea that a home can seem functional through feminine effort alone and a family can scrape by solely through the woman's efforts. Kirkland's anecdote of this family (and the rest of her novel as well) is a testament to feminine resilience in the face of masculine ignorance as well as an exposure of the failures of individualism, of how the romanticized version of life on the frontier can go horribly wrong.

Representing the Firsthand Experience of Frontier Domesticity

Besides discussing and critiquing the living conditions of others, Kirkland also discusses her experience of various domestic spaces belonging to herself and her immediate neighbors, adding a "first person experience" of frontier domesticity to the text. The first few homes, which are log cabins, that Mary Clavers encounters on the frontier are roughly constructed and overcrowded. When her family first arrives in Michigan, they stay in a cabin that doubles as a lodge for travelers: "My hotel was a log-house, of diminutive size, with corresponding appurtenances; and from the moment we entered its door I was in a fidget to know where we could possibly sleep" (Kirkland 15). While she admits that the log cabin is charming, she is also worried about where everyone inside will have room to sleep. The master and mistress of the hotel and their

children sleep in a tiny room occupied entirely by two beds and a trundle bed (Kirkland 15). Mary Clavers and her family are brought up a ladder into the loft area, which doubles as the sleeping space for guests: “Here, surrounded by beds of all sizes spread on the floor, was a bedstead, placed under the peak of the roof in order to gain space for its height; and round this state-bed, for such it evidently was, although not supplied with pillow at each end, all the men and boys I had seen below stairs were to repose” (Kirkland 16). Every bit of space in this log cabin has been maximized to fit as many settlers as possible. This early moment in the novel demonstrates the creative measures necessary to fit all of the settlers into these tiny log cabins. Because of its crowded nature, this frontier lodge acts as both public and private at the same time, especially with its cramped sleeping quarters.

Mary Clavers and her family find themselves in another cramped sleeping loft in a log cabin when they spend the night at the Ketchums. About the space, Kirkland writes, “The aspect of our lodging place was rather portentous. Two bedsteads, which looked as if they might, by no very violent freak of nature, have grown into their present form, a good deal of bark being yet upon them, occupied the end opposite the stairs; and between them was a window, without either glass or shutter—that is to say, politeness aside, a square hole in the house” (Kirkland 60). Once again, their lodgings are rough. Bark from the log walls has fallen onto the beds and window is a hole in the wall, opening the private space of the bedroom to the outside world. This interior space is anything but romanticized. Mary Clavers remains committed to focusing on the details of frontier life, down to the bark shavings that have fallen off the roof and log walls and onto their

lodgings. The repetition of Clavers and her family staying with neighbors also reinforces the notion that community and having strong relationships with one's neighbors is essential on the frontier, a rejection of the romanticized notion of the sole settler living off the land by themselves without struggling the grit of everyday life.

Mary Clavers experiences other challenges of domestic space on the frontier as delays in building and expansion of the village postpone her family's move into first a log cabin and then a framed house. First, her family must wait for their temporary log home to become available once the family living there moves into a more permanent framed house (Kirkland 66). About her family's wait to move from their temporary log cabin to a more permanent and stable framed house, Mary Clavers muses, "Our preparations for residence were on a very limited scale, for we had no idea of inhabiting the logger more than six weeks or two months at farthest. Our new dwelling was to be put up immediately, and our arrangements were to be only temporary. So easily are people deluded!" (Kirkland 74-5). The slow process by which home building, done by the men, is completed on the frontier inhibits the stability of feminine home making. Mary Clavers is unable to fully establish her home, as it is only temporary because they were supposed to soon move into a more permanent dwelling. This subtle thread in the novel hints at the way in which homemaking depends on homebuilding the way in which men must first create the exterior home before women can complete its interior, which was seen in Lee's novel as well. Towards the end of the novel, the family does move into a framed house: "When we first took our delighted abode in the 'framed house,' a palace of some twenty by thirty feet, flanked by a shanty kitchen, and thatched with oak shingles" (Kirkland

228). The house, while still small, is massive and more secure compared to the cramped, roughly built log cabin in which they lived before. Once living in the framed house, the family can also fully settle down as well, completing their transition out west.

Coming from a middle class home in the eastern part of the country, Mary Clavers brings her gentile conveniences out west, where she soon realizes they are largely frivolous and useless in a new frontier domesticity. In one case, Mrs. Jennings questions the japanned tables that Mary Clavers has brought, to which she responds: "And I began to cast a disrespectful glance upon them myself, and forthwith ordered them up stairs, and wondering in my own mind how I could have thought a log house would afford space for such superfluities" (Kirkland 69). Mary Clavers, accustomed to her exotic domestic luxuries, quickly learns that she must acclimate to a more simplified existence on the frontier, at least while living in a log cabin. Her conception of domesticity must shift with her transition out west. With the help of her neighbors who have become accustomed to the quirks of life out west, Mary Clavers begins to change her own ideas about her home. She reflects upon this soon after the move: "My ideas of comfort were by this time narrowed down to a well-swept room with a bed in one corner, and cooking apparatus in another—and this in some fourteen days from the city! I can scarcely, myself, credit the reality of change" (Kirkland 71). As a result of just two weeks on the frontier, Mary Clavers has acclimated to the kind of home necessary to thrive on the frontier. Her priorities are now to keep her rough floor clean (which is no easy task), have a tiny bedroom set up in one corner and her hearth in the other. Her material needs have been

pared down to the minimum. There is little romanticized or idealized here. The domesticity that Mary Clavers presents is an empty room with a bed and a hearth.

In her discussion of frontier domesticity, Kirkland critiques romanticized narratives of frontier life. She does so through the expression of Mary Clavers' changing perceptions of western life, using the log cabin as the vehicle that facilitates this mental shift. Mary Clavers says, "The circumstances of living all summer, in the same apartment with a cooking fire, I had never happened to see alluded to in any of the elegant sketches of western life which had fallen under my notice. It was not until I actually became the inmate of a log dwelling in the wilds, that I realized fully what 'living all in one room' meant" (Kirkland 78). Here Mary Clavers uses the language of imprisonment to describe her life in the log cabin, trapped in the summer heat with the added heat of the cooking fire and no protection against it. Mary Clavers also acknowledges that she has seen no traces of the romanticization that she read about in her own life. Instead, she realizes the reality of her pared down sense of domesticity, although I would not describe her tone as critical like Smith does in her essay. Mary Clavers experiences what it is like to set up a safe and private home in the middle of the woods, to house an entire family in one room, as the start of her family's establishment on the frontier.

Public Versus Private: Building and Breaking Barriers

Like in Lee's novel, Kirkland demonstrates how the private sphere is not impermeable from the public sphere, particularly as neighbors frequently enter the space of each other's homes uninvited. However, perhaps as a way to counter this, quilts and

blankets are raised in the home to protect private spaces from the outside and demarcate intimate spaces, a makeshift alternative to steadier walls. Early in the novel, Mary sees this technique in a neighbor's home: "The room was occupied at one end by two large beds not partitioned off 'private like,' but curtained in with cotton sheets pinned to the unhewn rafters. Between them stood a chest, and over the chest hung the Sunday wardrobe of the family; the go-to meeting hats and bonnets, frocks and pantaloons of a goodly number of all sizes." (Kirkland 22). She recognizes that the sheets do not make the space fully private, but they do mark off the space with the beds as separate from the public areas of the home. The beds are where the family sleeps and keeps each other warm, coding them as intimate and requiring them to be separate from areas where one receives guests. It is proper to separate that space from the place where the family receives guests and has company. The chest is also used in a similar way. The proper public clothes of the family are kept out of the space in which they keep their private clothes. It is acceptable to have their more public clothes out for display.

The use of sheets and quilts to mark public and private spaces in the home is also shown when Mary Clavers and her family stays with the Ketchums in their sleeping loft as a way of closing off the home from the outside world and creating a boundary where Mary Clavers can privately dress. Kirkland writes, "So a quilt, that invaluable resource in the woods, was stuck up before the window, and the unhinged cover of one of the chests was used as a lid for the stairway, for fear the children might fall down. Sheets served to partition off a 'tyring room' round my bed" Kirkland 61). Here, sheets and quilts are used in different ways. The quilt is used to seal up the window, the boundary between inside

and outside. The sheet is used to create around a boundary around Mary Claver's bed, designating her to a more intimate space. Within the home, there are thus more private spaces and the boundaries between these and more public spaces must be built and maintained.

These boundaries are constructed for guests too, who are privy to a different type of domesticity. When Mary Clavers has a guest visit from the east, she sets up the loft apartment in a way that feeds into the romanticization of frontier life: "I curtained off with the unfailing cotton sheets a snow-white bower for her in the loft, and spread a piece of carpeting, a relic of former magnificence, over the loose boards that served for a floor. The foot square window was shaded by a pink curtain, and a bedside chair and a candlestand completed a sleeping apartment which she declared was perfectly delightful" (Kirkland 93). Her sleeping quarters for her guest are filled with frivolous luxuries like carpeting, a chair, a candlestand and a pink curtain to cover the window. Sheets are again used to mark off this space, designating it as separate and private from the rougher domesticity Mary and her family experience daily.

Class, Community and Ownership on the Frontier

Connected to this idea of Mary Clavers creating an idealized domestic space for hers eastern visitor, Kirkland's representations of domesticity also connect to a discussion of how social class operates on the frontier and the role that social class played in the conflict between individual and community on the frontier. Part of Kirkland's commentary on social class comes from the fact that social class operates differently on

the frontier than it does elsewhere, making the transition to frontier life difficult for those who were well off in the eastern part of the country. About this shift in societal dynamics, Kirkland writes, “No settlers are so uncomfortable as those who, coming with abundant means as they suppose, to be comfortable, set out with a determination to live as they have been accustomed to live. They soon find that there are places where the ‘almighty dollar’ is almost powerless” (Kirkland 83). The west is a place where money means less than it does elsewhere because life is more communal and stronger relationships are a more effective and valuable form of currency. The frontier is a place where work, not the dollar, facilitates relationships and earns respect, elements necessary for success. This reference to the uselessness of the dollar also ties back to Kirkland’s critiques of overspeculation, as money literally became powerless once speculation of frontier land artificially skyrocketed the price.

Furthermore, material ownership and wealth differs on the frontier in that what belongs to the individual ultimately belongs to the community. About the role of sharing out west, Kirkland writes, “Whoever comes into Michigan with nothing, will be sure to better his condition; but wo to him that brings with him anything like an appearance of abundance, whether of money or mere household conveniences. To have them, and not be willing to share them in some sort with the whole community, is an unpardonable crime” (Kirkland 107). One’s private possessions are subject to public use, where that boundary between public and private simply doesn’t exist. Oddly, this notion of everyone shares everything exists in a place idealized for its notions of rugged individualism and popular democracy. Mary Clavers lists all of the items that have gone around the

community, from cooking tools, beds, linens, continuing to say, “Sieves, smoothing irons, and churns, run about as if they had legs; one brass kettle is enough for a whole neighborhood; and I could point to a cradle which has rocked half the babies in Montacute. For my own part, I have lent my broom, my thread, my tape, my spoons, my cat, my thimble, my scissors, my shawl, my shoes” (Kirkland 108). From large to small items, everything is shared among the members of the community. The borders of ownership do not exist, blurring the line between individual and communal possession.

Bursting and Maintaining the Spheres: Gender Roles on the Frontier

Similar to her discussion of social class, Kirkland’s representation of gender roles in the text fractures typical representations of femininity by showing what characteristics women needed and used on the Michigan frontier. Mary Clavers must figure out how to perform every bit of her daily routine in a new environment, which affects every part of her life. One particular area that causes Mary Clavers strife is the need to become accustomed to using a skillet as a washbasin, which her neighbor teaches her. Mary Clavers, not having any other choice, was “not at all pleased with this part of country habits” (Kirkland 17). She has to learn how to wash up outside with this limited resource, and having small children complicates it. About trying to ready her kids in the morning, Mary Clavers muses, “That morning was the first and the last time I ever attempted to carry through the ordinary nursery routine, in a log hut, without a servant, and with a skillet for a washbasin” (Kirkland 61). Mary Clavers must wash her children without help and using only a skillet. This subtly humorous moment exposes the extent to which being

a mother is hard with only the rough accommodations of the frontier. This extends to cooking, about which Kirkland writes, "There was no end to the bread that the children ate from morning till night—at least it seemed so, while a tin reflector was my only oven, and the fire required for the baking drove us all out of doors" (Kirkland 79). Even feeding her children is a struggle for Mary Clavers, who only has a small pan as an oven. Additionally, the lack of protection from the fire needed for cooking overheats the small cabin. Living out west makes it difficult for Mary Clavers to complete the daily tasks of a mother. Kirkland's text reflects this readership, adding the struggles of a mother on the frontier to the narrative about western life. Including these mundane snippets of woman's life into a text concerned with truth and storytelling is radical. Kirkland deploys everyday details as an act of rhetorical resistance. The ordinariness of these details and many of the details is what makes this depiction of the frontier such a resistance to romanticized depictions of it.

Kirkland also uses the portrayal of gender roles to show that often times, men cannot fully substitute for the roles of their wives when it comes to taking care of the home and the children. When she falls ill, Mary Clavers wishes at one point that her husband was more feminine so he would be more helpful around the house. She laments, "O, for one of those feminine men, who can make good gruel, and wash the children's faces! Mr. Clavers certainly did his best, and who can do more? But the hot side of the bowl always *would* come to his fingers—and the sauce-pan *would* overset nicely…After a day's efforts, he began to complain that stooping over the fire made him very dizzy" (Kirkland 97-8). Mary Clavers' husband cannot handle the domestic work for which his

wife is normally responsible, namely the cooking and cleaning to take care of the home and children. Kirkland critiques men who are not in tune enough with the daily duties of domesticity to help their wives in an emergency, especially on the frontier where there is a lack of proper domestic help. Additionally, this insertion of this subtly humorous moment further demonstrates the value of women's work within separate spheres ideology and the need for balance if one's husband cannot handle traditionally domestic duties. At the same time, Kirkland's narrative is complicit with separate spheres ideology by reinforcing the notion that the woman is the only one who can handle domestic tasks.

However, the moment above when Mary Clavers laments over the lack of femininity in her husband also points to another point the novel makes about the multifaceted nature of gender roles on the frontier. Out west, every person must fulfill a variety of roles and perform a variety of tasks appropriate to his or her gender. There is no excess of specialization and thus, "If in absolutely savage life, each man is of necessity, 'his own tailor, tentmaker, carpenter, cook, huntsman, and fisherman;' so in the state of society which I am attempting to describe, each woman is, at times at least, her own cook, chambermaid and waiter; nurse, seamstress and school-ma'am" (Kirkland 115). The men are thus expected to complete tasks related to the outdoors and building, even needing to fulfill some masculinized versions of domestic tasks like tailoring and cooking. The women must complete all of their domestic tasks, ones associated with private and interior spaces.

Kirkland's novel praises the resilience of women on the frontier, which is ultimately what she adds to complicate and expand the national, individualistic narrative

of the west, which doesn't account for the strength of women. Kirkland notes that these women have left the comforts to which they are accustomed and move to a desolate, difficult country with little of the conveniences they once knew. Towards the end of the novel, she writes, "Women are the grumblers in Michigan, and they have some apology. Many of them have made sacrifices for which they were not at all prepared, and which detract largely from their every-day stores of comfort." (Kirkland 230). Kirkland acknowledges that it is women and their needs, which are overlooked in the move out onto the frontier. It is women who must adapt their sense of domesticity and their domestic duties to their new life. Women persist, and their struggle complicates the national narrative around the frontier.

Kirkland weaves a rich text that both confirms and challenges popularized and idealized notions of frontier life. Kirkland's novel works differently and to different ends than Lee's novel in that while both feature a moralistic tone and use of sentimentality, Kirkland's novel is more about a woman's experience on the frontier and the various types of people and homes populating it. The novel's commitment to realism resists romanticized narratives of frontier life that idealistically depict an individual surviving off the land with little to no obstacles. However, Kirkland also concedes that sentimentality is part of the fabric of living on the frontier. Written two years after the Panic of 1837, Kirkland's novel also qualifies as an example of panic fiction, as it critiques the reckless male-coded economic responsibility and associated activities like overspeculation. Additionally, Kirkland deploys domesticity as a way in which to

investigate Mary Claver's various neighbors, making a connection between the state of the home and the inhabitants' moral character.

Kirkland uses various vignettes of Mary Clavers, her family and her neighbors to construct a rich and deep text that conforms with and subtly challenges the masculine narrative of western movement onto the frontier and typically masculine-coded ideas like individualism. Kirkland's novel presents the experiences of a frontier woman who exposes the gritty realities and challenges of frontier life from a female perspective. Kirkland uses a variety of literary styles adeptly in order to critique and comment upon American frontier life through various representations of domesticity. From her opening pages, Kirkland and her narrator Mary Clavers are committed to a sense of truth. Her representations of domestic life on the frontier in Michigan expose the characteristics needed to succeed in frontier society, namely a strong work ethic and adaptability. She exposes the extent to which the boundaries between public and private were more flexible on the frontier. She also shows the resilience of women in their roles on the frontier, adding nuance through a woman's perspective of the frontier. The next chapter of this thesis will add a different type of nuance to the narrative of American frontier life and domesticity. By examining two conflicting representations of the log cabin, one idealized through the lens of white, northern middle class standards of domesticity and the other a marker of white-coded oppression of slaves in Harriet Beecher Stowe's iconic novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly*, I will show how women's frontier narratives can complicate the typical masculine narrative of the frontier and individualism and then reveal the limit of such a system.

Chapter 4: George's Cabin versus Uncle Tom's Cabin: Unwrapping how Stowe's Use of Sentimentality and Competing Narratives of Domesticity

The log cabin myth internalized in American popular imagery is predominantly coded as white. However, the log cabin's multiplicity of meanings can be seen not only in representations of white frontier families, but also black slave families. In the past two chapters, I have shown how Lee and Kirkland provide alternatives to the attitude of men of the frontier that led to economic panics like the Panic of 1837 and romanticized narratives of frontier life. However, examining the literary construction of slaves' domestic spaces challenges traditional, white associations of the log cabin with individualism by revealing the limits of how far authors could expand that narrative before the politics of their time resisted this inclusivity. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* shows the complicated relationship slaves had with the image of the log cabin, which had different associations for them as slave housing and a symbol of their confinement and static status as property instead of acting as a source of moralizing power for white women writing about the frontier.

Stowe's novel provides new ways of thinking about slave domesticity, how it conforms to and resists the idealized narrative of individualism on the frontier and the alternatives that Lee and Kirkland offer. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* criticizes the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by challenging the institution of slavery with an abolitionist message based in moral Christian and domestic values. Stowe deploys sentimentality and slave domesticity in its portrayal of Uncle Tom's cabin that both parallels and diverges from the conventions of idealized white domesticity seen in Lee and Kirkland. Stowe deploys sentimentalized images of slave domesticity that echo

conventions of domesticity that would have been familiar to Stowe's white, middle-class, northern audience and/or readers of other works of domestic fiction, like Lee's and Kirkland's texts. Stowe's descriptions of Uncle Tom's cabin reveal how its space functions literally and figuratively as a rhetorically powerful construction of domesticity in the beginning of the novel and later as a memorial to freedom for emancipated slaves. George refuses to comply with this system; for him, the cabin represents confinement and oppression. Using close readings of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I will show how the text simultaneously provides a continuation of the use of domesticity as a source of power to expand the individualistic national narrative I've been tracing, but also rejects and reveals the whiteness and limits of this extension through George Harris' rejection of Lee and Kirkland's models of log cabin domesticity.

Rhetoric as Resistance: Stowe's Response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

Previous scholarship has established that Stowe's novel is a polemic critique of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was one law within a block of legislation organized by Kentucky senator Henry Clay called the Compromise of 1850 (Moore par. 1). The law required the enforcement Article IV, Section 2 in the Constitution, which stated that escaped slaves must be returned to their owners, by federal marshals. This made the capture and return of escaped slaves a federal issue, instead of leaving it to the states to enforce the law. Northern free states had long established protections for escaped slaves that evaded the enforcement of this part of the Constitution (Moore par. 3-4). The Federal Slave Act of 1850 also strengthened the original Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 by restraining states' abilities to aid escaped slaves

captured in their states, denying captured fugitive slaves a fair trial and corruptly paying the judges in charge of these cases more money if the escaped slave was returned to his or her owner (Moore par. 8). While Clay envisioned the Compromise of 1850 as a solution to regional tensions in the United States, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which threatened the safety and security of escaped slaves living in the north and reinstated fugitive slave capture as a federal concern, only exacerbated these tensions. In response, Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which exploited the appeals of sentimentality and the recognizable conventions of her audience to garner concern over the fate of slave families and garner more opposition against this contested piece of legislation.

Stowe employs sentimentality in order to appeal to the sanctity of the home and the value of family, particularly in the escaped slave narrative of Eliza, George and their child, Harry, in order to position the novel as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. George decides to escape after his master gives him a choice between a false, arranged marriage and a confining sense of domesticity and sale down the river into the deep south plantation slavery notorious for its brutal nature. His wife, Eliza escapes after she discovers that Mr. Shelby, in order to pay his debts, sells her son Harry to a slave trader. In one of the most sentimental passages of the novel, Stowe directly addresses the reader and writes, "If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning…how fast could *you* walk? How many miles could you make in those few brief hours, with the darling at your bosom,--the little sleepy head on your shoulder,--the small, soft arms trustingly holding on to your neck?" (Stowe 105, original italics). Stowe demands the attention of readers and asks

them to connect their own lives and own feelings about their families to the situation that Eliza finds herself in this moment, on the run from slavery in an effort to preserve her family and particularly her relationship to her son. Phrases like "darling at your bosom," "sleepy head on your shoulder" and "small, soft arms trusting holding on" convey maternal imagery that would have communicated emotion to readers who participated in the intimate public of domestic fiction by reading it. These images are tender and familiar. One cannot help but feel sympathy and care for Eliza as a mother. In George and Eliza, Stowe establishes the impending separation and destruction of the family as justification for slaves to escape and proof of the destructive nature of slavery as an institution. Like Lee and Kirkland, Stowe's novel prioritizes the home and the family. However, she uses this prioritization to critique the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the institution of slavery.

George and His Cabin: The Log Cabin as Emblem of Confinement

The image of the log cabin first appears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not with a description of Uncle Tom's cabin, but with George's rejection of a falsely idealized domesticity that his cruel and controlling master wants to thrust upon him. The first time the word "cabin" is used in the text, it symbolizes the control of the slave master over his slave. American log cabins have traditionally been a symbol of a man's journey into the American frontier, the beginnings of a frontier family and stability gained through control and domination of the land. Constructing a log cabin is inherently about controlling one's environment, but the first time it appears in Stowe's novel it acts as a signal of the control

imposed onto the person meant to live in it. The word "cabin" first appears when George says to Eliza, "He says he won't let me come here any more, and that I shall take a wife and settle down on his place. At first he only scolded and grumbled these things; but yesterday he told me that I should take Mina for a wife, and settle down in a cabin with her, or he would sell me down river" (Stowe 63). For George, the log cabin doesn't symbolize freedom, self-sufficiency and domesticity. Instead, it represents the control and power that his master seeks to exert over him because George is his property as his slave. Log cabins were also historically used as slave housing, and thus wouldn't have the same optimistic associations to a slave as it would to a white settler (Watson 357). George's master has already taken him away from work by removing George from the bagging factory he worked in and putting him at work in the fields as another display of his authority.

George rejects this forced narrative of idealized domesticity, of living in a cabin with Mina. For him, the cabin represents a looming sense of confinement. In telling George that he should take another slave as a wife and start a family on his own property, George's master attempts to restrict him from travelling to the Shelby's farm to see his wife, Eliza. However, because they are slaves and not American citizens, their marriage is not fully legal and binding. George's master demands that he marry another slave on the farm or he will send George to the Deep South, a fate met with much anxiety by slaves who worked in northern slave states like Kentucky. About being sent to the south, Stowe writes, "The threat that terrifies more than whipping or torture of any kind is the threat of being sent down river...They were induced to brave the perils of escape, in

almost every case, by the desperate horror with which they regarded being sold south" (Stowe 165). George is given a choice between two equally horrific and dehumanizing options. He can marry Mina and settle down in a structure that represents neither self-sufficiency and autonomy nor a satisfying sense of domesticity for him, or he can be sold to even more horrid working conditions in an area that has a reputation of being especially torturous for slaves. Like this passage alludes, in these cases escape becomes the only option, choosing to take one's life in one's hands and try to break outside of the system of slavery in an attempt at personal freedom. George escapes from a fate, living in a log cabin, that was a domestic state of attempted escapism for some white Americans.

George's situation illustrates how the log cabin myth was not available to everyone living in America at the time. It was only offered primarily to white men, epitomized through figures like Davy Crockett. In having George reject the domestic space of a log cabin because of its looming sense of confinement, Stowe exposes the cruel choices imposed on slaves, for whom these structures were a symbol of their unchanging daily lives. The text also illustrates the limits of the myth of rugged individualism, even if this was not likely one of her intentions in writing the novel, before the title's cabin is even introduced. This moment demonstrates how cultural and historical context can render American symbols fluid when they are being used as leverage of power against someone excluded from citizenship, and thus excluded from the national narrative being debated and crafted in the culture. Keep George's refusal of the log cabin in favor of escape in mind throughout this essay, as I shift gears to discuss the title home of the novel: Uncle Tom's cabin.

Unpacking Uncle Tom's Cabin in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Stowe constructs Uncle Tom's cabin as an idealized domestic space using sentimental rhetoric in an effort to convince her readers, with their hearts, that slavery is a corrupt institution that destroys the family and the home, both of which are prioritized in domestic fiction. When the log cabin first appears in the novel, it is ironically presented as a symbol of idealized domestic family life and self-sufficiency for slaves, occupants who are *not* free and *not* included as American citizens. Uncle Tom is one of Mr. Shelby's favored slaves, having worked loyally on the farm since the master was a child. Stowe provides an extensive description of the "small log building" in which Uncle Tom lives with Aunt Chloe and their three children (Stowe 66). This scene takes place before the slaves know that he will be sold to Haley in order to pay Mr. Shelby's debts. Creating this narrative where Shelby is forced to sell two of his favored slaves in order to pay for his debts from bad investment is a subtle critique of the male-coded economic irresponsibility similar to what Lee and Kirkland do in their novels. However, unlike Lee and Kirkland, this critique is not central to Stowe's narrative. Inserting this subtle dramatic irony—the audience is aware of Uncle Tom's fate, though he is not—amplifies the way that Stowe describes the cabin. Readers enter this chapter knowing that this idealized space is on the brink of being torn apart by politics of slavery.

Stowe depicts Uncle Tom and his family living in a peaceful, domestic space filled with the joys of family. Describing the exterior of the cabin, Stowe writes, "In front it had a neat garden-patch, where, every summer, strawberries, raspberries, and a variety

of fruits and vegetables, flourished under careful tending" (66). The cabin is a place of abundance, a place where Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe grow food. It is rich with the rewards of the land and their labor, borrowing from the language Lee uses to describe Henry as he constructs his cabin. Stowe clearly indicates that this is a space to which Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe take great care attending, and Stowe characterizes them as hardworking. Stowe goes on to describe the flowers surrounding the home, writing, "Various brilliant annuals, such as marigolds, petunias, four-o'clocks, found an indulgent corner in which to unfold their splendors, and were the delight and pride of Aunt Chloe's heart" (Stowe 66). It is important to note here that the flowers are annuals, which only last for one growing season and which must be constantly replanted, further reflecting the effort that Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe put into developing the space. This ephemerality of the plants adds to the sweetness and sentimentality of this moment and foreshadows Uncle Tom's fate and the fate of the carefully constructed domesticity they have worked so hard to maintain. Aunt Chloe plants and cultivates these flowers each year, relating to the precarious nature of her family, which, because of their status as slaves, is under constant threat of being separated and ultimately destroyed. This happens, first with the sale of Uncle Tom to Haley, then when Aunt Chloe goes to work at a confectioner in Louisville to raise the money to help buy Uncle Tom back, leaving her children in the care of other slaves.

When describing the interior of Uncle Tom's cabin, Stowe connects the organization of the space to religious ideas and American history, carefully presenting a domestic space in the novel that inserts itself into a national narrative that has historically

excluded the experiences of slaves. Stowe constructs this sense of connection when she writes, “The wall over the fireplace was adorned with some very brilliant scriptural prints, and a portrait of General Washington, drawn and colored in a manner which would certainly have astonished that hero, if ever he happened to meet with its like” (Stowe 68). The wall, with its décor of Bible passages and a portrait of the nation’s first president, is represented as thus significant. In doing so, she represents Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe as practicing and appreciating Christianity, as hanging someone on the wall of a house attests to its importance for those who live inside of it. Having an artistically rendered portrait of American hero and first president George Washington (who was also a slave owner) demonstrates interest in American history and the principles on which the nation was founded. The presence of the George Washington portrait also gives the feeling that Uncle Tom’s cabin is a symbolic space for the country, that the way it is torn apart reflects the way the debate over slavery was regionally tearing America apart. This passage in the text raises more questions than it answers about how Stowe constructs domesticity in the novel and deploys it to convince her readers to sympathize with her slave characters. Appealing to the middle class Americans who read this when it was published, Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe are shown to have respect and reverence both for Christianity and for the history of the United States, which has historically excluded their experience and value as people.

Just as Lee and Kirkland turn to material particulars and a division between public and private spaces, Stowe takes care to describe the beds in the cabin, designating them as private spaces within the private sphere of the home and separate from the more public

areas of the cabin. In one corner of Uncle Tom's cabin, there is a bed "covered neatly with a snowy bread; and by the side of it was a piece of carpeting, of some considerable size…the bed by which it lay, and the whole corner, in fact, were treated with distinguished consideration, and made, so far as possible, sacred from the marauding inroads and desecrations of little folks" (67). The bed is treated as a separate and elevated space much like the beds in cabins are in Kirkland through the use of sheets hung around them for more privacy. Here, the bed is separated through its condition and materials. However, this bed is used for public space in the house, described as the "*drawing room* of the establishment" (Stowe 68). Incorporating the language of middle class domesticity into the slaves' home, Stowe makes it clear that this sacred space is used as public space.

This designation exposes how tension exists in the home between private and public space and that these spaces can be coded differently depending on the way in which they are constructed in the text. In the opposite corner of the cabin, there is a bed "of much humbler pretensions, and evidently designed for *use.*" (Stowe 68). The bed that Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe use for sleeping is deemphasized here and made more private through being a space not worth noticing. Stowe demonstrates how, using the limited resources they have, Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe separate the open space of the log cabin into more public and more private areas as do Henry and Ellen in Lee's novel and the settlers in Kirkland's novel. This example demonstrates how Uncle Tom's and Aunt Chloe's domesticity, through the careful attention to the exterior space and the careful arrangement of the interior space, echoes conventional frontier domesticities that her readers would have known with if they were familiar with domestic fiction of the time.

Like she does with her rendering of Eliza during her escape from the Shelby plantation Stowe employs sentimentality to present Uncle Tom's cabin and his family in order to appeal to middle class readers' values of family and self-sufficiency that is contradictory to the precarious state of domesticity in which the family lives. Stowe writes, "On a rough bench in the corner, a couple of woolly-headed boys, with glistening black eyes and fat shining cheeks, were busy in superintending the first walking operations of the baby, which, as is usually the case, consisted in getting up on its feet, balancing a moment, and then tumbling down" (Stowe 68). This tender moment of brothers playing with their baby sibling who is learning how to walk further establishes a strong sense of family in this domestic space. The passage also inserts racially coded descriptions of the children as African American in a way that is cherubic and kind, perhaps to further seek an emotional response from the reader. Moments like this show how Stowe uses references to the log cabin differently than she does when George mentions it. Instead of symbolizing the exertion of a master's authority over his slave, Uncle Tom's Cabin instead symbolizes the imposition of a white-coded optimism and self-sufficiency onto a slave family, perhaps as a way to argue for slaves' humanity to the reader at a time of rising tension over slavery in the country.

Uncle Tom's Cabin as a Privately Public Space for Slaves

Uncle Tom's cabin doesn't just function as a private domestic space in the text; it also functions as a public place of worship for local slaves. The family sets up makeshift benches and chairs from tubs, pails and boards in addition to their own chairs (Stowe 76).

In doing so, they transform their home into a congregational space for communal worship and the exchange of information. About this exchange, Stowe writes that among the "motley assemblage" gathered for the meeting, "a little harmless gossip ensued on various themes…A few of the worshippers belonged to families hard by, who had got permission to attend, and who brought in various choice scraps of information, about the sayings and doings at the house and on the place, which circulated as freely as the same sort of small change does in higher circles" (Stowe 77). On one hand, Uncle Tom's cabin is public because various slaves from different estates are coming together in a shared, communal space. On the other hand, the space is private because it allows the slaves to speak to one another more freely and have more private conversations. This passage reinforces how Stowe makes the lives of the slaves relatable for the novel's middle class audience, through Stowe's point that the kind of conversations that they had mirrored the small talk in white churches, women's groups or intellectual circles.

Young George and Uncle Tom's Cabin as Memorial

Another element to discuss in relation to Uncle Tom's cabin, is George Shelby, the thirteen-year-old son (at the beginning of the novel) of Uncle Tom's master, who spends much of his free time and evenings in Uncle Tom's cabin interacting with his father's slaves. Master George plays an active role in the household from helping Uncle Tom with his writing to helping read the scriptures for their meetings. He is particularly close to Aunt Chloe, who "regarding young Master George with pride" says, "The way he can write, now! and read, too! And then to come out here evenings and read his

lessons to us,--it's mighty interestin'!" (Stowe 69). Stowe presents Aunt Chloe as having a maternal affection for George Shelby, expressing pride in his accomplishments and preparing him food while he visits the cabin. Once again, this tender moment could signal Stowe deploying sentimentality and the representation of maternal affection to appeal rhetorically to middle class readers. It also serves to provide the foundation for Master George's different views of slavery and his actions at the end of the novel.

After Tom's death at the hands of his cruel southern master Legree, the symbolism of Uncle Tom's cabin shifts to represent freedom, honesty and a different kind of self-sufficiency than possible when the cabin was first introduced in the novel. Uncle Tom is beaten to death on Legree's plantation, George Shelby having arrived too late to save him. At the end of the novel, George reflects upon Uncle Tom's death while standing in front of the slave's old cabin, surrounded by the Shelby family slaves. In order to prevent more suffering to the slaves or cause them pain by separating them from loved ones and splitting up their families, George frees them. He concludes by saying, "Think of your freedom, every time you see Uncle Tom's Cabin; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow in his steps, and be honest and faithful and Christian as he was" (Stowe 617). With Uncle Tom dead, the cabin is no longer the symbol of domestic life that it was in the beginning of the novel. This symbol of safety within the institution of slavery becomes a symbol of freedom from slavery. This shift exposes the fluidity of meanings for symbols as well, and is yet another example of how white-coded optimism is attached to the image of the log cabin in an attempt to give it a positive association to slaves, for whom the structure represents confinement and oppression.

Like Kirkland connects the state of one's domesticity with his or her moral character, Stowe uses George to connect Uncle Tom's cabin and his character, particularly his honesty and faith. When discussing memorials, it is important to recognize that they are sites of power. Memorials mediate power and whoever creates a memorial has a certain level of authority in shaping the meaning of the memorial. By deeming Uncle Tom's cabin as a memorial to the freed slaves' liberty, George places power in the structure and the ideals associated with it. George's speech urges the slaves not to be self-sufficient in the goods that they produce, but rather self-sufficient in terms of the strength of their morals. Stowe ends the novel with this image of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a memorial to his character, treating him more like an individual than a slave.

"Freedom" or Containment? Diverging Responses to Log Cabin Domesticity

While Uncle Tom's cabin functions as a symbol of newfound freedom and opportunity for slaves by the end of the novel (at least from the perspective of the implicitly white-coded narrator) George consistently resists the model of domesticity that Lee and Kirkland present in their novels. George isn't interested in a falsely constructed and idealistic notion of insular, controlled domesticity. He also isn't interested in staying in America, or even North America at the end of the novel. Instead, he decides to immigrate to Liberia, to free himself from the culture that could not guarantee him personal liberty and full agency for a chance at the individualism he craves. In that way, George is the ultimate embodiment of the American myth of masculine coded-

individualism. He takes the initiative to change his situation and make a move for a new life, but ironically that drive leads him out of America.

George's refusal of American domesticity reveals the limitations and whiteness of the narrative that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe extend in their texts. His rejection of their amendments to individualism exposes its instability and the flaws in its internal logic, especially regarding racial identity and the prioritization of white experience in a country becoming increasingly divided over race. All three novels covered in this thesis are both complicit with and involved in the revision of individualism, and more specifically an adherence to self-sufficiency and self-improvement. However, these texts' deployment of domesticity as a rhetorical strategy ultimately reveals the limits of domesticity as a vehicle for early feminist writing. For Lee and Kirkland, the home is a site of power and cultural production. It is a safe, stable space where white women can perform their moralizing role through a circumscribed agency that is still inherently restrictive. Just a decade later in Stowe's novel and through its depiction of slave domesticities, the agency and power contained within the walls of the log cabin weaken.

George Harris recognizes this oppressive symbolism of the slave's log cabin when he rejects domesticity in favor of rebellion, escape and ultimately personal liberation, destabilizing the myth of the log cabin and revealing part of the complex web of associations with these structures. Log cabins have historically been used as slave quarters in American history. They still function as a site of power, but they symbolize the white masculine-coded oppression associated with slavery. George's decision at the end of the novel exposes the fragility and whiteness of American individualism, whether

it is Emersonian or the revised versions of Stowe, Kirkland and Lee. A national mythic philosophy that alienates the people willing to follow it beyond the country's borders is inherently flawed and none of these books fully reconcile the cracks and fractures in that philosophy, or America at the time. Pushing this argument even further, George's narrative also exposes the cracks and fractures in Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's conservative approach to advocating for the inclusion of female experiences in the national narrative. By rejecting domesticity and the circumscribed agency associated with the private, domestic sphere in favor of a chance at more fulfilling personal liberty through escape into the public sphere, George Harris reveals the restrictive nature of domesticity. Domesticity might appear sacred and stable, but it is ultimately not a self-sustaining solution for social and cultural turbulence; a stronger, more durable form of resistance is necessary to effect change. These forms would emerge, I would argue, in the outbreak of Civil War and the development of first wave feminism through the contemporaneous work of Margaret Fuller and later suffragists.

Throughout her novel, Stowe uses the image of the log cabin in order to critique the institution of slavery as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and uses sentimentality to appeal to the values of middle class Americans and argue for slaves' humanity. The log cabin functions dichotomously in the text, with positive associations for Uncle Tom and negative ones for for George. When the log cabin is first mentioned in a conversation between George Harris and Eliza, it represents the power that George's master exerts over him. In this way, the log cabin does not represent freedom for George, but white-coded power and cruelty, thus distorting the traditional associations with the

image and exposing the fluidity of the image. On the other hand, the first description of Uncle Tom's cabin in the novel depicts a serene, productive and fertile space filled with the joys of children and family. The description seems to promote the traditional American cultural associations of the log cabin with themes like self-sufficiency and domesticity, but applies them to slaves who are not completely free. In this way, the symbol shifts in the narrative to represent not cruelty, but rather the projection of a white American conception of family on the frontier onto a slave family in order to plea for their humanity. At the novel's end, George Shelby frees the slaves on the farm and establishes the log cabin as a symbol of not only their freedom, but of Uncle Tom's honest, devout character. In this way, the symbolism shifts to a self-sufficiency that is internal rather than external, but still asserts the humanity of African Americans and involves them in the American cultural tradition of the log cabin. George Harris resists this involvement, undercutting the model of domesticity as amendment to individualism that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all provide and exposing the limits and whiteness of the narrative these three domestic fiction authors amend through their writing.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I connected the multiplicity of meanings of the log cabin as it shifted from a predominantly utilitarian structure to symbolic object in the 1830s and 1840s to the contradictory set of meanings contained under the umbrella term individualism, which brought me to conclusions about the limits of domesticity, feminism and space that I will consolidate in this final, brief chapter. From Emerson's apolitical and intellectual individualism to a rugged individualism associated with figures like Davy Crockett to its vernacular associations today, individualism is a complex system of ideas centered around the fine line between progressive self-sufficiency and aloof selfishness. Responding to the turbulent economic, social and political context of the American Renaissance, the female authors discussed in this thesis amended the individualism by reacting to various manifestations of this ideology on the frontier. Lee's novel *The Log Cabin,* Kirkland's novel *A New Home, Who'll Follow?* and Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are three examples of domestic fiction that speak back to the typically male-coded individualism blossoming in American culture during the time in which they were written through the deployment of domesticity and strategic use of sentimental rhetoric. Moreover, another thread I explore in each novel is the tension between private and public space in order to illustrate how all three novels at least partially resist the use of domesticity as a utopian space of retreat. Furthermore, each novel also contains tension between a need to protect and revere the sacred space of domesticity and a critique of the masculine economic irresponsibility that stems from a perverted adherence to individualism. The tension between these two competing goals

exposes both the cultural turbulence of this historical moment and the role of domesticity as a stabilizing force within that moment.

In the second chapter, I posit that Lee's moralizing novel *The Log Cabin* critiques reckless spending and speculation by positioning Henry as the model settler. Henry leaves his New England town for Illinois to become a schoolteacher, builds a log cabin and then convinces his childhood love Ellen to come live with him and start a family on the frontier. Lee's novel idealizes the construction of frontier domesticity while prioritizing the responsible spending of one's money and being financially independent of credit or debt. However, throughout the novel, Lee demonstrates how the public sphere of the market and the community intrudes upon the private sphere of the home, whether Henry finds an unexpected visitor in his home or is critiquing a local family who has fallen on hard times. To this end, Lee also employs sentimentality as a rhetorical tool to emotionally appeal to her likely middle class audience. Finally, the novel suggests that a blending of feminine and masculine qualities are needed for familial success on the frontier, shown through Henry's feminized traits and Ellen's masculine qualities. While *The Log Cabin* is a didactically written novel that idealizes at points the journey out west, it features persuasive critiques of masculine economic irresponsibility through overspeculation and overreliance on credit while also prioritizing the home as a safe space that facilitates one's success on the frontier and thus needs to be protected from the public sphere.

Moving to a discussion of my third chapter, I argued that in her novel *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*, Kirkland deploys domesticity on the frontier and a commitment

to "realistic" depictions of life out west as a resistance of both the uncontrolled system of speculation run by men that had disastrous effects on the formation of frontier communities and romanticized and idealized frontier narratives. In some ways, Kirkland resists the idealism in Lee's *The Log Cabin* that would continue to permeate domestic fiction in the 1840s through her commitment to depicting the gritty, ordinary details of frontier life. However, Kirkland also engages with sentimental rhetoric throughout the text, going so far as to suggest that sentimentality is part of the spirit of frontier life, through a nostalgizing view of the land that American settlers began to tame and control out West. By presenting commentary that critiques the economic shenanigans of Western speculators and upholds the value and importance of functional, orderly domestic spaces, Kirkland's novel resides in the tension between these two rhetorical moves and exposes the extent to which the expansion of the frontier was a gritty experience that challenged one's notions of everyday life. However, she also shows how permeable the boundary between public and private spheres are, amplified by her descriptions of how public and private space was separated within the open space of the log cabin. Kirkland's novel challenges core tenets of individualism by displaying the value of community and public sphere over the individual and commerce. It also ruptures the idealizing optimism of the rugged individualist by forming a connection between one's morality and their domestic space. Kirkland's novel is a complex investigation of what contributed to the spirit of the frontier and how this masculinized idealism affected the women and their domestic spaces of agency.

Finally, in my fourth chapter I both continued and challenged my discussion in the previous two chapters through an examination of two competing notions of slave domesticity in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Stowe's hallmark abolitionist novel was a strong, northern reaction against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which reinforced the clause in the Constitution demanding the return of escaped slaves and was a major source of appeasement to the south within Henry Clay's Compromise of 1850. While I argue that Stowe continues a discussion of similar themes as Lee and Kirkland, like critique of masculine economic carelessness, I also show how the institution of slavery disrupts and complicates the prioritization of domestic space as sacred and stabilizing. There are two log cabins in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: the cabin that George does not want to be confined within and Uncle Tom's idealized cabin that he is forced to leave. George's cabin represents a choice between domestic control and confinement or torture and violence down South, and thus he flees. Uncle Tom's Cabin is a simulacrum of white, middle class domesticity that is ultimately destroyed by Uncle Tom's departure and reinstated as a symbol of freedom by Master George, Shelby's son, at the end of the novel. Like Lee and Kirkland, Stowe strategically deploys sentimentality as a rhetorical tool in her novel as a means to providing emotional appeals and familiar imagery for her target middle-class white female audience. However, Stowe's novel is a call to arms against the institution of slavery through idealized, detailed descriptions of slave domesticity and sentimentality surrounding Eliza and George's escape, facilitating her readers' connections with the slaves in the novel as people.

All three of these works of domestic fiction present an alternative version of the individualism that was proliferating through American culture during the American Renaissance. Individualism is a complex set of ideas and associations that continues to take on new meanings and retain its central role in myths of American identity. However, in the nineteenth century, in a time of rampant national identity formation and increasing national tensions leading up to the Civil War, it was a particularly powerful system of ideas. Emerson, one of the most well known proponents of individualism through the literary movement of transcendentalism, promotes an intellectual and largely politically detached mode of individualism that values individual thinking and self-sufficiency. However, rugged individualists on the frontier lived out these ideas to an extreme, embodying the selfish side of individualism. Individualism is a complex system of often competing ideologies, and in this thesis I have attempted to begin to think about how female authors at this time took Emerson's idealized individualism and applied it to the frontier in a way that would combat the carelessness of more "rugged" individualists.

However, this thesis is not about amending individualism, but ultimately about three examples of female-authored attempts to expand the interests of the home, the private sphere, to expand the power of women in society. This might not have been the intentions or politics of these three authors, but this attempt at gaining power is an implication of the way that Lee, Kirkland and Stowe deploy domesticity in their texts. Their novels do not just expand the narrative of individualism, but ultimately the narrative of feminism, what it can be and what it has been. Lee, Kirkland and Stowe's turn to domesticity as a source of power echo the opening moment of Berlant's 1988

essay “The Female Complaint” in which radical lesbian-separatists denounce a feminist speaker who is proud of her “conventional” role as a mother (Berlant “The Female Complaint 237). Returning to a twenty-first century lens of feminism where intersectionality is the new measure of acceptability in what one may argue is becoming fourth wave feminism, I hope that my analysis of these works will challenge the readers of this essay to consider a broader populist feminist lens of earlier women writers, in which turning to conventional symbols of “confined” femininity isn’t wrong or bad, but a product of the author’s historical moment.

Lee, Kirkland and Stowe all demonstrate an attempt to use the home as a source of power and a vehicle for subverting larger ideologies that worked in complex and interesting ways, but wasn’t self-sustaining. All three authors astutely demonstrate how the home can be destabilized by reckless individualism in the public sphere, but in order to be effective, women needed to break out of the private sphere, not try and envelope the public sphere within it. In order to ultimately be effective in gaining political ground, women needed to construct an agency that went beyond the circumscribed agency of the home, which these texts do not do. However, these texts still serve as a reminder of the home and a reminder that domesticity can be subversive. Conventional femininity and domesticity is not always a threat to feminist ideas, but once served as a tool in these works for deploying them.

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