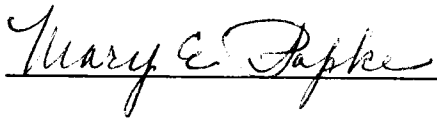


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sarah E. McKee entitled "Mammies and Mothers: Black and White Womanhood in Imitation of Life and How to Make an American Quilt." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.


Charles J. Maland, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:





Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

Mammies and Mothers: Definitions of Black and White
Womanhood in Imitation of Life and
How to Make an American Quilt

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sarah Elizabeth McKee
August 1997

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who taught me to read,
and
to my father, who financed my love for it.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe the completion of this thesis to a number of people who sustained my work through unwavering encouragement and support. I would like to thank, first and foremost, my advisor Charles Maland for his consistent dedication to the project, allocating a tremendous amount of his summer time to allow for its timely completion. His balance of challenging critique and friendly encouragement through several revisions of the paper was absolutely essential to the finished product, and I am most grateful for such a wonderful advisor.

I also thank the other members of my thesis committee, Mary Papke and John Zomchick, for their participation and encouragement. In particular, I thank Dr. Papke for introducing me, as an undergraduate, to film studies and for skirting a rock slide to attend the defense. I am grateful to Dr. Zomchick for his willingness to join the committee at a late date and for expressing immediate interest and enthusiasm in the project. I also thank them both for their suggestions for revision at the early and late stages of the paper.

Other faculty members at the University of Tennessee contributed immensely to the realization of this degree. I thank LaVinia Jennings for her suggestions for research on the African-American domestic figure in literature and film. I also thank Christine Holmlund for her invaluable insights, encouragement, and friendship during the writing process, and for her dedication to teaching important film courses on this campus. Finally, I wish to thank Christine Boake, in the department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, for allowing me to continue working in her lab, despite my desertion to the humanities. She has provided much personal encouragement and good advice during both my graduate and undergraduate years; her friendship has been invaluable. I also thank Marie Garrett at John C. Hodges Library for her assistance with and interest in my research, and Dinah

Brock, graduate secretary, for knowing and sharing with me information of true importance about the English Department.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and family who are, surprisingly, still around. For essential encouragement, advice, and friendship during both my teaching and my writing I thank Kathy White, Sara Ford and Jo Angela Edwins. In particular, I thank Bill Larsen for both teaching me to read film and teaching me how to teach. I am grateful to Debby, Paul and Kassie Andreadis for selling to me, within my price range, the computer upon which most of the writing was completed, and I especially thank Debby for answering endless idiot computer questions with such kindness. For living with me I thank my roommates, Amanda Beck, Jenny Cook, and Julie Larson. And, to my bestest friend Jennifer Mitchell, I express thanks for being with me, as always, during this latest phase of our lives.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the definitions of black and white womanhood that emerge in the context of two traditional women's films, Imitation of Life (John Stahl, 1934) and How to Make an American Quilt (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1995). In particular, the investigation focuses on the inclusion and transformation of the traditional "mammy" figure as a relevant point of comparison between the two films. Using both feminist and cultural analysis, the study demonstrates that stereotypes of both white and black women in American culture are perpetuated in these two films, and are often used as points of differentiation between American women of different ethnicities. Because the aim of the woman's film is generally to endorse traditional patriarchal values of marriage and motherhood for white women, the inclusion of African-American women as mammy figures both creates a foil against which white characters define themselves, and provides as well nurturer figures who direct white protagonists to make the necessary choice for marriage and motherhood. However, these "mammy" figures generally do not maintain traditional nuclear families themselves within the space of the film, creating a distinctly different definition of "womanhood" itself, according to race. As a result, these Hollywood films tend to validate and reinforce the feminist concern with existing divisions between women of different ethnicities in American culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. DOWNSTAIRS AND UPSTAIRS:.....	16
DEFINITIONS OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMANHOOD IN <u>IMITATION OF LIFE</u>	
The Source Novel.....	19
Novel to Film.....	26
The Film.....	33
Bea's Mammy.....	36
Peola's Mother.....	41
III. REMNANTS OF THE PAST:.....	50
THE LEGACY OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMANHOOD IN <u>HOW TO MAKE AN AMERICAN QUILT</u>	
The Source Novel.....	53
Novel to Film.....	63
The Film.....	69
Finn and Anna.....	75
Finn and Marianna.....	78
Finn and Sophia.....	80
IV. CONCLUSION.....	87
WORKS CITED.....	98
VITA.....	103

Chapter One

Introduction

Over the past century, Hollywood films have both shaped and commented upon American culture. The tremendous technological, stylistic, and narrative changes that the cinema has experienced have allowed this particular art form to flourish as it evolves with the sensibilities of its audience. And while the fascination of the public with Hollywood stars, happy endings, and special effects tends to direct attention towards the creators of film, the importance of that public to what is finally produced can never be underestimated. As an art form with serious financial stakes, Hollywood film depends upon the interest and validation of its audience in order to survive.

Learning to please this audience has been a long and interesting process for filmmakers, who eventually standardized successful narratives. The studio system evolved from the early silents to reach its heyday during the 1930s and 1940s, as studios produced various film types with proven audience appeal. The studio system, then, created film genres, which provide much of the narrative material, characters, and stylistic conventions that still dominate much Hollywood film today. This project focuses on the "woman's film," specifically the genre of family melodrama as it appears in two films, both based on best-selling novels by women, separated by over sixty years: Imitation of Life (John Stahl, 1934), adapted from Fanny Hurst's 1933 novel, and How to Make an American Quilt (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1995), adapted from Whitney Otto's 1991 novel. Acknowledged (and at times criticized) by film scholars, the woman's film typically focuses on the conflicts and interests in the lives of white women, even when women of other ethnicities appear on screen and despite the fact that they comprise part of the audience as well. I argue that within these two films the appearance of an African-American woman within a

community of white women serves to define and validate essentialist notions of black and white womanhood, relying on established tradition and stereotypes of the film industry.

Despite the very different contexts of these two films, one character type in particular provides an interesting and relevant point of comparison. The inclusion in both films of an African-American woman stereotype, loosely defined for the moment as a "mammy," as well as her biological daughter, distinguishes these films from most others in the genre. Nevertheless, the focus of the film remains, not surprisingly, on the white protagonist(s), despite the fundamental importance of the African-American women to the narrative action of each work. These contributions, as I will delineate, do not allow them to function as traditional secondary characters; rather, the interactions between white and black women on screen reflect the racial tensions and beliefs in American culture, as the "mammy" characters rather unproblematically contribute to the success and happiness of the white characters.

Given the current debates over definitions of feminism for different American ethnicities, the cinematic meeting between white and black women should be particularly intriguing for feminist film scholars interested in the woman's film as a source of information into the tensions and desires of its female audience. An examination of this meeting in two distinct American contexts will, hopefully, lend itself to an interrogation of how relationships between white and black women are portrayed in the films, and what those representations imply about the status of race relations and feminism in our culture. What pertinent issues raised by each novel are either retained or ignored by the films, and what do these choices imply about the representation of women's issues in Hollywood? In other words, what does the female audience of the family melodrama hope to see validated about itself on-screen?

According to film historian Thomas Schatz, the genre film results primarily from Hollywood's drive to profit from and satisfy its audiences. As a particular film type or

narrative gains popularity, Hollywood eventually standardizes that narrative into a recognizable and familiar genre with a strong audience appeal. However, despite the genre's surface uniformity or "formalized sign system" (Schatz 19), the conflicts depicted in genre films are adapted to meet the needs of its current audience. Schatz argues that "the determining, identifying feature of a film genre is its cultural context, its community of interrelated character types whose attitudes, values, and actions flesh out dramatic conflicts inherent within that community" (21-22). Generally, the community of the family melodrama revolves around a central female protagonist or protagonists, whose relationships with one another (and men) reflect the dilemmas and/or choices for its particular female audience.

The family melodrama, though admittedly a somewhat amorphous genre, dramatizes the important conflicts that tend to surface and re-surface in the lives of women. The "interrelated community" of family melodrama includes several recognizable, recurrent characters, who dramatize the societal conflicts and pressures which exist for American women at various cultural moments. At the core of these conflicts, obviously, is the family and the woman's role in and responsibility to that institution. As Schatz points out in his discussion of 1950's family melodrama,

At the narrative thematic core of family melodramas is a metaphoric search for the ideal husband/lover/father who, as American mythology would have it, will stabilize the family and integrate it into the larger community . . . the woman's dilemma is that she must opt for either socioeconomic security *or* emotional and sexual fulfillment. (235)

For example, romantic love (i.e. the quest for a husband) very often becomes a focus for the unmarried woman, which often conflicts with other goals, often some sort of career. Married women often find themselves, on the other hand, in an unsuccessful marriage and

must choose between fidelity as wife and mother or romantic love (a second chance at the ideal marriage).

Relationships between mothers and daughters are also significant in many family melodramas, as the mother must often choose between some personal desire or motherhood. Not infrequently, this conflict merges with the quest for romantic love, as the mother and daughter may even find themselves rivals over the same man. According to Schatz, this narrative strategy works to "counter the heroine's role as mother-domesticator with that of sexual partner . . . propelling her [daughter] towards the same marital and social traps as her mother" (233). Relationships with other women, siblings, or friends also generally revolve around a conflict over the protagonist's romantic interest.

In addition to the relationships occurring within the home, both Schatz and Jeanine Basinger point out that the house itself becomes a significant point of contention. Having a home and keeping a home may function as key dramatic conflicts, in addition to the importance of the home as setting for the dramatic conflicts of the family proper. Basinger claims the following :

In the woman's film, the house frequently becomes a character. It is always a metaphor. It represents who the woman is, both as a physical representation of her inner turmoils and a reflection of where she stands on the social scale. It is the space the woman is allowed, her place to dominate. (244-5)

Obviously, the definition of the home will differ according to the context of the film. The longing for that home is often juxtaposed with a desire for freedom from that space, a need for other domains of power. Ultimately, however, the home is generally validated by the family melodrama as the appropriate realm in which women may exercise power.

The home of the woman's film, then, is generally a matriarchal household which, while giving women power, also sets the stage for a narrative conflict concerning men. Basinger notes that "the only way to make a film about woman is to remove the man from

the story, to place him in a weak or secondary position, or to turn him into a problem . . . often depicted as unreliable, destructive or dead" (258). In the context of the family melodrama, however, the importance of a father to complete the nuclear family creates a whole series of contradictions for women negotiating the "reality" of men with the ideal. Despite the fact that the "reality" of marriage often disappoints, women are nevertheless encouraged to become wives, a decision which restores the matriarchal household to a microcosm of patriarchal society.

One of Basinger's central arguments about the woman's film is that it provides a "*temporary* visual liberation" [my emphasis] for women from the constraints she experiences in that patriarchal culture. She also identifies two other main purposes of the genre, which are to "place a woman at the center of the story universe and to affirm in the end the concept that a woman's true job is that of just being a woman" (13). The temporary liberation, then, occurs with the film's articulation of conflicts surrounding alternative possibilities for women, while the ending recovers the protagonist into her appropriate domestic sphere. Ultimately, just being a woman requires the acceptance of the traditional roles of wife and, especially, mother as the primary responsibilities which, coincidentally, also provide the woman's only hope for true happiness. What happens to this argument, however, when the definition of "woman" is extended beyond that of the white woman? Given that women of other ethnicities do appear in the woman's film, can we make the argument that all women in the audience are liberated from the same problems or that they are liberated at all in the context of the film?

Because, as Basinger and others have noted, motherhood is generally conceptualized as the natural and appropriate route for women's lives, an investigation of the differing circumstances for white and black women on screen might fruitfully begin there. As Mary Ann Doane points out:

black servants are frequently used to buttress central ideologies and to invalidate any claims of racial inequality through their representation as essential and

legitimate appendages of the nuclear family. Female black servants, in particular, act to double and hence reinforce the maternal function. (291)

She further argues that "perceived as closer to the earth and to nature and more fully excluded from the social contract than the white woman, the black woman personifies more explicitly the situation of the mother, and her presence, on the margins of the text is a significant component of many maternal melodramas" (292). Mammy, then, as a recurrent (albeit somewhat infrequent) character in the family melodrama creates a space for herself in Schatz's "interrelated community," implying that she will serve some sort of recognizable function within that genre. Moreover, she introduces into that community another example of "womanhood," answering the question for the film audience of what it means to be a black woman.

Answering the question of black identity has long been a concern of American culture at large, with inevitable consequences for American cinema. Hollywood films have been recognized, since the 1915 release of Birth of a Nation, as one of the most powerful media functioning in American culture. A most important consideration to any film study, then, is that of a film audience: to whom are the majority of Hollywood films targeted, and what does this audience want to see validated on screen? Most black film historians would argue that the target audience, throughout Hollywood history, has generally been white and that this audience expects, among other things, to be validated as the dominant culture. However, as the fictionalized example of Pauline Breedlove, a "mammy" figure in Toni Morrison's novel The Bluest Eye clearly demonstrates, the marginalized of American culture also comprise part of this mass audience, despite the fact that their own lives are far from being validated on screen. As Pauline notes in the novel:

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I'd go early, before the show started. They'd cut off the lights and everything be black. Then the screen would light up and I'd move right in on them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the

toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly [her husband] hard. I don't know. I 'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time. I thought I'd see it through to the end again, and I got up to get some candy. I was sitting back in my seat, and I had taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could've cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly. (123)

Pauline tells this story in retrospect, from the vantage point of a middle-aged, poverty-stricken mother of two. Trapped in a loveless and often violent marriage, Pauline now seeks asylum from a dismal home life through work as a domestic in a large, clean, expensive white home. Here, Morrison demonstrates the power of film images to transform self-perception. Despite Pauline's recognition that the life on screen in no way represents her own, even making a return to her actual life more difficult, she still attempts to transform her outward appearance to match the beauty, the wealth, the prestige of a Jean Harlow. Her brutal and pathetic reminder that this image is absolutely unattainable catapults Pauline into a passively destructive acceptance of her lot in life as a poor, black woman, unable to meet the impossible standards of the silver screen.

As Morrison's scene suggests, the African-American experience in Hollywood film, at least until recently, has been predominantly characterized by negation, either through simple erasure or through the persistence of negative and damaging stereotypes. This negation, in turn, allows for the transmission and perpetuation of white ideology in two ways. First, the white audience remains comfortably safe in its role as cultural arbiter, establishing the norms and standards for "others" to emulate. Secondly, the black audience may internalize the negation of their own lives, accepting, as does Pauline, an inferior

status in the culture at large. Films do not merely tell pretty stories that provide a temporary escape from life's realities; rather, as Pauline's experiences demonstrate, movies affect and transform the realities of life. The equation of blackness with ugliness assumes multiple forms and enjoys a long and complex history in Western consciousness, creating many concrete and material consequences in the lives of African-Americans. This equation, in fact, establishes the foundation for the stereotypical representations of African-Americans in Hollywood film, the templates for which occur in D.W. Griffith's landmark film, Birth of a Nation (1915).

Negative stereotypes of African-Americans are, perhaps, another form of erasure in that they create false personas for African-Americans. According to Donald Bogle, the silent era of Hollywood film forged the existence of five basic African-American stereotypes: toms, coons, mulattos, mammies, and bucks. Film, however, created not the stereotypes themselves but another outlet of dissemination for them; in Bogle's words, "filmic representations of black stereotypes . . . had existed since the days of slavery and were already popularized in the American life and arts" (Bogle 4). Birth of a Nation is the silent film generally credited with the solidification of these traditions into Hollywood cinema. As Manthia Diawara explains, Birth of a Nation

defined for the first time the side that Hollywood was to take in the war to represent black people in America. In Birth of a Nation, D.W. Griffith, later a founding member of United Artists, created and fixed an image of Blackness that was necessary for racist America's fight against Black people. Birth of a Nation constitutes the grammar book for Hollywood's representation of Black manhood and womanhood, its obsession with miscegenation, and its fixing of Black people within certain spaces, such as kitchens, and into supporting roles, such as criminals, on the screen. White people must occupy the center, leaving Black people with only one choice--to exist in relation to Whiteness. Birth of a Nation is the master text that suppressed the real contours of Black history and culture on movie screens. (3)

The erasure of nuanced and complex representations of African-American lives, for Diawara, is registered by the fact that "there are no simple stories about Black people loving each other, hating each other, or enjoying their private possessions without reference to the White world" (4). In other words, African-Americans, until very recently, have existed in Hollywood films as secondary characters who gain importance when their lives intersect in some way with that of a white protagonist. The substance of their lives consists, according to Hollywood, purely of their relationship--positive or negative--with white people, an idea that mirrors quite effectively the treatment and consideration of African-Americans by American laws and customs.

Negative and/or inaccurate images of African-Americans still persist in Hollywood film, revealing themselves, at times, in transformed yet recognizable narratives and characters. Donald Bogle, referring again to the influence of Birth of a Nation, argues that:

Once the basic mythic types were introduced, a number of things occurred. Specific black themes soon emerged. And the basic types came and went in various guises. Guises long confused many movie viewers. They were (and remain) deceptive, and they have traditionally been used by the film industry to camouflage the familiar types. If a black appeared as a butler, audiences thought of him as merely as a servant. What they failed to notice was the variety of servants . . . What has to be remembered is that the servant's uniform was the guise of certain types during a certain period. That way Hollywood could give its audience the same product (the types themselves) but with new packaging (the guise). (17)

What was true of the butler and servant was also true of the mammy. Mammy, like other black stereotypes, has been repackaged at various cultural moments in the American cinema.

In his study of prevalent African-American stereotypes in Hollywood film, Bogle describes the typical Mammy as "closely related to the comic coon (male), distinguished, however, by her sex and fierce independence. She is usually big, fat, and cantankerous." The "aunt jemimah," an offshoot of the mammy, is "often blessed with religion or are

mammies who weasel themselves into the dominant white culture. Generally, they are sweet, jolly and good tempered--a bit more polite than mammy and certainly never as headstrong" (9). Trudier Harris argues that these images of the domestic black woman in American culture are, in fact, the "basic historical conception from which other images and stereotypes have grown" (4). A partial list of these images as named by Maya Angelou include "Matriarch," "Emasculator," "Hot Momma," "Welfare Recipient," and "Unwed Mother" (qtd. Harris 4). As a source for various ways of labeling black women, then, Mammy is an essential historical construct to consider within an examination of black womanhood and how "womanhood" itself assumes different and even oppositional meanings when applied to white and black women.

Working within the homes/intimate space of the dominant culture, mammies straddled the boundary between two cultures, especially when placed in the position of nurturing young white children. According to Harris, in her discussion of revised images of the mammy in black literature, Mammy had three possible "compromises" available for her own survival: mask-wearing, in which she separates her circumstances from her self-perception; self-suppression of her cultural identity; or a "destructive psychological frustration" which never allows her to develop a sense of identity at all (16-17). Depending upon which compromise Mammy chooses, she finds herself somewhere on Harris' continuum from "mammies to militant," with mammies capitulating completely to the dominant culture and militants subversively navigating their access to white culture for private material gain or revenge. The mammies of Hollywood film, not surprisingly, generally fall into the category of the bona fide mammy, not asking the white audience to see anything other than a woman content with her place in the culture. This fantastical construction of the dominant culture has been harshly criticized time and again by the African-American community as untruthful and dangerous. Negative reaction to such

familiar mammy actresses as Louise Beavers and Hattie McDaniel illustrates the anger which these representations create(d).

Two recent dissertations have examined the historical construct of the mammy in American culture at large. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders argues that from 1824 to 1935, "the impulse to define African-American motherhood was the center of significant inter-textual and interracial debate"(ix) and that from 1910-1935, "black mammy functions as a cultural barometer, reflecting ongoing fluctuations in racial attitudes and socio-political agendas" (99). As an example, Sanders cites a long list of projects, beginning with the 1895 Faithful Slave Monument erected in South Carolina by the Daughters of the Confederacy, which portrayed a Mammy holding a white baby, to their support for a 1924 bill to Congress proposing a National Black Mammy monument. As part of a "revival of neo-Confederate sympathies" (100), the Daughters hoped to honor "the faithful colored mammies of the south" (106).

White reverence and nostalgia for black mammies, then, is a significant indication of her place in the dominant culture as a woman who aided the cause of white supremacy. D.W. Griffith's mammy figure in Birth of a Nation illustrates that idea vividly as we see her literally smother, with her enormous bulk, two black men attempting to revolt against her white master, ensuring the master's safety in the process. Mammy, thus, can easily be used by white culture to justify the validity of white supremacy, given the mammy's undying loyalty and intimate connection with the white family (imaged generally with her holding/nursing a white child). However, as Wallace-Sanders notes, black reaction against these notions were swift and vehement; DuBois, in particular, completely shattered the mammy myth so cherished by the Daughters of the Confederacy, when he wrote the following in 1912, "Let us hope that the black mammy for whom so many sentimental tears have been shed, has disappeared from American life. She existed under a false social system that deprived her of husband and child (qtd. Sanders 106), and again in 1924:

Above all looms the figure of the Black Mammy, one of the most pitiful of the

world's Christs. Whether drab and dirty drudge or dark and gentle lady she played her part in the uplift of the South. She was an embodied Sorrow, an anomaly crucified on the cross of her own neglected children for the sake of the children of masters who bought and sold her . . . a few snobs have lately sought to advertise her sacrifice and degradation and enhance their own cheap success by building on the blood of her riven heart a load of stone miscalled a monument. (337-338)

Thus the mammy figure was constructed by southern whites, and that with the assistance of some northern whites, but was criticized by DuBois and others as a deceptive and insulting representation of the black female experience.

As Veta Smith Tucker points out in her investigation of mammy figures in contemporary novels by African-American women: "Whites preserved their sentimental image of mammy as a self-immolating, devoted servant. Blacks conceded that mammies performed devoted service to the slaveholding class, but maintained that her devotion was not an expression of her own desires, but an appearance demanded by the unusual role thrust upon her" (2). The stark contrasts between these two conceptions of mammy are integral to the study at hand; as the woman's film investigated the dilemmas and situations of white women, the unique tensions of the African-American counterpart are often eclipsed by the assumption that she experiences nothing but contentment as a nurturer and perpetuator of white values. Even as black women historically have occupied a category of their own, apart from white womanhood, their lives are predictably glossed over in films they do appear in, despite the fact that they are often integral to the white protagonist's success or happiness within that narrative context.

Ultimately, then, the black mammy functions in the woman's film as an alternative or foil to the "appropriate" life of a white woman. That Hollywood should position her as the photographic negative of a white counterpart is not particularly surprising. Toni Morrison, in her investigation of "whiteness" in the American literary imagination, Playing in the Dark, defines "Africanism" as a "term for the denotative and connotative blackness

that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about those people" (6). Africanism enables the white writer to define his or her own place in American culture by a process of elimination: this is what I am *not*. Similarly, Mammy and her daughter can amplify the white film audience's perception of difference between white and black women, especially in terms of the conventional tensions of the woman's film.

Whether or not these perceptions of difference are valid, the amplification of those differences contributes to the white protagonist's search for self-definition. What choices will ultimately satisfy her and why? How and why can the experiences and knowledge of a black woman allow her the opportunity to explore and investigate other options? Is this exchange ever reciprocal? And finally, if Jeanine Basinger correctly suggests that the woman's film provides a moment of escape or catharsis from the strictures governing the lives of white, female audiences, who better to embody the contradiction between her desires and her realities than the black mammy, who is sure to deliver her white charge safely home?

An analysis of the films Imitation of Life and How to Make an American Quilt, as well as the novels upon which they are based, will hopefully provide some insight into how black and white women function in family melodramas. The next two chapters, each divided into three sections, will provide a textual analysis of a film and its source, noting the historical contexts of the film industry, the women's movement, and the status of race relations at the time of production. The first section of each chapter will examine the source novel of the film, looking particularly at the portrayal of interracial female friendships which determines the ideological perspective of the work. The second section will address questions of adaptation from novel to film, outlining the central changes and choices of the filmmaker and suggesting how those choices determine the ideological stance of the film.

In addition, this section will provide relevant information about the production circumstances of each film, in both general and particular terms, as well as a brief mention of its critical reception.

The third section will examine the "mammy" figure in terms of her relationships with the other women characters in the film version, and how these relationships contribute to the overall definition of black womanhood emerging in each film. In Chapter Two, dealing with Imitation of Life, this section is divided into two parts. The first examines the mammy figure, Delilah, in relationship with her white peer Bea and her facilitation of Bea's discovery of herself as white woman. The second section examines Delilah's relationship as mother to her biological daughter Peola, whom she guides to an acceptance of her "place" as black woman.

The film section for Chapter Three is divided into three parts, centered on the white protagonist, Finn, and her search for womanhood as facilitated by the characters Anna, Marianna, and Sophia. The patchwork structure of the film How to Make an American Quilt, which helps Finn to define her appropriate place as white woman by considering the life experiences of a number of women, necessitates this difference in structure from the examination of Imitation of Life. However, just as Anna functions as the creative center binding the metaphorical patchwork of lives in the quilt, her narrative also structures the film by guiding Finn through the multiple alternatives to restore her eventually to the traditional sphere of domesticity.

Finally, a concluding chapter will deal with the ways in which the definition of black womanhood changes from Imitation of Life to How to Make an American Quilt. In what ways is the mammy figure a dynamic and evolving character within the communities of these family melodramas? In what ways is she static? An examination of her metamorphosis reflects, to some extent, a changing American consciousness in terms of feminism and race relations. However, this same examination reveals that some aspects of

the familiar stereotype have not changed and are still functional in these films. The ultimate aim of this investigation, then, is to explore and explain how the traditional stereotype of the mammy functions in these two family melodramas.

Chapter Two

Downstairs and Upstairs: Definitions of Black and White Womanhood in Imitation of Life

A best-selling writer of women's popular fiction, Fannie Hurst published Imitation of Life in 1933. During her career from 1918-1961, Hurst published twenty-seven books and was active in several important movements, including women's labor unions and civil rights (Wilenz 21). Well-known for her patronage of Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston, Hurst's interest in promoting black art seems at odds with the stereotypical portrayal of both Delilah and Peola in Imitation of Life. However, as Gay Wilenz suggests, Peola may be, to some extent, autobiographical, as Hurst hid her own Jewish ethnicity for much of her adult life (40). Extremely popular in her own day, Hurst was best known for writing novels, including Lummox (1923) and Back Street (1931), which were often adapted into women's film melodrama. Twenty-eight film adaptations were made in all from her writing (Fischer 159), including two versions of Imitation of Life.

An immediate success, the novel was quickly adapted first by Universal Studios to film in 1934, directed by John Stahl and starring Claudette Colbert and Louise Beavers (later remade in 1959 by Douglas Sirk, starring Lana Turner and Juanita Moore). Imitation of Life, both as novel and the 1934 film adaptation, depicts a friendship and partnership between a black woman, Delilah, and her white employer, Bea. Bea is able to market Delilah's culinary skills effectively to create a multimillion dollar enterprise. Delilah, meanwhile, not only contributes the product (becoming a product herself in the process) to Bea's enterprise but manages the home and the women's two daughters as well.

As a family melodrama with a key black woman in the constellation of characters, Imitation of Life differentiates itself from most other films of the genre. Both the novel and film versions investigate several recurrent tensions of the genre through Bea's struggles to

balance career, motherhood, and romantic love. The inclusion of Delilah into her story, however, is interesting in that the narrative action of Bea's rise to fame and fortune would literally be impossible without her--because Delilah's contribution is irreplaceable, she assumes greater importance than a typical secondary character. However, Delilah continues to function in the role of stereotypical "mammy" despite her significant contributions to Bea's success. As such, she is a nurturer and a helpmate to Bea emotionally, relating to Bea in a simultaneously maternal and subordinate fashion. The interactions and exchanges among these two women and their daughters provides an interesting study of the various definitions of womanhood emerging for white and black women.

The women's relationships with each other create inevitable conflicts which dramatize existing assumptions about black and white womanhood in American culture. Because she is a woman, Delilah as black mammy fits comfortably into the necessary community of women for family melodrama. However, because black womanhood is defined differently than white womanhood, the "mammy" allows the white protagonist to explore her own tensions and desires without offering a threat to romantic love, family, or career. The taboo of miscegenation, as well as the assumption that black women's lives are governed entirely by other problems (which they generally are), allows Delilah to function as a peer to Bea without the possibility of rivalry or jealousy. Moreover, the status of the mammy figure as contented, celibate woman removes the potential distractions of Delilah's own love life, enabling her to focus on Bea's romantic conflicts. One emergent definition of black and white womanhood, then, is a fundamental difference in presumed needs and desires. In order for Bea to fulfill the requirements of successful womanhood, she must marry and establish a (patriarchal) home for herself and Jessie.

Delilah, on the other hand, requires quite the opposite for herself; as a successful black woman, she takes under her wing a white family in addition to her own. Although

she does so primarily to better conditions for her own daughter, Delilah's devotion to this white family, to some extent, comes at the expense of Peola. Ironically, the problematic representation of black womanhood, characterized by Peola, results in part from her experiences in Bea's white household, and her mother's unwavering devotion to the innate superiority of whiteness over blackness. Black womanhood, as defined by Delilah, is a condition to endure, in which one finds glory only in the associated suffering. Peola's resistance to that definition, as a woman who can function as either a white or black woman, ultimately works to validate her mother's perception in the end--Peola may not assume the guise of white womanhood because there is something fundamentally different about her. She is not allowed to hope for the same lifeway as Bea and Jessie, and is therefore returned by the film narrative's conclusion to her appropriate place by accepting the validity of her mother's life.

Bea and Peola, in both the novel and the film versions, question and challenge the accepted cultural definitions of white and black womanhood. Delilah, then, as the mammy/mother figure responsible for passing along those accepted definitions to her charges, is key to the resolution of both versions. Yet adaptation to film usually requires cutting, and because of the narrative condensation of both Bea and Peola's experiences, the film *Delilah* assumes an even more integral role in that her death precipitates both characters' final capitulation to their appropriate paradigms of womanhood. While Hurst's Bea realizes her "mistake" of devotion to her multimillion dollar industry, that realization is more a result of her terrible loneliness than Delilah's influence. Peola, moreover, does not return and repent at her mother's funeral in the novel version, and presumably leads a successful life as a white wife in South America. The film version of Imitation of Life, then, by adhering to the generic prescription of family melodrama, relies on Delilah to shepherd both a white and black woman from a challenge to acceptance of their very different spheres of womanhood, defining each one by the negation of the other.

The Source Novel

A melodramatic and tragic novel, Imitation of Life deals with central issues of the 1920s and 1930s, including race relations and feminism. Published during a time when The Crisis kept a running tally of black lynchings, Hurst creates black characters who do acknowledge racial injustice but continue to believe in the superiority of whiteness. Most commentary on race relations comes from the mouths of these characters. Feminism, on the other hand, receives more direct treatment, as the narrator digresses on several occasions into an ambivalent indictment of the women's rights movement. As Diane Lichtenstein points out:

Hurst suggests that hard work and financial success are no substitutes for a warm home life and "man-lovin'," and yet she creates a female character whom we respect This [Bea Pullman] is an ambiguous character which has as its model a capable, shrewd entrepreneur who is also a lonely, old-fashioned woman. (35)

The narrator supplements the example of Bea's life through direct commentary on the women's rights' movement, noting in particular the irony that Bea, a homemaker at heart, should find herself the heroine of feminists across the country. It is within this ironic situation that Bea's black domestic, Delilah, comes to play an integral role as a "mammy" who attempts to shepherd Bea back into the fold of marriage and maternity.

The story traces a widow's rise from a struggling independent business woman to a millionaire tycoon following World War I. As the novel opens with her mother's death in Atlantic City, the young Bea Chipley soon finds herself married to the much older Benjamin Pullman. A tenant in her parents' home, Mr. Pullman (as Bea refers to him throughout the marriage) runs a pickle and relish concession on the boardwalk; he also sells maple syrup around town on the side. As the result of an arranged marriage, far from any young girl's romantic fantasy, Bea nevertheless becomes pregnant and feels content

and secure in her role as homemaker. However, when Mr. Pullman is killed in a train accident, Bea is left alone and penniless to provide for her infant daughter Jessie and her paralyzed father.

In desperate need of money but unable to afford child care, Bea cleverly uses her husband's business cards (B. Pullman) to continue his side business of selling maple syrup without revealing her gender. Working slavishly day and night, leaving Jessie with her father for only short intervals, Bea manages not only to continue but also to expand the business. Eventually, her father's physical deterioration forces her to take in Delilah, a black woman willing to work only for food and board. After Delilah and her daughter Peola move in, Bea begins to make real progress as a businesswoman. Not only does Delilah run the house and care for the children and father, but her culinary skills also become the basis for Bea's new business schemes.

First, Delilah makes a batch of candy hearts from an unclaimed order of maple sugar. Bea decides to box the candy and market it to vendors across town; the candy, distributed in boxes with a print of Delilah's face, is soon a success. Soon after, Bea decides to open a concession of her own on the boardwalk, featuring Delilah's homemade waffles served, of course, with maple syrup. Continued backing from the maple sugar company (still unaware that Bea is a woman) allows the women to open B. Pullman restaurants in major cities across the country. Bea is heralded as a female success story by women's rights' activists, although her only desire, a recurrent motif throughout the novel is to settle finally into a dream home and have the opportunity to raise her own child. Always working towards but never actualizing her dream home of married and marital bliss, Bea understands that "[S]he had built a colossus, when all she had ever wanted was a homelife behind swiss curtains of her own hemming" (278). The business itself, then, exists as a means to the very dream which it prevents for the entirety of Bea's life.

Bea is hardly able to notice, much less enjoy, much of her life as she works to make her business a success. Only when she finds herself a millionaire with leisure time does Bea realize her lack of a social or personal life. Jessie, at school in Switzerland, has grown up without her, and Bea recognizes that her true dream of a home and family has yet to come true. Although her early and passionless marriage was hardly the stuff of Bea's romantic fantasies, her initial reaction as a new wife was that "[M]arriage freed you from the concerns of girlhood, eased your sense of being an outsider to life Marriage established you. Gave you a sense of security and being cared for in a special private way that meant everything" (Hurst 35). Significantly, then, the young Bea identified marriage as womanhood itself, as well as a form of security. Pregnancy, moreover, "compensated" for any disappointment in her marriage, making the "sense of let-down merge readily into the not unpleasant routine of her marriage to Mr. Pullman" (Hurst 47). Because the older Bea, with plenty of financial security, still lacks self-confidence in personal matters, this security obviously reaches well beyond the material. Marriage and motherhood provide a communal security, creating a niche for the female individual within a larger world. Bea, as a successful businesswoman, carves out an alternative niche for herself within white patriarchy, but in so doing loses the sense of herself as "woman" which, in turn, causes a lifetime of misery.

Delilah is the first to identify Bea's problem as the (unwilling) rejection of motherhood and marriage. Working so tirelessly over the years leaves Bea with little time for mothering Jessie, much less for falling in love. Noting first that "you and your chile is too polite to each other, Miss Bea. What you need to get acquainted is some good old hollering fests, lak me and mine" (181), Delilah also expresses concern over Bea's lonely and celibate existence:

Man-lovin' was what I said. All dis here gittin' us upper and upper is all right,

but 'taint gittin' mah child nawthin' for herself I doan' know nothin' about Mr. Pullman, honey. You ain't never mentioned him much. I ain't nevah asked, knowin' mah place. But I've seen his picture, honey. You ain't nevah had your share. Nothin' lak your share. You doan' know nothin'. It ain't in your eyes, honey. (186)

Here, we see that Delilah not only fully endorses the idea that life, even the "good life," means nothing without a man, she also claims that Bea "doan' know nothin'," an interesting claim to make about an American success story.

By falling in love with her business manager Frank Flake, a man eight years her junior, Bea hopes that she might finally realize her dream of marital bliss. Having reworked her blueprints for the unbuilt dream house which serves, throughout the novel, as the symbol of Bea's unrealized fantasy, Bea decides to sell her business and create the perfect home for husband and daughter. Instead, Frank and Jessie disrupt her plans by falling in love with each other upon the daughter's return from school, leaving Bea to continue her life as a mere "imitation," without a love of her own. This tragic ending is intended to leave the reader with a sense of the futility of Bea's life, although as one caustic reviewer noted in 1933, "just now one finds it difficult to weep over the sex-starved life of an attractive woman under forty who is worth about six million dollars" (Winsten 198). About the remainder of Bea's life, the narrator tells us only that "her grandchildren were growing up to regard her as a magnificent legend," as she continues to expand her reputation into international fame (306).

Bea's life as a failed wife and mother is a tragedy in this novel because her financial success does not balance that loss of a "true" woman's personal happiness. Delilah, however, functions under a different paradigm of motherhood, which demands that she contribute not only to her own daughter's happiness but that she allow her obligation to a white family to usurp her biological motherhood if necessary. Delilah, unlike Bea, is

simultaneously capable of mothering and working outside of her own home. Part of her job description is, of course, to mother the white household, but Delilah works long hours at the restaurants as well, both cooking waffles and adding necessary ambiance. Delilah even mothers hundreds of customers, particularly the homesick young men who leave for war but send postcards back to Aunt Delilah praising her waffles. For Delilah, then, although mothering is an appropriate career, it occurs in large measure outside of her own home and family, in direct opposition to the rules for white motherhood.

During the years of Bea's rise to fame, Delilah not only runs the home but also becomes a national icon, as famous as Bea herself. Not only is the image of her face blazoned across the boxes of her candy hearts, but actual Universities of Delilah eventually exist to train other black women to be mammies in B. Pullman restaurants across the country. Nevertheless, she refuses to share in the financial success to establish a home of her own; she wishes only to support Peola as well as possible and to have a grand funeral upon her death. No longer interested in marriage, claiming "I's had it and I's done wid it, but I's had it while it lasted" (188), Delilah implicitly rejects the notion that a man is necessary for living a worthwhile life. At the same time, however, although deserted by her own husband and fully aware of the instability of a marriage, Delilah argues repeatedly that Bea will not be happy without it. "Done wid it" herself, Delilah's life, then, becomes an endless sacrifice to the well-being of others, especially Bea and Peola. Her version of womanhood, then, is to adhere to the rules of her social "place" and literally work herself into the grave for a white family, declining access to any accouterments of white womanhood in her own life. Her life, in order to validate white supremacy, then, must act as a negation of her life. It is this negation which ultimately alienates her daughter, whose appearance offers the possibility of (illicitly) achieving the status of white womanhood.

The relationship between Delilah and Peola is charged at best, as Delilah's matriarchal success in the white world falls short in the eyes of her daughter. Peola is

light-skinned enough to easily pass for white and often does so, much to the chagrin of her mother. She eventually returns home as an adult to announce her engagement to a white man and to renounce the affiliation with her mother once and for all. Moving to South America with her new husband, she never contacts Delilah again, not even returning home for her mother's funeral. Delilah dies broken-hearted, literally at Bea's feet, which she kisses before passing away. This action signals her devotion to Bea as a servant and her general reverence for white womanhood, an attitude which has contributed to Peola's devastating rejection of Delilah.

Peola is the only character in the novel to present a significant challenge to essentialist definitions of white and black womanhood by demonstrating, in the classic tradition of the tragic mulatto, that a black woman is in fact capable of assuming the guise of a white one. However, her challenge is limited by her acceptance of white superiority in that she wants to join the master class rather than validate the worth of her own (if, as a "mulatto," she can accurately identify herself as one race *or* the other). Her reasons for desiring to escape the restrictions of black womanhood in America are obvious, making Delilah's resistance to Peola's desires open to question. Delilah, very dark-skinned, has no choice but to make the best of her life as a black woman during the first decades of twentieth century America; why does she expect her daughter to make the difficult choice to live life in the same way?

Delilah states her case in unambivalent terms when Jessie and Peola are small children playing together, completely innocent of racial division or prejudice. When the girls are caught sticking pins into Jessie's nearly comatose grandfather, Delilah tells Bea:

Dat liddle yaller-headed one of yourn is no innocenter than mah black one, only mine might as well begin learnin' herself now, that what's jes naughty for a white chile, can be downright ag'in' de law if a black one does it. 'Tain't no use mah chile tryin' to get herself raised on de idea all men is equal. Maybe day is in de eyes

of de Lawd, but it's de eyes of man I's talkin' 'bout. (101)

Concerned, obviously, with the dangerous consequences for a black woman caught passing for white, Delilah also embraces the hope that Peola will learn to accept her "true" position as a black woman because she wants, "mah young un to know de glory of bein' born one of de Lawd's low-down ones" (119). For Delilah, then, races were created by God, and, despite the pain of being black in a white society, she requires that Peola accept her divinely created status. Delilah's very perception of the world relies upon various hoodoo superstitions mixed with the tenets of Christianity; the world is a mysterious place that demands not human interrogation but acceptance in order to avoid unknown dangers. The way things are, according to Delilah, is not subject to change, an attitude which serves to validate the essentialist definitions of black and white womanhood she passes down to Peola and Bea.

Delilah understands her position as a black woman to be that of the stereotypical construction of "mammy"; her place, in relation to whiteness, is to accept and support the (earthly) superiority of whiteness. Her dedication to preserving Bea's status as a white woman at her own expense, then, is not particularly surprising; Peola's refusal to do so stems from the possibility of achieving her mother's glorified conception of white womanhood for herself. In either case, the representation of black women in Hurst's Imitation of Life offers an alternative to patriarchal constructions of white womanhood, which ultimately works to validate those constructions. The issues under scrutiny in Hurst's novel lent themselves well to a film adaptation within the genre of family melodrama. The choices of the filmmakers about which issues to articulate on screen and how to resolve those issues reveal much about the images of womanhood validated on the 1930s Hollywood screen.

Novel to Film

Though nominated by the Academy for best picture in 1934, the reception of Imitation of Life was not unproblematic. The race issues, in particular, sparked debates in the black community, especially over Peola's dilemma. As Sterling Brown noted in 1935, "It requires no searching analysis to see in Imitation of Life the old stereotype of the contented Mammy, and the tragic mulatto; and the ancient idea about the mixing of the races" (288). These (mis)representations, Brown goes on to say, have the end result that "Hollywood gets something less artistic and less true" than social reality (290). Brown also points out, as a positive aspect of the film, that the word "nigger" is not used, "even in places where logically it should occur" (288). Apparently giving credit to the white filmmakers for their tasteful choice, Brown seemed unaware of the contribution of Louise Beavers, the actress who portrayed Delilah. As Donald Bogle notes, Beavers enlisted the help of the NAACP during filming to have "nigger" replaced by "black," a case she eventually won, though not without retaliation: "When she was called afterward into the front office and made to pronounce 'Negro' repeatedly as a means of punishment, she may have wondered if she had really won after all" (64). Although Beavers herself was a far cry from the mammies that she gained a reputation for playing, her experience at the hands of the studio bosses indicates something of the racial consciousness in the minds behind the film.

Commercial filmmaking, at this point in American history, was controlled by the major studios. Hollywood studios of the 1930s were run predominantly by white men. The major studios not only produced films targeted toward a large, general audience but also controlled distribution and exhibition. Obviously, then, power over the cinematic images created for and viewed by the American public was held by relatively few people in the industry, generally white men. However, these men were not solely responsible for the

content of their films; as noted above, because the studios targeted the largest market possible, the genre film developed from the feedback (measured in profit) from that audience. In addition to providing audiences with what they wanted/needed to see on screen, Hollywood worked diligently to avoid offending its diverse audience. Though not always possible, choices about what would finally appear on screen during the 1930s were made with certain moral guidelines, which ultimately worked to preserve the white, patriarchal status quo of American culture.

Tino Balio, in his history of American cinema, notes three controls on the content of Hollywood film: state and municipal censorship boards, pressure groups, and the Production Code (4). Because the first two operated from outside the studios themselves, the self-regulation of the Production Code is, perhaps, the best source for explicating the choices of 1930s filmmakers. In its earliest form, produced by the Hays office in 1927, the Code amounted to a long list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" which listed very specific rules for the content of a film (Maltby 43). By 1930, however, this list was expanded into the "Code to Govern the Making of Talking, Synchronized, and Silent Motion Pictures," along with the addition of three "General Principles":

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence, the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil, or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. (Maltby 48)

Written in 1930 but not enforced so strictly until July of 1934 (Maltby 62), the Code was implemented just in time to have an effect on the adaptation of Imitation of Life, released in November of that year. According to Maltby, several "films in production, including The Barretts of Wimpole Street, Bordertown, and Imitation of Life underwent substantial modifications" (62). Whatever those modifications may have been, the final product adheres to the dictates of the Code. Because 1930s films produced by major studios agreed

to follow these rules, assumptions about the sensibilities of the majority of Americans concerning the rather vague "correct standards of life" and "natural law" can be derived from the particular narratives and characterizations of individual films.

The woman's film, then, as a genre dealing specifically with the interests and conflicts of women, reveals some aspects of the working definitions of womanhood in American culture. As do most Hollywood films, the woman's film relies to an extent on the creation of stereotypes in order to demonstrate or provide examples of both good and bad role models for women. Jackie Byars defines the stereotype as "ideology made tangible," and notes that they "function to reinforce ideological hierarchies by naturalizing the occupation of specific rungs by specific groups" (73). The stereotypical definitions of white and black womanhood which emerge in Imitation of Life, though derivative of Hurst's novel, articulate the seemingly "natural" assumptions made by Hollywood about women; because the focus of the woman's film of the 1930s was generally a white protagonist, the inclusion of African-American women involved the stereotyping of her as an "other," a way to help define the protagonist through negation.

The final assessment of appropriate womanhood in the film remains true to the novel: white women are only truly happy as mothers and wives, while black women exist to facilitate the desires of the white world or suffer the consequences. However, significant changes do exist in the film adaptation, attributable in large part to the dictates of the Code. The choices made by the screenwriter, William Hurlbut, to include and exclude various aspects of the narrative are a particularly important starting point for revealing the "natural" and "appropriate" Hollywood definitions for women in 1934 America.

The basic plot of the film remains the same in that a white woman, Bea Pullman, rises to fame and fortune as a successful entrepreneur, marketing a product provided by the contributions of her black domestic, Delilah. Again, each woman has a daughter, and Delilah's daughter Peola can pass for white. The women open a restaurant selling

pancakes made from Delilah's secret family recipe, eventually boxing the pancake flour and becoming multimillionaires. Both Bea and Delilah remain single throughout the film, concentrating on running the business and raising their daughters until, true to the novel, Delilah dies and finally realizes her only "selfish" desire of a grandiose funeral. Although the essential plot and ideological message of the film resembles that of the novel, several important changes alter the dynamics of the women's relationships and work to emphasize an unambiguous distinction between white and black womanhood.

Although the story of her financial success remains virtually unchanged, Bea herself undergoes significant change in the transformation from novel to film. As played by Claudette Colbert, Bea is a graceful, independent, and self-confident woman who seems capable of making her way in the world with little difficulty. Although part of this perception is due, undoubtedly, to the condensation of Hurst's harrowing account of Bea's struggles, Colbert portrays a woman juggling the pressures of home and business quite well. Although a love interest does not enter the picture until after her success, the audience understands that this situation is Bea's choice and not a lack of opportunity, as is the situation for Hurst's workaholic Bea, whose appearance to men was that of a "dowdiness induced by frantic haste" (Hurst 73). Moreover, once Bea achieves success, we see her surrounded by an upper class coterie of friends celebrating her company's tenth anniversary, unlike the lonely millionaire of the novel, who suddenly realizes that "she held the unique record of having had part in not one social function on any nature whatsoever" since the inception of her business enterprise (Hurst 230). In addition to her rich social life, Colbert's Bea also, significantly, manages to maintain a close relationship with her daughter Jessie.

As Jackie Byars notes, Bea fulfills the requirements for Marjorie Rosen's "The Woman Alone" in Hollywood film, defined as "a warm, loving, and independent person who maintains an opulent, vital, and productive lifestyle" (75-76). Although Jessie is away

at school once Bea achieves her success, much evidence in the film supports the fact that the film Bea takes an active role in raising her own daughter. Part of this change results from different timing; Delilah appears in Bea's life when Jessie is two years old, rather than when she is an infant. Nevertheless, Colbert's Bea still spends much intimate time with Jessie on screen after Delilah's arrival. In contrast to Hurst's Bea, whose initial relationship to Jessie was that of a "mouth whose first quiver and howl had shaken the world with the imperious demand to be fed" (92), the film's Bea has time to peek in on the sleeping Jessie after a day at work, and to play Old Maid (an interesting choice) with her when home sick from school. Moreover, the joyous reunion between Bea and Jessie upon the daughter's return from boarding school, planning their time together, demonstrates clearly the friendship between the two women. However, as Byars also notes, Bea still makes "maternal mistakes attributed to the demands of her career" (76) and must learn to embrace the role of mother despite any personal sacrifice required in the process.

The crisis point of Bea's relationship with Jessie, however, occurs not as a result of too much time at the office but after Jessie develops a crush on Bea's love interest, Stephen Archer (the charming ichthyologist who replaces Frank Flake). After meeting Stephen at her own dinner party, Bea falls madly in love; in contrast to the situation in the novel, Bea's love is reciprocated, due in part to her revised image as strong but loving woman. The romance with Stephen, like her venture into the male-dominated business world, however, threatens to remove Bea from her "natural" place as mother. Jessie's infatuation, then, is a necessary conflict for the generic requirement of returning Bea entirely to the sphere of domesticity. Although Jessie never confronts Bea over Stephen, once she learns that he is inaccessible she upsets and frightens Bea with a plea for an early return to school. At this point, the close-ups of Bea's distressed face reveal her realization of her precarious maternal relationship; soon after, Delilah's death and Peola's belated return convince Bea of the personal sacrifices she must make in order to be a true mother to Jessie. Here, while

the strong female protagonist is not usurped by her daughter, she, like Hurst's character, gives up her own hopes for romantic love as the only means possible for maintaining her maternal relationship.

The importance of maternal relationships in the film version is again emphasized by the attention paid to the troubles between Delilah and Peola. As in the novel, Peola's desire to pass as a white woman disrupts the relationship with her mother, whom she perceives as the source and proof of her unwanted blackness. However, a major plot difference arises in that Peola does not marry a white man, which would have constituted a direct violation of the Code's "Shall not appear in movies" list which specifically named "miscegenation (sex relations between white and black races)" under the heading "Offensive to certain individuals" (Spring 299). Instead, Peola runs away from the black college she attends (at her mother's request) to work as a cashier in a restaurant. Eventually unmasked by Delilah and Bea in front of her employer, Peola does return home for a final renunciation of Delilah. However, the other significant change to Peola's story is that she does return home again, repentant, for Delilah's funeral, and in so doing assumes her rightful "place" in the world as a black woman. Again, the dictate against miscegenation may have required that return; after all, a black woman posing as white represented a threat to the unsuspecting white male. However, an additional explanation lies in the dictates of the genre itself--Peola, specifically as black woman, participates in the feminine exploration of definitions and boundaries that characterize the family melodrama. Thus Peola, like Bea, must return to her appropriate sphere of womanhood by the end of the film as well. And again, that return is facilitated in large measure by the influence of the black mammy Delilah.

The return of both Bea and Peola to their appropriate lifeways by the end of the film, then, is a central change from novel to film and reconfigures Delilah in the process. Delilah does not live to see the fruit of her labor; in fact, the funeral itself is instrumental in

the film for reuniting Delilah's "children" and affirming their acceptance of her definitions of womanhood. Delilah literally gives her life in order to fulfill her duty as mammy; once she does so, no further need or function exists for her in the family melodrama. Delilah functions as a supreme mother, raising and guiding both white and black female charges into their prescribed, separate roles as white and black women. More important than Delilah herself, then, is the perpetuation of the white patriarchal (supremacist) system which constructed her, embodied in the lives of her "offspring." While Delilah's sacrificial role of black mammy to Bea is certainly carried over from the novel (she dies on the floor kissing Bea's feet), she is not capable, in Hurst's novel, of restoring Bea to a the life of a contented white woman. Moreover, Peola slips from her grasp entirely, leaving for Bolivia as a white woman, never to be heard from again. The film makes clear, in contrast, that Delilah's sacrifices were not in vain, by validating and collapsing the role of black mammy into black woman. In so doing, the film erases even the small steps taken by Hurst to problematize that "natural" definition for black women through Peola.

Differentiated from most stereotypical Hollywood mammies by the presence of Peola, Delilah nevertheless maintains the tradition of sacrificing her own family in order to support and nurture the white family. Peola's presence, as a little black girl learning her limitations in the white world, has devastating consequences for their black family, rendering even more visible Delilah's sacrifice as a mammy. The "natural" definitions of black and white women here clearly show a return to the nostalgic role of the slave mammy in the life of her white mistress; the life of the white mistress is of greater value and, therefore, naturally usurps the life of her mammy. The energy Delilah does direct towards her own child, significantly, works to convince Peola of her "natural" station in life as a black woman. All explorations of black womanhood occur, then, not only in relation to whiteness but as a validation of white superiority in the film, made even more striking by

the narrative changes from novel to film which make that message possible to convey in condensed form.

The Film

The opening sequence of Imitation of Life brings Delilah and Bea into one another's lives and establishes immediately the pervasive theme of motherhood, used to link the black and white protagonists. The opening shot is a rubber duck bobbing in a bathtub, with the accompanying soundtrack of Baby Jessie's voice demanding, "I want my Quack Quack." Opening with an intimate scene of mother/daughter relations, Stahl refers back to this opening at the close of the film when Bea, having narrowly salvaged her relationship with Jessie after Delilah's funeral, reminds Jessie of the morning that Delilah first entered their lives. As mother and daughter walk arm in arm out of the frame in the final shot of the film, Bea repeats Jessie's phrase, "I want my Quack, Quack." As Flitterman-Lewis notes, "this circularity signifies a reassertion of the utopian maternal which in fact structures the entire film" (48). The maternal connections which link Bea and Delilah, then, frame the narrative of their relationship with one another; the relationship itself is also informed by the maternal paradigm of black mammy, as Delilah serves as Bea's nurturer and helpmate. Although much of that help derives from Delilah's essential contributions to Bea's financial success, Delilah also ensures that Bea will assume her true role as woman by returning her to the maternal sphere invoked at the opening of the film. As such, Delilah assumes the role of black mammy to Bea by passing down a legacy of womanhood to her white charge; she performs a similar function as the biological mother of Peola. In the role of black mammy, then, Delilah passes down her essential convictions of black and white womanhood to both Bea and Peola.

Delilah's dual function as Bea's mammy and Peola's mother, thus, comprises her contributions to the exploration of feminine self outside the paradigm of white patriarchy,

as well as the facilitation of a return to that paradigm. As Valerie Smith notes, Bea and Peola are "the two women who leave their rightful place; these are the two who must be returned to those places at the end of the film" (51). Delilah is a constant reminder, for each woman, of her appropriate place.

Bea and Delilah meet immediately following the opening scene of Bea bathing Jessie on what turns out to be a particularly hectic morning. Juggling a business call and breakfast preparations, in addition to bathing Jessie, Bea quickly loses control of the situation with the further interruption of Delilah's arrival at her door, looking for work. However, Delilah's arrival turns out to be a blessing in disguise, when she salvages breakfast and helps Bea restore order and harmony. This initial meeting is significant in several ways to establishing the definitions of black and white womanhood endorsed by the film. Generally imaged as competent throughout most of the film, here Bea cannot alone manage the impossible task of being in several places at once, immediately setting up her need for Delilah.

Bea initially believes that she is unable to afford Delilah's help, but Delilah effectively convinces her otherwise by relying on the assumptions surrounding the stereotypical mammy. As Bea re-enters the kitchen with Jessie to find breakfast on the table, her delight is interrupted by Jessie pointing at Delilah and pronouncing, "Horsey." Delilah's initial reaction is to glance backwards over her shoulder; obviously, then, the label surprises her. Although Bea quickly asks, "Why darling, what do you mean by saying such a thing?," when Jessie repeats her observation, qualified as "nice horsey," both women erupt into laughter. Delilah good-naturedly responds with "I been took for many things but I ain't never been took for that before." Here, through the reaction of a very young white girl to the presence of a black woman, we see the seemingly "natural" hierarchy established between the races. Jessie identifies Delilah as an animal (a friendly animal used as a beast of burden) and thereby differentiates herself from the human, but

different, woman standing before her. Although Bea "scolds" Jessie in Delilah's presence, her quick laughter, as well as her continued snickering with Jessie as Delilah turns to leave the frame, indicate her tacit endorsement of Jessie's appraisal.

Initially surprised by Jessie's outburst, revealing that she in no way accepts that label as part of her self-identity, Delilah quickly smoothes over the conflict and reassures Bea's sense of "natural" racial hierarchy in the process. Here Delilah identifies herself as the quintessential mammy, creating a sense of racial harmony by adhering to white dictates of her "place" in society. Preparing to leave, Delilah persists with her petition to work for Bea, asking: "You right sure you wouldn't need someone for your own self now? I'm right handy with housework, and takin' care of children--that just comes natural to me." Significantly, Delilah literally offers herself first to Bea for her "own self," before launching into a list of her "natural" qualifications, defining herself as the black mammy available for the white mistress' needs, no matter what they may be.

Only when Bea learns about Peola, however, does she begin to relent; here again, Stahl stresses the bond of motherhood between the two women, but does so in order to eventually use the daughters to fully differentiate between the mothers. Turning from Bea, the camera follows Delilah across the kitchen to the door, where the two daughters stand on opposite sides of the threshold, looking at one another. Physically (though very gently) moving Jessie out of the way to let Peola in, Delilah essentially forces an entrance into this white world for her daughter, who enters the kitchen to stand beside Jessie. Bea notes that Peola is "a lovely little girl," to which Delilah immediately agrees, saying, "She's very light...Peola's a pretty nice brung up child, she ain't been dragged up like most of 'em is." Here a cut back to Peola and Jessie reveals Jessie inching closer to Peola, closing the distance between the young girls completely. Peola becomes acceptable in this space because of her proximity to whiteness; the sight of two innocent children together not only links Bea and Delilah as struggling single mothers but invokes a picture of racial harmony,

though not equality. Although Peola's proximity to whiteness is valued (indicating again a "natural" racial hierarchy), Peola's misinterpretation of her entrance into this white domestic space will form the center of conflict between herself and her mother. The resolution of conflicting definitions of black and white womanhood (for Bea and Peola) is both precipitated by and negotiated through Delilah as the film continues.

Bea's Mammy

Bea Pullman, a beautiful and successful mother and businesswoman, lives a seemingly charmed life. Released from the confines of an arranged marriage by her husband's death, Bea takes over his maple syrup business and enters into the world of commerce. Typical of the family melodrama's protagonist, Bea is freed from part of her presumed social responsibility as wife and is able to investigate aggressively a life for herself. However, Bea is not only widow but mother, and it is this responsibility that demands her unwavering allegiance in this film. The inevitable conflicts of time divided between work and family for a single mother are clearly portrayed in the opening sequence; the arrival of Delilah, to act as Jessie's mammy, allows Bea relatively guilt-free time away from the child to pursue a career. Important to note, as well, is that her initial business enterprise, a restaurant serving Delilah's secret recipe pancakes, shares the same space as her home, allowing her to pass freely from the sphere of business to that of domesticity. Bea, then, seems to embody the impossible dream for the woman who wants to have it all.

Bea's success as a businesswoman allows her to investigate (and to prove her capability) in the man's world. Her eventual wealth allows her to send Jessie to boarding school, removing herself to an extent from the responsibility of motherhood for a time to enjoy a lavish and glamorous lifestyle. To a Depression audience of women, Bea's enormous home (with servants to clean it), expensive clothes, and glittering parties surely represented to most the extreme of all they were living without. Bea's life, for much of the

film, is the perfect escape fantasy; even her climb to the top seem effortless (in striking contrast to the novel's painful detail of that journey), as cuts move the audience from one of Bea's successes to the next. As the embodiment of "The Woman Alone," Bea's combined intelligence and charm give her a foothold in the male business world and, though men solicit her attention, she manages to hold them at bay and continue life as an independent woman.

This fantasy is, however, undercut in two ways. First, Bea's rise to the top could not possibly be as effortless as it seems, either for herself or Delilah, who contributes both product and manual labor. Second, Bea must eventually pay for the relinquishment of her maternal duties; in the world of family melodrama, she must return completely to the sphere of maternity in order to validate herself as true woman. As Basinger notes about Bea, "she makes maternal mistakes that are attributed to the demands of her career, not to her unloving nature. In the end, she is willing to sacrifice her own sexual satisfaction for her daughter's happiness" (76). Delilah, significantly, facilitates not only Bea's exploration outside the traditional paradigm of white womanhood but her return to it as well. The relationship between Bea and Delilah, then, is a revealing one in the investigation of emergent definitions of womanhood, particularly in terms of how white and black womanhood define each other in the film.

According to Jeanine Basinger, the relationship between Bea and Delilah is that of an "alliance," or a "marriage of shared responsibilities" (204). A closer look at the interactions between the two women reveals, however, that their relationship lacks the reciprocity characteristic of a true alliance or friendship. For example, in the scene following Delilah and Peola's acceptance into the household, we see Bea arriving home from an admittedly difficult day delivering cans of maple syrup. Met by Delilah at the door, the two go upstairs to look in on Jessie, asleep before her mother could return home to tuck her in. Moving across the room to a chair, Bea gratefully accepts Delilah's offer of

a foot rub. Although both women have been on their feet all day, revealed in Delilah's explanation that Jessie played hard enough to wear herself out and that Bea's dinner is waiting downstairs, this kindness is predictably not reciprocated.

As the conversation turns to Bea's lack of a husband, which forces her to maintain the difficult hours of a saleswoman, Delilah begins what will become a recurrent theme throughout the film with the comment "You ought to have a man takin' care of you, honey." As Delilah asks questions about the late Mr. Pullman, Bea divulges that her early marriage was primarily one of convenience. Delilah expresses sympathy, noting that "It's too bad when you get started out on the wrong foot first," and she assures Bea that true love is surely coming to her. Throughout the exchange, the camera maintains either a medium shot of the two women together or a close-up of Bea as she tells her story. Although Basinger believes this scene indicates a "real" friendship between the two women (204), Bea tellingly expresses no interest in Delilah's marriage to Peola's father. Bea's lack of a man, rather than Delilah's, is the key information conveyed by the scene. However, the absence of Delilah's story is striking in that it follows immediately upon the initial meeting which clearly links her and Bea's maternal saga with one another.

Another oft-mentioned lack of reciprocity (Brown 285; Flitterman-Lewis 51) occurs with the establishment of Bea's business. After Delilah reveals the secret of her pancake recipe to Bea one morning, Bea returns that same day to inform (and order) Delilah that she will soon be selling pancakes on the boardwalk. The women and children set out for the store, cleaning supplies in Delilah's hands, to finish various negotiations and to begin to fix up the place. Delilah immediately begins to scrub the front window, as Bea shrewdly manipulates a painter and a fixture salesman to work for no money up front. The discussion with the painter leads to a brief focus on Delilah's contribution, however, as Bea describes the sign she wants for the front of the store. Commanding a confused Delilah to smile, a long close-up of Delilah's profile with a huge smile and eyes rolled

heavenward creates the image Bea uses to market first the restaurant and then the pancake flour. Bea triumphantly announces that, underneath this image, the sign will read "Aunt Delilah's Homemade Pancakes." In exchange for her secret recipe, appropriated by Bea without permission, Delilah receives additional labor and commodification.

Cutting from the scene of the unfinished concession to a bright and busy restaurant, the film moves the audience smoothly past the difficult labor necessary to start the business to the moment of Bea paying off her last debt. Significantly, the cut takes us from Bea's negotiations with the fixture man, conducted with Delilah scrubbing the huge picture window in the background, to a close-up of the completed Aunt Delilah sign. The camera then pans up to reveal Delilah, again hard at work in that window, flipping pancakes. The telling image of Delilah working while Bea spends the money, asserting, "*I've* finally paid my last debt," establishes the film's unproblematic assumption that Delilah should dedicate herself entirely to Bea's success. Further, Bea receives both the credit and the money as the fixture man replies, "You know, *you've* built up a mighty pretty little business here" [my emphases].

These assumptions are later validated by Delilah herself, when she refuses Bea's 20% offering in the corporation that bears her name. Nearly begging to retain her position as Bea's mammy, Delilah cries:

My own house? You gonna send me away, Miss Bea? I can't live with you no more? Oh, honey child, please don't send me away . . . don't do that to me . . .

How'm I gonna take care of you and Miss Jessie if I ain't here?...I's your cook and I want to stay your cook.

Bea's response to this is an affirmation of Delilah's wishes, along with the comment that Delilah would soon have Bea in tears. The nostalgia for a sacrificial black mammy reveals itself here not only in Delilah's rather unrealistic desire to stay in her role of domestic but in Bea's emotional acceptance of that gift. Whatever the desires of the black woman might

be, Delilah completely submerges these in order to validate her appropriate and "natural" place as black mammy. Not only does Bea generally fail to reciprocate Delilah's contributions to the relationship, but Delilah prevents any attempts in that direction. As a result, the "friendship" of Delilah and Bea remains free of tension, as Bea continues to profit and Delilah continues to work.

The scene ends with Delilah's sole request for a fine funeral, anticipating no reward for herself in this life and further ensuring that her needs and desires will not conflict with Bea's. Tellingly, the one desire articulated by Delilah for her own life (she has many for both Bea and Peola) is possible to fulfill only when she will not be able to enjoy it. Delilah knows and accepts that the recognition of her sacrifices and labor will not come during her lifetime; her status as black woman prevents those around her from noting anything extraordinary about her life. As black mammy, after all, she is just doing her job. Perhaps Delilah hopes for a grand funeral to be the final measure of her life's value, as her sense of place will not allow her to demand a recognition of that worth in this world.

Although Delilah demonstrates an acceptable contentment with her lot (and choice) as black mammy, this definition of black womanhood is also challenged in the film. As Valerie Smith points out:

while Bea's life proceeds from one fulfilling relationship to the next, Delilah's sufferings proliferate, due to her tortured relationship with Peola. However easily Delilah may accept her role, Peola refuses to do so. Each time the movie attempts to soar into an idyllic fantasy about Bea's charmed personal or professional future, Peola is there to return it to earth with her relentless demands for equality and acceptance. (48)

For example, after a grand anniversary party for Aunt Delilah's pancake flour, Bea and Delilah sit down to "talk the party over," despite the fact that Delilah spent the evening in her own quarters downstairs (along with an irritable Peola). Again rubbing Bea's feet

(now sore from dancing in pumps all night), Delilah presses for information about the handsome Stephen Archer, whom she manages to "get a peek at" from her position on the stairs. Reminding Bea that "'Taint romantic to want a man, just natural," Delilah continues to insist that Bea needs, despite her seeming satisfaction with life, to find a man in order to be complete. Again, Delilah's interest in Bea's love life, despite the striking absence of her own, re-establishes Delilah's contentment in nurturing Bea rather than cultivate her own life as woman. Obviously, the stakes of black womanhood are "naturally" different from those of white, a message that Delilah finds increasingly difficult to communicate to the daughter downstairs. The irony inherent in Delilah's celebration, from the basement, of the corporation bearing her name reinforces that presumed difference, as does the simultaneous ascent and descent of the two women going to bed after their chat. And that chat ends, significantly, with a discussion of Peola's place, as a woman caught between those worlds of black and white womanhood.

Peola's Mother

Peola's conflict with her mother begins when she is a young child, growing up in a household of white women and easily able to pass for white outside of the home. Peola quickly realizes the differences between the life of her mother and the life of Bea Pullman; given the choice because of her light skin, Peola opts for white womanhood. As Sandy Lewis-Flitterman argues:

her conflict is one of self-definition, for to remain with the mother (that is, to be black, and to be like the mother) means to accept a notion of an "essential" self and to assume the position of daughter, child, and servant . . . [Her] resistance can only be articulated, then, as a refusal of socially dictated positions on either side, a transgression of culturally determined racial and feminine boundaries. Peola's

assertion of self involves the crossing over into social territory forbidden to "black ladies." (46-7)

Peola's ability to pass places her, then, in a prime position to investigate the definitions of black and white womanhood by exploring that which is forbidden to her. Delilah's life of sacrifice represents, for Peola, all that she should be and all she will not have. Her resentment of blackness, then, expresses itself as a rejection of Delilah. The presence of Bea, emblem of successful white womanhood, on the other hand, offers a more acceptable paradigm for Peola's imitation and desires. However, just as Bea must in the context of the woman's melodrama return to her accepted societal place, so too must Peola accept and conform to the definition of black woman that ultimately separates her from Bea and articulates the essential definitions of black and white womanhood in the film. To transgress her black boundaries into white womanhood constitutes a threat to the validity of those "natural" definitions.

Following her party, Bea and Delilah discuss not only Stephen Archer but Peola's misery. During the party sequence itself, the film crosscuts between the music and revelry upstairs, and the tense, muted atmosphere of the basement. Able to hear the music but not to participate in it, Peola irritably tries to escape the reminder of the life above by reading. Delilah's insistence on calling attention to the party, however, catapults Peola into another outburst over the injustice of her life. Pulling herself away from Delilah's attempt to embrace her, Peola moves away and out of the frame, leaving Delilah alone on screen. A cut reveals Peola examining herself in a mirror--as she physically shuns the sharing of space with Delilah, she literally confronts the paradox of herself in the mirror, caught between her mother off-screen and behind, and the white music floating down from above. As Delilah enters the frame from behind her, Peola resists her verbally saying, "I want to be white, like I look." Pointing to the mirror for validation, she says, "Look at me! Am I not white? Isn't that a white girl there?" Peola articulates the incongruities of definitions of

white and black womanhood, based, after all, on physical features alone. If the physical features belie the "truth," then the assumptions surrounding the amorphous categories of whiteness or blackness become suspect. The maternal presence of Delilah is a threat, providing the sole evidence of Peola's subservient "place" as black woman. In exasperation, Peola asks her mother, "Oh what is there for me anyway?" as she turns out of the frame once again, leaving Delilah alone.

This scene offers far from the first rejection of Delilah; the film earlier documents Peola's unhappy realization of her presumed place in relation to Jessie and Bea. The earliest incident occurs at age ten, when Peola returns home in tears because Jessie called her black. The reactions of the adult women to the situation validate the functioning definitions of black and white womanhood in the film; as Delilah closely cradles the sobbing Peola, she tells her daughter, "Calm yourself baby. You gotta learn to take it and you might just as well begin now." Not only does Delilah validate the implied slur of Jessie's comment ("nigger" in the novel), but so does Bea, however well-meaning, by telling Jessie to apologize. Because the term is, actually, neutral and because the action in question takes place off-screen, Bea's scolding acts to indict Jessie for pointing out an unpleasant truth in Peola's life. Jessie herself claims to have meant nothing by the remark. Bea's assertion, however, that Jessie's remark was "mean and cruel" further validates Peola's negative reaction to her identity as black girl. Further, Delilah will not allow the apology, deferring to Jessie's presumed superiority and using the incident as an object lesson in the education of Peola as black woman.

Peola's response, as she is still cradled by her mother, is the harsh "It's you. You're black. You make me black. I won't, I won't, I won't be black!" Although Peola's situation is certainly heart-rending, her violent accusations against her mother tend to fuel sympathy for Delilah and, hence, for her mother's conceptions of black womanhood. As Valerie Smith notes about the scene: "the close-ups of Delilah register her pain at and

acceptance of her daughter's verbal abuse and encourage viewers to identify with her suffering rather than with Peola's rebelliousness" (49). This rebelliousness erupts again soon after this incident; the next sequence portrays Delilah surprising Peola at school and inadvertently revealing her a "as little colored child." Brushing past her mother with the devastating response, "I hate you," Peola runs home, leaving her mother behind.

Her arrival home, however, invites another confrontation with both Delilah and Bea; during this scene, Peola's idolatry of Bea as white woman becomes apparent. Bea enters the room as Peola yells at Delilah, "Go away and leave me alone." As Bea demands an explanation, young Peola threateningly warns her mother, "Don't tell her." Delilah, of course, answers Bea's demands rather than Peola's. As Delilah relays the story, with much patient tolerance, a close-up of Peola looking downward reveals the first signs of remorse. Further, a cut to a medium long shot shows Peola moving, of her own accord, away from Delilah's side to stand in front of Bea. Allowing Bea to cup her chin and tell her not to feel that way, Peola submits to Bea's instructions to change her wet clothes, the same suggestion defied moments earlier when spoken by Delilah. Peola's obvious identification with Bea over Delilah complicates the definitions which both mothers agree to assign to white and black womanhood. Ultimately, Peola must decide and act upon her frustration as an adult, consciously choosing one world over the other. Not surprisingly, her choice brings heartbreak to Delilah and threatens the "natural" place for a black woman.

Referring to the assumptions about "natural" womanhood endorsed by the film, Flitterman-Lewis writes the following :

In what recurs as an almost hypnotizing refrain, Delilah repeats, 'I'm your *Mammy*'. . . . This poetic reiteration, like a litany that weaves itself through the moments of narrative crisis in the film, seals the compact between psyche and culture that gives the film its articulating conflict. (52-3)

Peola, significantly, grasps the essential differences between mammyhood and motherhood and fights not only her own but Delilah's capitulation to that paradigm. After their confrontation during Bea's party, Delilah tries to persuade Peola to consider attending a Negro college and, more importantly, to "bow her head" to God's decision to make her black. Sitting on the edge of Peola's bed, hovering over her as Peola stares blankly at the ceiling, Delilah pleads, "Won't you do something for your mammy?" Peola's immediate and cold reply is, "Oh don't say mammy." Delilah tries to fulfill this request, interrupting herself moments later to replace a reference to herself as "mammy" with the whiter, more formal "mother." (This is, of course, how Jessie refers to Bea). Although Peola does agree to leave for school, this confrontation ultimately precipitates her ultimate renunciation of Delilah as a woman incapable of understanding her dilemma or desires.

This final blow occurs after Peola leaves school to pass for white as an employee in a restaurant which, as Flitterman-Lewis notes, "mimics Bea's capability in the world of commerce" (51). Running from Bea and Delilah, who reveal her as black, Peola returns home to confront her mother for the last time. Significantly, as Peola begins to explain her frustration, the cutting moves back and forth from Peola and Delilah together in medium shot to close-ups of Bea, whose face registers the inevitable tragedy of the scene. The close-ups establish Bea as the protagonist who has something to learn from this exchange; although the conflict here centers on Delilah and Peola, the cuts to Bea indicate that this conflict is, to some degree, her own. When Bea attempts to excuse herself from the conversation, Peola asks her to stay, as she explains to Delilah that "I want to go away. And you mustn't see me or own me or claim me or anything. Even if you pass me on the street, you'll have to pass me by." As Bea immediately protests, Peola responds, "Oh I know it's terrible of me, Miss Bea. But you don't know what it is to look white and be black. You don't know." Delilah's subsequent protests that "I'm your mammy, child! I ain't no white mother! It's too much to ask me--I don't have the spiritual strength to beat

it!" serve only to send Peola out the door in tears, for Delilah as black mother is precisely the problem. Neither woman can be mother to Peola, who sees her only choice as a renunciation of them both, as well as the paradigms of womanhood that each inhabits.

Peola's desperate search for a white, feminized self, then, serves not only to call the constructions of white and black womanhood to the attention of the audience, but ironically to validate those as well. For Bea, the observation of Delilah's maternal tragedy functions as an important cautionary tale; called to Delilah's bedside after her collapse upon Peola's departure, Bea informs her that she must stay alive to see her marry Stephen Archer. However, as Bea leaves her side upon the arrival of the doctor, she overhears a conversation between Stephen and her infatuated daughter. Her realization that Jessie's love for Stephen could seriously jeopardize her own mother/daughter relationship follows immediately on the heels of witnessing Delilah's tremendous suffering over her own maternal loss. Bea backs out of her dinner engagement with Stephen and sends him away with a promise for dinner the following evening. However, Delilah's death interrupts those plans as well and effectively works to remove Stephen, as an impediment to her happiness with Jessie, from Bea's life. Hence, although Delilah worked diligently to convince Bea of her need for marriage, her life works instead to validate the sanctity of motherhood, the governing principle in this film for white womanhood. Observing her faithful servant die with a photo of Peola held to her chest, Bea recognizes through Delilah's tragedy the need to avert her own; again the black mammy of the narrative sacrifices for the good of her white mistress.

Delilah's death also serves to return Peola to the appropriate sphere of black womanhood, as dictated by the genre for a woman who explores alternative options for herself. As a major plot change from novel to film, Peola's tearful and repentant return for her mother's funeral was due in part, no doubt, to the dictates of the Production Code. To have Peola at large in the world, posing as white, would certainly offend the sensibilities of

the majority in 1934, who saw miscegenation as unnatural. More importantly, however, her return finally validates Delilah's insistence on her place as a black woman, forcing her to acknowledge her resistance to that place as unnatural and wrong. Weaving her way through a predominantly black crowd at the funeral, Peola finally wedges herself between two white women watching the procession. Asked by one if she knew Delilah, Peola nods yes before pulling herself away from these women and approaching the coffin crying, "Mother." Visually, then, Peola's revelation of her identity as black woman by owning her black maternity occurs while she is flanked by two white women; for the first time in the film, Peola leaves behind a desired white identification to join Delilah in the frame, rather than to desert her there. As Donald Bogle explains, "[H]ER weeping by her mother's casket was Hollywood's slick way of finally humiliating her, its way of making the character who had run away with herself conform to the remorseful mulatto type" (60). Sobbing in the funeral carriage that "She worked for me, slaved for me. Always thought of me first. Never of herself," Peola sums up the working, validated definition of black womanhood in Imitation of Life. That the other two women in the carriage could make the same claim about Delilah is imaged by the fade to the neon sign of Aunt Delilah flipping a pancake, the icon of Bea's success throughout the film.

bell hooks, perhaps, sums up best the consequences of these definitions for African-American women in Imitation of Life and, by extension, all Hollywood films conforming to these traditional and stereotypical characterizations. Addressing Delilah, she writes, after rewatching the film as an adult:

I had until now forgotten you, that screen image seen in adolescence, those images that made me stop looking. It was there in Imitation of Life, that comfortable mammy image. There was something familiar about this hard-working black woman who loved her daughter so much, loved her in a way that hurt. Indeed

as young southern black girls watching this film, Peola's mother reminded us of the hardworking, churchgoing, Big Mamas we knew and loved. Consequently, it was not this image that captured our gaze; we were fascinated by Peola. (121)

To Peola, hooks writes:

You were different. There was something scary in this image of the young sexual sensual black beauty betrayed--that daughter who did not want to be confined by blackness, that "tragic mulatto" who did not want to be negated. "Just let me escape this image forever," she could have said. I will always remember that image. I remembered how we cried for her, for our unrealized desiring selves. She was tragic because there was no place in the cinema for her, no loving pictures. She too was absent image. It was better, then, that we were absent, for when we were there it was humiliating, strange, sad. We cried all night for you, for the cinema that had no place for you. And like you, we stopped thinking it would one day be different. (121)

Although Delilah provoked tears of pathos from Bea and, presumably, her white audience as well, that Peola's resistance to the nostalgic type of mammy should strike the emotional chord for a black audience is significant to the consideration of the ideological impact of the film. Moreover, as hooks claims that the absence of the black female was better than a depiction of her depressing capitulation to the 1934 Hollywood definition of her, the final frustrated comment of hooks' childhood self is an invitation to examine its validity.

Contemporary reviews by the white press revealed an interest, at least, in the further examination of the racial issues introduced but not explored in Imitation of Life. Reviewers of the film commented, with surprising frequency, either that Louise Beavers carried the film or that the subplot featuring Delilah and Peola was far more interesting than that of the white protagonists. The reviewer of The Literary Digest claimed that "the real story, the narrative which is merely hinted at, never really contemplated, is that of the

beautiful Negro daughter of the loyal Negro friend" (31). The reviewer for Time more stridently remarked that "the real heroine of Imitation of Life is not Bea Pullman but Aunt Delilah, and, of the many problems which the picture investigates, by far the most exciting is that of the aging colored woman whose good fortune emphasizes her daughter's racial unhappiness. By dodging this problem with dogged determination, Imitation of Life relinquishes all claim to artistic honesty" (47). Land, of Film Reviews, noted that the "most arresting part of the picture and overshadowing the conventional romance...is the tragedy of Aunt Delilah's girl, born to a white skin and Negro blood" (15), while Aaronson of the Motion Picture Herald claimed that "Miss Beavers comes very near to being the actual star of the picture, partially because her problem, as the Negro mother, is the more poignant of the picture's dual theme" (42). Aunt Delilah, despite her endorsement of safe and familiar mammydom, sparked some measure of debate over the unproblematic representation of faithful black stereotypes on screen. As current critic Lauren Berlant suggests, Delilah's monologue about her bewilderment surrounding the pain of the black experience--"I don't know rightly where the blame lies"--is made directly to the camera and, hence, the American film audience, perhaps explaining in some measure the response of white reviewers. The question now at hand is whether or not persistence of the damaging and familiar types continues in Hollywood films in a current context.

Chapter Three

Remnants of the Past: The Legacy of Black and White Womanhood in How to Make an American Quilt

How to Make an American Quilt, published in 1991, is white novelist Whitney Otto's first published work. A New York Times best seller, the novel was hailed by many critics as a successful examination of American women's lives, using the metaphor of a quilt to represent the diversity of feminine experience. The metaphor works in part, as reviewer Boyd Tonkin notes, to present a "politically-correct alternative to the discredited image of the 'melting pot.' Each patch--each race, class, or culture--keeps to its territory: the threads bind but do not blend" (51). However, despite the derogatory label of political correctness, other reviewers thought the novel a truthful portrayal of the differences which exist among women of various ages, cultural background, and experience, successfully resisting a blanket interpretation of American woman. Reviewer Judith Freeman, for example, claims, "It's possible to see these stories as representative of a spectrum of women's experiences in the 20th Century" (4).

The quilting metaphor determines the structure of the novel as well, which alternates an "Instruction" chapter, detailing various material aspects of quilting along with historical/sociological commentary on the craft, with vignettes which sketch the lives of individual quilters. These quilters form the Grasse (California) Quilting Circle, headed by master quilter Anna Neale, an African-American woman and former domestic for two members of the otherwise white group (excepting Anna's daughter, Marianna). Otto's connections between literature, quilting, and women's lives are not without precedent. As Elaine Showalter explains:

Both theme and form in women's writing, piecing and patchwork have also become

metaphors for a Female Aesthetic, for sisterhood, and for a politics of feminist survival. In the past two decades especially, they have been celebrated as essentially feminine art forms While quilting does have a crucial meaning for American women's texts, it can't be taken as a transhistorical and essential form of expression, but rather as a gendered practice that changed from one generation to the next. (146-147)

Because quilting has historically been gendered female, Otto calls upon this tradition to draw disparate American women into a shared space. However, her examination of specific contexts for quilting remind and instruct the reader that this particular art form reflected the changing nuances of American culture, providing women with a political voice, as well as a personal one.

Backed by Universal Studios, Amblin Entertainment produced the 1995 adaptation of the novel, directed by Australian director Jocelyn Moorhouse, written by Jane Anderson, and starring actresses Winona Ryder, Maya Angelou, Ellen Burstyn, and Anne Bancroft. The ensemble cast of the film accurately reflects the structure of the novel, providing nearly equal screen time to the lives of each woman, which are dramatized in a series of flashbacks. However, this ensemble does revolve around an arguably central protagonist, Finn (Ryder), who fills the role of family melodrama's searching female protagonist on the verge of making important choices about marriage, children, and family. Although Finn does exist in the novel as the guiding narrator/writer who links the various stories together (and learns from them), the film version significantly expands her character so that each vignette functions to contribute information, gathered by the older women of the quilting circle, toward her own decisions as woman.

The guiding hand behind both versions, however, is that of Anna Neale. Through her language of quilting, the other women are able to tell their own stories. As reviewer Roberta Rubenstein notes, "Otto organizes her narrative like a well-designed quilt;

however, it is not until late in the novel that one discovers the finishing piece: the story of Anna Neale" (14). Anna functions as the character who understands both the creative and technical aspects of quilting, and her story serves to bind the diverse patchwork of white stories to one another as well. Jill McCorkle of the New York Times described Anna as "the heart of the novel" (10), while Mary Hawthorne claims that it is "her life which holds the greatest dignity" (19). Here we see that, like Delilah of Imitation of Life, an African-American woman contributes much to the well-being and self-discovery of the white women in her life. Whitney Otto's novel clearly delineates the differences that Anna experiences as an African-American woman; while all the vignettes are unique and individual, Anna must work to resolve very different issues from those which dominate the lives of her white friends. Her life, in marked contrast to white lives, is explored in the novel explicitly as an alternative definition to white womanhood, from the attempted point-of-view of the black woman. In this sense, Anna works to fill in some of the gaps created by the absence of Delilah's point-of-view in both versions of Imitation of Life. Similarly, Anna's daughter Marianna offers a nearly oppositional reading of the classic "tragic mulatto," as embodied by Peola.

While Anna retains her point of view in the film version, the condensation of her story results in a much less thorough examination of her own explanations/perceptions of her life as black woman. Although condensation of the stories occur in all the transitions from vignette to flashback, Anna's flashback includes material not found in the source novel, which works to amplify her role as guide for, in particular, the newly expanded Finn. In addition, Marianna's story is completely different, not addressing her position as both black and white woman. As a result, the differences between definitions of black and white women tend to seem natural or obvious, as Anna's and Marianna's opinions about their situations are virtually erased. Here, a close look at the film adaptation reveals that these choices of the screenwriter (Jane Anderson), result in the creation of a family

melodrama with a black woman finding her generic niche by successfully directing a white woman back to her appropriate sphere of domesticity. Because the family melodrama works to define the parameters of womanhood, the screen version of How to Make an American Quilt emphasizes differing definitions of white and black women in order to define the ideal life of its white protagonist. Unlike the source novel, which seeks to articulate more fully the context of black womanhood in its own right, I argue that the film tends to rely on well-established Hollywood film traditions and stereotypes to create its study of appropriate womanhood.

The Source Novel

The chapter entitled "Instructions No. 1" not only introduces the reader to the quilters whose lives she will encounter in the text but also shapes the reader's sense of how these lives should be read against one another:

The women who circle the frame should be compatible. Their names are:
Sophia, Gladys Joe, Hy, Constance, Em, Corrina, Anna, and Marianna. . .
When you have assembled the group, once a week for better than thirty-five
years, you will be ready to begin the traditional, free-form *Crazy Quilt*.

The *Crazy Quilt* . . . is comprised of remnants of material in numerous
textures, colors; actually, you could not call the squares of the *Crazy Quilt*
squares, since the stitched-together pieces are of all sizes and shapes. (8)

The group must be compatible in that their temperaments must allow them to work well together, ensuring a free-form, yet harmonious quilt in the end. Each contribution is unique and resists the rigid definition of "square," refusing, as do the quilters, to be placed into previously defined contours of womanhood. However, the need finally for harmony requires some measure of adherence to rules, some space of agreement where definitions of self are absorbed into the larger definition of a female community. Otto explores and (at

times) contests this space of agreement, although the novel does ultimately validate the traditional choices of marriage and motherhood for women.

These traditional choices, though validated, are not unproblematic in the novel, as each vignette generally reveals a melodramatic tale of heartache and loss in the lives of married women. Important to note, however, is that the communal bond of marriage and motherhood among the women does not exist in two significant cases. As Rubenstein points out: "The centerpiece of Otto's narrative is marriage: Nearly all the women are wives or widows whose stories depend on their relations to men. Anna Neale and her daughter Marianna are excluded from this communal center, for both are single parents of children whose fathers were white and quickly left the scene" (14). Here, Rubenstein notices two key elements which contribute to the definitions of white and black womanhood emerging from the novel. First, in the absence of marriage, both Anna and Marianna conform to the traditional mammy stereotype of the unwed black woman. Second, both women, as products of "miscegenation," fall into the potential category of "tragic mulatto," a victim of the slave system power relations, unable to assume a place in either the black or white world. However, Otto consciously works to undermine these white constructions of black womanhood by allowing Anna and Marianna to define and comment upon their own identities. Anna, as single mother and working domestic who nurtures an entire circle of white women, is able to assume a position of resistance to the paradigm of mammydom. Marianna, as a gardener who literally grafts one species of plant onto another, an expatriate, and a single woman with black and white lovers, finds herself in the role of a woman who defies the "tragic" downfall of a woman caught between two worlds.

Anna resists white desires and constructions of herself throughout the novel although, like the traditional mammy in the world of family melodrama, she tends to validate traditional structures of white womanhood for the novel's white women.

The white narrator who listens to, structures, and struggles to make sense of the various narratives is Finn, a graduate student in history trying to decide her future as woman. Although visiting the home of two of her biological matriarchs, Finn nevertheless credits Anna in the "Prologue" as the focus of her attention:

The true source of my interest during this visit, this impasse in my own life, is Anna Neale, another one of the quilters and my aunt's oldest friend. Anna has promised me a long talk one day, she says, when she is not so busy, when there is nothing else to do. But her time always seems occupied. (6)

Finn's desire to learn from the wisdom of the older black woman is reminiscent of the white mistress' dependency on a faithful black servant, establishing Anna's place within the paradigm of Mammy. Finn's desire to listen and learn from Anna, moreover, is directly linked to the "impasse" of white womanhood: marriage or career. Needing Anna to help define her own sense of place as white woman, Finn uses Anna's black experience as a foil, validating Morrison's assertion above that whiteness defines itself against blackness in American culture. However, Anna reveals herself to be, in some measure, resistant to Finn's advances, placing her own uses for time ahead of the young white woman's.

Nevertheless, Anna does ultimately contribute to Finn's decision to marry, evidenced by Finn's ending comments in the final section "Crazy Quilt." Here, the reader learns that the preceding vignettes, narrated by Finn, are actually second-hand accounts filtered through Anna:

I'll tell you what makes me happy about marrying Sam, that is, about marrying in general: I know that our marriage has just as good a chance of being wonderful as it does of missing the mark. There is a strong possibility that it will be both. And, contrary to what current belief is, it has always been so. This is a tremendous relief. I came to understand this from talking with Anna about the various quilters. (178)

Although Finn learns about the stakes of white womanhood through the stories of white women, these stories are, significantly, filtered through Anna and Anna's reading of the various decisions made by the white women. As mother/mammy figure, Anna passes this legacy down to Finn, despite the living presence of the white women who could easily speak for themselves. Each vignette, then, is ultimately narrated, in part, by Anna. Finn does not merely record first-hand accounts of the quilters' lives, evidenced by the use of third person in all cases except Anna's. In addition, Anna makes several brief incursions into the stories of other women, offering a judgmental/moral response to the action.

Although the reader remains unaware that anyone other than Finn is filtering each story until the end of the novel, Anna's presence permeates the work and often manifests itself at key moments of crisis in each vignette. From these incursions of Anna's point-of-view into each story, Finn shapes her own identity as white woman.

As Em, a member of the quilting bee struggling with an unfaithful husband, reveals when Anna tries to comfort her, Anna's position as arbiter of white women's choice does not always seem to be validated by her own lived experience: "Anna Neale told her that it doesn't matter, that as long as Dean keeps coming home at night that's all Em needs to know. Em wants to say, Anna you don't know what you are talking about, since Anna never married, but refrains" (96). Em's reaction brings up the interesting question of why the black mammy, traditionally unmarried herself, should concern herself with a white woman's marital status, endorsing an institution that she herself is not a part of. Anna appears in other places as well, offering a commentary that endorses white domestic values of marriage and motherhood, despite her own lack of a traditional nuclear family. For example, by way of introduction to the story of the "Flower Girls," Hy and Gladys, Anna comments about the house they share in old age: "This is a strange house; haunted I think it could be said. But it is an odd haunting, not as if something extra were here as much as something missing; not a void, only the powerful absence of something lost" (13). The

story that follows reveals the terrible heartache of two sisters who must live with Hy's infidelity with Gladys's husband Arthur, an unmistakable breach of the rules of marriage and family.

Another incursion into the decisions of white women, however, is based on lived experience and strengthens the shared bond of motherhood between white and black women. When Sophia decides to force her sixteen-year-old daughter to give up an illegitimate child for adoption, she "looks across the unfinished quilt they are working on to see Anna Neale coldly watching her" (63). Sophia, married young because of an unexpected pregnancy that shattered her own youthful hopes for an exciting and interesting life, attempts to shield her daughter from a similar heartache. Anna unambiguously judges Sophia's decision, in light of her own, similar experience.

Anna's judgment of Sophia, however, is significant in light of Sophia's resistance to the entire paradigm of white womanhood:

To be known as Mrs. Preston Richards was to exact a certain amount of social respect. She had gained entry into the ranks of motherhood with the birth of Duff. Even "the daughter of that poor Mrs. Darling," her mother's daughter, lent her a modest measure of communal visibility. These were all Sophia's identities and parts, the parts she grew to mistrust for her duplicitous feeling when she played them. So to say *I am Sophia Darling; that is all* was, in this time and place, this homemaker era, to admit that she was nobody. (58)

Sophia is the one character who, while living the approved existence for a white woman, reacts against that without the provocation of infidelity. Her husband does nothing technically wrong; he exists as a barrier to Sophia's dreams by impregnating her and giving her unwanted responsibilities. That reaction comes under fire from Anna; although Anna never married, she did give birth to and decide to keep an illegitimate child. Part of her negative reaction to Sophia, then, involves Sophia's negation of the value of an

illegitimate child. However, Anna's reaction as mother figure to these white women is contradicted, at times, by the emergence of her own voice, which reveals a marked resistance to the stereotypical paradigms of black womanhood.

As a resisting mammy figure, Anna questions and deconstructs essentialist notions about black and white womanhood. Defining references to slavery in the "Prologue" as "another story," (10) the narrator makes clear that the historical circumstances governing white and black women's lives create very different experiences and, therefore, perceptions and values. However, the creation of a space to tell that "other" story within the novel disrupts and challenges white constructions of black women which serve only to fulfill white needs. To show that Anna might also long for the same things as some white women do throws into question the "natural" assumption that black women are content to live vicariously, as servant, through their white mistresses. Speaking in first person, the only character besides Finn to do so, Anna explains:

To know my story is to understand my superimposition on the world, to see that I am in the world as shadow, as film laid upon the more vibrant picture. All underneath my image are people with families, children, husbands, houses, college degrees; all of one color . . . I refused at an early age to be a specter in my own world. I decided that I would not be whisked away, so I sought to anchor myself to society, to make them see me , Anna Neale . . . undisputed leader and founder of the Grasse Quilting Circle I am not invisible because of this closed circle; I am not unknown. I learned to speak with needle and thread long before society finally "gave" me a voice--as if society can give anyone a voice; it can only take a voice away. (133)

Following a list of presumably white desires, Anna recognizes herself as both integral to and excluded from the traditional markers of white success. With her blatant refusal of that exclusion, Anna insists that she gain visibility in her own right--she notes her success as a

quilter to prove the validity of that recognition--and links, again, the art of quilting to the possibility of resistance.

Quilting both begins and documents Anna's story in the section entitled "Tears Like Diamond Stars." Anna's Aunt Pauline sells a story quilt, entitled "The Life Before," to her employer to buy Anna a telescope to encourage her interest in stars. Significantly, the quilt is the only record of Anna's African-American heritage. The white woman, uninterested in the significance of the images or the stories behind them, hangs the quilt on the wall. Pauline recognizes her mistake immediately; the young Anna is devastated by the loss and angry over the white appropriation of her life, experiencing an anger which feeds, undoubtedly, her resistance to white paradigms of black womanhood in her later life. Pauline's good intentioned reason for selling the quilt demonstrates the paradox of black success in white America: "Why couldn't Anna have both things? The quilt and the telescope; her history and her future? Why were their lives always a series of choices that seemed to cancel each other out?" (138). As a teenager, Anna runs away from this home, taking "The Life Before" with her, signaling the importance of this document for herself, as well as her unborn child. Anna eventually establishes her own quilting business, designing individualized story quilt patterns for other women, finally using her connection with the past, through quilting, to carve out an independent future.

Anna's independence, however, is called into question by the grown Marianna, who demands to know why Anna continues to work as a domestic for Gladys Joe: "I don't see how you can do it. Not that it isn't honest work, but you have your own things now. Things that belong to you" (167). Anna's continued loyalty to Gladys does restore her status as black mammy to some extent, although the relationship is carefully explored to reveal that an element of reciprocity, absent from the traditional mammy/mistress relationship, does exist between the two women. Arriving as a pregnant teenager to work as domestic for the family of the also adolescent Hy and Gladys Joe, Anna at first resists the

advances of Gladys Joe, who tries to befriend her. However, Gladys Joe and Anna soon spend evenings together; they share a love of reading and take turns reading aloud favorite authors, white and black, while the other one quilts. Gladys Joe learned basic quilting techniques from Anna which she used to take over the tedious work of Anna's quilting, freeing Anna to concentrate on the creative aspects of her work.

As adults, Gladys frees Anna from the unimaginative drudgery of a bookkeeping job, hiring her to work as a domestic upon the arrival of twins. The two women, then, share a home again, a situation which the narrator describes as follows:

Two things happen. Gladys Joe begins *her* circle with Anna as the *unspoken* leader and teacher [my emphases]; black Anna and white Gladys Joe find equal footing. They become true friends because they share, complement each other; one does not solely take on the role of comforter or comforted; one does not exclusively receive while the other takes. Theirs is an exchange. (156)

While equal footing may be something of an overstatement, evidenced in that Gladys Joe considers the group her own with Anna functioning as true but "unspoken" leader, still this passage breaks apart the traditional mammy relationship, revealing how it does not apply to Anna and Gladys Joe. The fact remains, however, that Anna does choose to continue as domestic long after she no longer needs the money, and, in so doing, chooses not to establish a home of her own. In addition, the absence of a man from Anna's life is again reminiscent of the black mammy's, especially in light of her articulated desire for his presence.

As the reviewers above noted, Anna and Marianna both differentiate themselves from the rest of the Grasse Quilting Circle by never marrying. Anna never fully explains her reasons for not doing so, although she does deflate the notion that, as black mammy, this desire does not exist in her life. One revealing moment occurs during her pregnancy when, examining herself in the mirror, Anna confides:

suddenly she is glad she has no man to see her naked. She is sad, too. There is no one to hold her, and she wonders if that is what drew her to the boy on the ranch in the first place--the longing to be held . . . Anna believes that people can live without any number of pleasurable sensations, providing they never come into contact with them again. Because once they are reintroduced into a person's life, the need for that thing becomes consuming and uncontrollable. (147)

Here, Anna admits to the need for a man but also imposes the odd restriction of not indulging in that experience again, especially as she later reconfirms that "she would be happy to have a man of her own who kisses her when he comes in at night, calls her honey as he runs his strong, capable hands across her stomach, says good-evening to their baby inside her" (149). Otherwise silent on the subject, Anna's powerful fantasy reveals, at the least, that her needs and desires extend well beyond the traditional parameters of the stereotypical mammy, who typically remains unmarried.

Anna's celibacy is noticed and questioned by Marianna, who "wondered how it was that her mother could live her life without someone to adore her and be adored" (169). Although Marianna often questions the "mammy" attributes of her mother she lives her life as a black woman, who embraces the heritage of Anna. Able to pass for white by virtue of her white paternity, Marianna embodies the potential to function as the traditional, stereotypical "tragic mulatto." Her refusal to do so indicates the novel's resistance to such stereotypes, allowing the voice of the black woman herself to create identity. Working as a gardener who grafts different species of roses for a living, Marianna's occupation works as a metaphor for her own self-perception, as a hybrid caught between two worlds. Despite the resultant confusion of her circumstances, Marianna addresses her "mulatto" status, refusing to pass because "she refused to deny her African-American heritage, for to do so would deny Anna, and that she would not do; act as if her mother had never existed. She considered Anna's blood the proudest part of herself, not something to be falsified" (171).

Reading almost as a direct rebuttal to Peola's stance through much of Imitation of Life, Marianna further distances herself from that character by actually trying to ignore, rather than embrace, her white heritage:

It was so odd, really, this anglicizing of her features as her face matured, as if her white history would not be ignored, either, and her body was some sort of quiet battleground, with her father's side slowly but surely assuming more and more territory. . . . Marianna began to feel the profoundest need to be back with her mother. To steady herself. (171)

The image of whiteness as encroaching enemy on a battlefield clearly reveals Marianna's self-perception as woman-- the need to identify with her black mother.

Although Anna identifies with her black mother, she does not lead her mother's life so that the definitions of black womanhood in the novel are by no means monolithic or uncontradictory. Generational differences play a key role; Anna continues as domestic although she

recognizes her status is changing in the country with the advent of civil rights, but she sees civil rights as a demand and a gift when it should be neither So here in this little town of Grasse, Anna achieves equality in her own way. Let anyone try to tell her otherwise or wrest it from her. Just let them. (156)

Thus, her seeming adherence, at times, to the constraints of black mammydom are explained and explored. Although the novel endorses, ultimately, the traditional values of white womanhood, the constructions of black and white American womanhood, responsible for stereotypical representations, are examined and, at times, resisted. As the narrator explains at the close of the novel:

The quilters accepted Anna and Marianna, and no one ever made the mistake of saying that, "We don't even notice color; they are just like us." It was this recognition of their differences that allowed the group to survive, not pretending to

transcend them. The impulse to unify and separate, rend and join, is powerful and constant. (176)

That resistance to a universalizing experience for white or black women characterizes the novel's exploration of the possible and various definitions of womanhood itself.

Novel to Film

Although the novel ultimately endorses traditional values, the constructions of black and white American womanhood are explicitly explored. The film moves away from that particular focus, adapting the novel to a family melodrama which places, at its center, a more clearly defined protagonist. Although all the women of the novel are included in the film (with the exception of Corrina, who suffers the loss of a son in the Vietnam War), their vignettes are dramatically condensed, although visual cues often refer back to moments of the original text not explored in the film. The condensation of material is an inevitable part of the adaptation process; however, especially in Anna's case, details are added by the screenwriter to articulate further the film's primary conflicts surrounding Finn. Significant details deleted from and added to Anna's story transform her character into a less resistant mammy figure than Otto's Anna, though she certainly does not embrace the mammydom of Delilah by defining herself completely in relation to whiteness. However, Anna and Marianna's narratives still define them as "other" even though the distinctions between white and black womanhood are no longer as fully contextualized or challenged. The end result is the creation of black characters serving to define whiteness for white characters; those aspects of their narratives which separate them from white womanhood, because not challenged, are naturalized. In accordance then with Byars' definition of a stereotype as "ideology made tangible," the film relies heavily on the very assumptions and traditions about black women that Otto's novel challenges.

Otto's structuring metaphor of quilting, however, is successfully carried over in the move from novel to film. With Finn as the center, each woman reveals her own story of heartache and choice through flashbacks which place her in a particular experience relevant to Finn. As the screenwriter, Jane Anderson describes her vision:

I saw it as a compilation of stories so that when you stand back and look at it at the end, you see this huge canvas and realize what the story is about. The flashbacks, which are designed to have an emotional impact, are essentially a panel in a quilt. Finn has a storyline which is more linear and is the border of the quilt. (Seeger 139)

The interpolated chapters dealing with instructions and historical context pertinent to quilting or individual quilters are replaced, however, with scenes of the Grasse Quilting Circle constructing a wedding quilt for Finn. This structure allows the viewer a better sense of the women, both "now and then," in order to visualize Finn's fate which is dependent upon the choices she will make by the novel's end. It also creates visual images of the process of quilting, described by Otto's narrator in the "Instruction" chapters, though in much less detail. The film further creates visual imagery of the craft by showcasing several quilts created expressly by the president of the Southern California Council of Quilt Guilds, Patty McCormick, for the film. In addition to the wedding quilt under construction throughout the film, McCormick and her team of quilters also constructed Anna's "The Life Before" (O'Steen E3).

Not only is the film about quilting and cinematically structured as a quilt, but the creation of the film itself is reminiscent of the gendered activity of quilting. As both filmmaking and quilting are generally collaborative art forms, the predominantly female creation of the film invites comparison to the quilt metaphor at hand. In addition to Anderson, the director (Jocelyn Moorhouse) and producers (Midge Sanford and Sarah Pillsbury), as well as the actresses, comprise the predominantly female production team.

Unlike quilting, however, this example of female collaboration in mainstream Hollywood film is somewhat unusual. Despite early significant contributions to the film industry, women were for the most part effectively barred from participation as anything other than actresses, screenwriters, or editors during the studio years. With the notable exceptions of Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner, women directors were virtually non-existent in Hollywood during that time (Seeger 14-15). Despite the dismantling of the studio system during the 1950s and 1960s, women did not function at all as key "decision makers" until the 1980s, while the 1990s finally saw a "significant emergence of women as directors, writers, and producers" (Seeger 29). The independent woman filmmaker, still struggling to create a place for herself in Hollywood, won a victory in How to Make an American Quilt, although the essential backing of Steven Spielberg for the project reveals that final power in Hollywood still belongs to the men (Benenson 17).

Although the project was created by, for, and about women, How to Make an American Quilt still relies heavily on the male studio-created conventions (endorsing the lives of the female audience) of the woman's film or family melodrama. The flashbacks, in fact, were expressly created by Moorhouse, according to Pillsbury, to be "very distinct little movies" (qtd. in Benenson 26), each of which adheres, in some respect, to the conventions of family melodrama. As a result, the communicated message(s) of the film differs, to some extent, from the more overtly feminist explorations of the novel.

One central difference, as mentioned above, is the placement of Finn as a major character in the constellation of women, perhaps in the role of protagonist. As Anderson noted above, Finn's narrative is more linear and serves as the border which outlines the narratives of the other women--that is, they tell their stories in relation to her life. For example, when Finn tries to call her fiancé after an argument and the phone is answered by a giggling woman, the next sequence involves Em relaying the story of her consistently unfaithful husband to Finn. In order to make Finn into a protagonist, then, scenes such as

her argument with Sam were added to create a heightened dramatization of Finn's conflicts as a young career woman. The argument with Sam, provoked both by his unannounced appearance at her grandmother's house and his decision to convert her office into a potential nursery, clearly articulates Finn's confusion over the balance between private and work space in her life. The further addition of sexy "Latin lover," Leon, tempts Finn with meaningless sex and provides a contrast to the traditionally appropriate decision for marriage and family, represented by Sam. Finally, the addition of a reconciliation between Finn's divorced parents, as well as the transformation of Hy from a paternal to a maternal grandmother, emphasizes that Finn must inherit the legacy of womanhood passed down to her, accepting the legitimacy of herself as married woman.

Involved as well with passing along the legacy of (white) womanhood is Anna, whose character undergoes a shift to a less resistant mammy. Erasure of significant elements in the novel contribute to Anna's mammy status; gone are the references to her own business, desire for marriage and family, and resistance to invisibility in a white world. Instead, Anna's life is reduced to various outlets of mothering: as Gladys's domestic, leader of a white quilting circle, and mother of Marianna, the sole love of her life. The film audience does not have access to Anna's private thoughts which revealed to Otto's readers Anna's unfulfilled wishes and her often resentful perceptions of the white world around her. On Harris' continuum from mammies to militants, then, Anna fits most closely into the "moderate" or "transitional" domestic category, although not completely. The "moderate" domestics

are seemingly as acquiescent as the true southern maid but . . . they recognize an amount of suffering and deprivation within the black community that the true southern maids refuse to see, and they are able to see the white community as

partially responsible for such suffering. Though economic necessity teaches them to curb their yearning to rebel overtly, these women, not mammies and not yet militants, identify more with the black world than the white. (24)

Defined also as "trickster" by Harris, the moderate will assume the guise of submission but also work to "counteract the negation of their humanity" (29). Important to note, of course, is that Harris' definitions of terms are formed through a study of mammies depicted by black authors, while both versions of How to Make an American Quilt are white projects, focusing on white definitions of womanhood. Nevertheless, her definitions are helpful in distinguishing between Delilah and the two versions of Anna. The white perception of Anna, in the film, as black woman willing to devote her own time to white well-being precludes her from an easy fit into Harris' categories; unlike the novel's Anna, any element of the mask-wearing trickster is erased from Anna's narrative in the film.

Anna's life story is reduced, as are the stories of the other women, to the essential bit necessary to communicate an essential truth about adult womanhood to Finn. An addition to her film narrative, however, involves the romantic tale of her great-grandmother who, after Emancipation, tries in vain to locate the rest of her family until a crow leads her to her future husband. Although this story does contextualize Anna as black woman in the historical context of slavery in America, this story is linked directly to Finn's through the symbolic device of the crow, which reappears in the final sequence to lead Finn to Sam. Through this device, Anna passes down the story of her great-grandmother to Finn, having chosen to adopt another narrative for her own life. Thus, although one married black woman does appear in the film, the story of this ancestor ties in directly with that of the white protagonist, rather than to Pauline, Anna, or Marianna.

Marianna herself does not question or wonder about her mother's life, as she does in the book, so that the film itself never questions Anna's choices, relying on the traditions of mammydom to validate them instead. Marianna also is transformed significantly as a

character, becoming less concerned with exploring the division of herself as black and white woman; a far cry from the tragic mulatto, Marianna obviously embraces her black heritage, evidenced through her clothing and hairstyle, as well as her respect for Anna. However, through the eyes of Finn, Marianna also assumes the role of exoticized and sexualized black woman, idolized by Finn since childhood. No reference whatsoever is made to Marianna as gardener or, thus, to her sense of displacement as a light-skinned black woman who makes a conscious decision to embrace her mother's heritage. Her agricultural existence in rural France becomes a romanticized life in Paris, complete with the discovery and loss of a newly created "soulmate," who writes poetry using quilt imagery. And, despite the fact that she grew up in Grasse, Marianna now speaks English with a French accent, obviously intended to further exoticize and romanticize her. Her narrative, in the adaptation from novel to screen, becomes almost unrecognizable, and enjoys considerably less screen time than the other flashbacks. Nevertheless, Finn's obvious fascination with this "other" definition of womanhood allows Marianna's story to deliver the final word to Finn on the value of true love and functions to return Finn to the realm of marriage and motherhood.

The final character who experiences a significant degree of change so as to comment more fully on Finn's situation is Sophia, although she does so by means of resistance to rather than endorsement of a traditional white paradigm. True to the novel, the film Sophia is an unhappy wife and mother eventually deserted by her husband. Her untraditional love for diving and her drive to lead an exciting and self-fulfilling life away from Grasse connects her to Finn as struggling woman writer, although Sophia's failure to achieve her dream leaves her a bitter woman who scared Finn as a child (and adult). Sophia distinguishes herself from the other women by being the only one not to share her own story with Finn (Hy and Glady do that), although the connection between Finn's name and Sophia as swimmer (the image on her patch is a mermaid), as well as her

unrelenting jabs at Finn during the movie, link these two women. Sophia, then, is the only one not to advocate, by word or deed, Finn's capitulation to the path of marriage ahead of her. Although the final sequence involves Finn's unambiguous return to Sam and a commitment to a life with him, the final shot of the movie is not of wedded bliss but of Sophia, diving alone into the pool below. Sophia disrupts an otherwise complete endorsement of traditional definitions for white womanhood in the film, not permitting the expected sense of complete closure and restoration at the end of most family melodramas.

Although the narratives of the remaining women are considerably condensed, their basic characters and narratives remain the same. While each woman contributes an essential story to highlight Finn's own dilemmas, flashbacks aside, only Anna, Marianna, and Sophia contribute much toward Finn's self-exploration. Anna and Marianna, as black women, rather unproblematically assume their place as "other" in the film, giving Finn the chance to test her own ideas of womanhood against theirs.

The Film

The film version of How to Make an American Quilt depicts a twenty-six-year-old woman, Finn, spending the summer with her grandmother in the hopes of completing her master's thesis. Because her thesis deals with women's handiwork in various "tribal cultures," Finn expresses an academic interest in the work of her grandmother's quilting circle. However, Finn soon discovers her role in the rituals of her own culture, as the circle works to construct a wedding quilt for her. Each woman contributes a patch containing images symbolic of her own married/ romantic life. The story behind each patch is detailed in flashback, and each relates to some aspect of Finn's own struggles. As a result, Finn assumes the center of attention, with each separate narrative working to help her to define herself as a woman. Although past conflicts are still present in the lives of the older women, they have already made and are currently living with the consequences of

the decisions facing Finn at this particular moment in her life. True, then, to the conventions of family melodrama, Finn is given the opportunity to explore various options existing for her life as woman; the vicarious experiences granted her by the quilting circle allow her to explore a wide variety of paradigms, gathering information to make her own choices.

By effectively creating the flashbacks as "distinct little movies" or melodramas, then, Moorhouse invites the viewer to witness the hodge-podge of conflicts and characters that make up the eclectic genre of family melodrama. Each one, by definition, works to allow the dramatization of female desires (and temporary liberation) but also returns her to her sphere of domesticity by the end. The current images of the young women portrayed in each flashback leaves no doubt concerning their "happily ever afters." All the white women are mothers and wives or widows, and most harbor various levels of bitterness or sadness as a result of their adherence to the rules of white womanhood. As a young white woman, Finn will presumably look to these women for guidance and, despite their tales of heartache, will eventually embrace marriage (and motherhood) for herself.

The opening sequence of the film establishes these conflicts and makes a visual connection between womanhood and quilting as an essential metaphor for the film. The opening shots involve close-ups of women's hands engaged in the different stages of quilting--cutting, measuring, stitching. A cut reveals a little girl sitting underneath the quilting frame watching the hands working above her. The adult Finn tells us, in voice-over:

For as long as I can remember, my grandmother and her friends have been part of a quilting bee. I remember sitting under the quilting frame pretending that I was surrounded by a forest of friendly trees and that their stitches were messages from giants written across the sky.

From her youngest and most impressionable moments, then, Finn has had a maternal connection to the art of quilting which she interprets, significantly, as "messages" from the "giants" (adult women) who surround her. The film, then, goes on to address exactly what those messages from woman to girl contain, as Finn makes a transition from girl to woman (as defined by the genre).

The young Finn next turns her attention to a box of photographs with her under the frame, as the adult Finn captions the photos as mementos of her parent's failed marriage, leaving her with the impression that "Sometimes, love simply dies." Following this sobering conclusion, the film cuts from a close-up of Finn's parents' wedding photo to a photo of herself and Sam. The first image we see of Finn, significantly, establishes her as part of a couple, despite her negative observations on marriage in the preceding shot. Finn introduces herself as a graduate student, newly engaged, and voices the central examination of the film as she wonders, "But how do you merge into this thing called a couple and still keep a little room for yourself?" Finn's ultimate decision is thus foreshadowed from the opening of the film; despite the uncertainty surrounding marriage, it is the inevitable step for Finn. Further, the film then cuts away from Finn and Sam to return to the young Finn, running her hand across her grandmother's quilt, further establishing the connection between quilting and the answer to her questions.

Significant, then, is the role of the master quilter who must, within the context of the film, provide the answers for the searching Finn. The inclusion of Anna into this space of the family melodrama, structured as quilt, is significant in that she takes a hodge-podge of patches (lives) and creates a unified whole. Her role as master quilter is made clear near the opening of the film, as she explains the art of orchestrating the disparate components of a quilt to Finn:

The challenge with a quilt like this is each of these squares is made by different hands, so I have to bring all these different squares together into a balanced and

harmonious-- design.

Her pause occurs as Finn places a small tape recorder on the table in front of Anna, indicating that Anna is a voice of authority in the film from whom Finn, in particular, will need to learn. Anna's "balanced and harmonious design," we soon learn, results from an adherence to a theme. In this case, the theme she orchestrates is "Where Love Resides," and the quilt created by this theme will be Finn's wedding quilt. Finn's first screen encounter with Anna, then, establishes the central issue of her indecision concerning marriage to Sam in conflict with Anna's determination to create the quilt.

The quilt itself, established as a visual metaphor for the information Finn gleans from these women, encapsulates the final message of the film. Created from images that represent the greatest heartache in the life of each woman contributing a patch, the quilt claims that love resides, very often, in the midst of that pain. Upon completion of the quilt, Hy carefully spreads the enormous work over the sleeping Finn, literally covering her with challenges to the paradigm of appropriate womanhood; nevertheless, wrapping herself in these images, Finn goes out to meet her fiancé, ready to risk the potential heartache of her predecessors. Analogous to the film itself and its adherence to the generic conventions of family melodrama, the quilt simultaneously embodies various alternatives for women, while subsuming these alternatives into the larger rubric of marriage. Significantly, then, that "rubric" is designed and imposed by Anna, the black domestic who, though apparently happily unmarried herself, uses her creative capabilities in the space of the film to validate and pass down the legacy of white womanhood to Finn. In so doing, she is reminiscent of other screen mammies, who nurture and guide white women into specific lifeways as women, although their own lives contradict that particular definition of white womanhood.

Anna, introduced with the other women as Finn arrives at the house, is differentiated from them from the beginning. The four white women are introduced in pairs (Hy and Glady; Em and Sophia), appearing in the same shot with each other as

Finn's voice-over describes them. However, Anna, as well as her daughter Marianna, are introduced in separate and lingering shots, emphasizing their importance and their difference. We first see Anna, oblivious to the chaos of the other quilters setting up the room, unrolling a pattern. This image of Anna holding the plans for the rest of the group, buzzing like worker bees around her, is supplemented by Finn's voice-over: "Everyone defers to Anna who is the master quilter. She used to work for my Aunt Glady, but these days it seems they're all working for her." Although Finn wryly observes the *seeming* power exchange, noting Anna as a domestic is an important cue to her original status in this particular space.

Following a brief introduction to Em and Sophia, the film cuts to a close-up of a black arm, covered in bangles, gracefully reaching down to pick up material. Another cut reveals Marianna sitting on the floor, removed, as is Anna, from the activity around her, calmly choosing her colors. With her hair in dreadlocks and wearing a dress of African-inspired cloth, Marianna has a foreign aura, which differentiates her from the white women in the room. Finn, then, comments on her own perceptions of that otherness: "I always idolized Anna's daughter Marianna. She had lived in Paris which made her very mysterious to me when I was a kid. She taught me French, made *cafe au laits*, and, the year I got my period, she gave me a glass of red wine." Finn's adoration of Marianna obviously marks her as an important influence; moreover, that influence is directly related to Marianna as exotic woman. The gesture of red wine in celebration of menstruation is not an American ritual; rather, the symbolism of feminine power is reminiscent of a more "tribal" or perhaps matriarchal culture. In any case, the exotic nature of the act impresses Finn and makes her anxious to relate to this very different woman.

Finn seems, in fact, to have a comfortable relationship with all the women save one--Sophia, of whom Finn admits being scared as a child. She too is singled out amidst the chaos of the opening scene when she approaches Finn, who is setting up an electric

typewriter. Sophia immediately challenges Finn over her hesitance to write on a computer, obviously making Finn ill at ease and requiring the interference of Anna to bring the confrontation to an end. Sophia, as a character, fits the mold of the other white women in that she married, though unhappily, but she is also set apart by her small intrusions into Finn's peace of mind. The other women, knowing Sophia's rather cranky and negative outlook, usually "rescue" Finn from Sophia's prying; however, as her narrative reveals, Sophia as a young woman had much more in common with Finn than did any of the other women. Her incursions into Finn's narrative, as well her solo moment as older woman in the final shot of the film, constitute a testament to the reality of unhappiness that will not be undermined by a willful glossing over of that pain. Sophia, in small ways, then, works to create a resisting voice to the overall validation of marriage in the film.

That validation of marriage finally works to define Finn's appropriate role as white woman. And, significantly, her primary guide through that difficult arrival at self-knowledge is Anna, the black mammy figure whose presence and actions demand that Finn eventually conform to domesticity. Although Anna's life is nothing like the one she advocates for Finn (quite unlike the example of Sophia), the film relies on the nurturing stereotype of the black mammy to deliver Finn into the arms of her fiancé. The opposition of white and black womanhood is further reinforced in the film by the examples of Marianna and Sophia. Ironically, Marianna had the globetrotting and glamorous existence desired by the young Sophia. However, single like her mother, Marianna's life is tinged with sadness in that she is separated from her "soulmate." Sophia, on the other hand, found and married a man who seemed to embody all her hopes; however, the devastating outcome of her marriage leaves her alone and bitter, wishing for experiences she never had. Finn, as white woman, must follow Anna's advice and Sophia's example and resign herself to the inevitability of marriage. Given the choice for potential and unpredictable

sadness, and having identified Sam as a "possible soulmate," Finn follows Sophia rather than Marianna.

Finn and Anna

The telling of Anna's narrative to Finn comes late in the film. Finn has already heard the generally woeful tales of marriage--with husbands either unfaithful or dead-- and is on the brink of infidelity herself. Angry with Sam and disheartened over the likely disappointment of marriage, Finn is tempted to accept the romantic advances of the attractive Leon. However, the rendezvous is postponed (temporarily) by the arrival of Anna, who has agreed to bestow the rare honor of showing her quilts to Finn. The sequence is important in establishing the extent to which Anna acts as guide for Finn and the other white women of the film by passing along a family heritage of quilting. Moreover, her story is markedly different from those of the other woman; after one sexual encounter, Anna renounces the possibility of romantic love and marriage for the maternal love for Marianna. Despite her contentment with that choice, however, Anna makes clear that Finn must not follow in her footsteps.

Beginning with the "Life Before," Anna shows Finn the story quilt which constitutes the only record of her family history. However, her commentary on the quilt itself is limited to the romantic tale of the great-grandmother who created it; this woman, walking alone, encountered a crow who led her to the man "God had intended for her to marry." Anna reveals that, as a child, her Aunt Pauline would tell that story to her every night and she would think, "OK. I'm gonna keep my eyes out for that crow. One day, he'll lead me to my own true love." However, Pauline sells the quilt to her white mistress, who brags to her friends that she got it "for a steal"; Pauline eventually "steals" the quilt back for the pregnant Anna, emphasizing the importance of a quilting heritage to Anna's family, registering as well a measure of resistance to the whims of her white mistress.

Forced to leave Pauline after becoming pregnant with a white man's child (significantly making clear first that she does not consider him to be her "master"), Anna arrives at the home of Hy and Glady, to work as a domestic until the arrival of the baby. An important scene between Glady and Anna, as teenagers, shows the beginning of their lifelong friendship. Here, as with her initial meeting with Marianna's father, Anna does demonstrate a measure of resistance to the overtures of a white person violating her space. Glady comes into her room and interrupts her quilting to offer a copy of Wuthering Heights. Although Anna is less than enthusiastic, Glady stays in the room to watch Anna quilt, noting that the work is very "artistic." Anna replies simply that all the women in her family quilt, establishing the craft as an integral part of her heritage and identity. Glady, ignoring the significance of this, instead says: "I'd love to learn to do that. Hy plays the piano, but I haven't as yet found an outlet for my creative expression." Telling here is Glady's immediate desire to participate in Anna's craft only as one of the many possible avenues of creative expression available to her. Like the white woman who earlier "stole" "The Life Before," Glady initially fails to recognize the significance of Anna's work in its original context. Anna, however, quickly reminds her when she curtly replies, "Look, I gotta finish this quilt for my baby and I'm kinda in a hurry." Although an abashed Glady does leave the room, the very next cut reveals the two women sewing together, Anna in the middle of critiquing Glady's work, when she goes into labor.

The quick cut, from a resistant Anna to the Anna who conforms to white desires, leaves out much important information about the gradual and reciprocal trust that grows between herself and Glady in the novel. The film nods to that relationship when Anna does effectively resist white authority in the decision to keep Marianna; with Glady positioned on one side of Anna's bed facing her mother (and Hy), who urges Anna to give up the baby for adoption, Glady does establish herself as something of an ally to Anna. The relationship between the two is not explored further than this, however, and Anna's

leadership of the Grasse Quilting Circle seems a natural outgrowth of her position as Gladys's domestic. Moments in the film allude to Anna's resistant stance in the novel and prevent her from assuming the role of mammy who defines herself entirely in relation to whiteness. However, Anna's feelings about her position, surrounded by white women who benefit from her expertise but cannot share in the heritage that motivates her expertise, is never articulated to Finn. What she does articulate is a distinction between the contours of black and white womanhood for Finn, guiding her towards an acceptance of her place as white woman.

As the film shifts from the flashback to the present, Anna and Finn have moved from the bedroom, where Anna laid out her quilts, to the front porch. Here, Anna confides to Finn that "it wasn't the love of a husband I was meant to find, but the love of my daughter." Anna, in true mammy form, expresses nothing but contentment in her role as celibate matriarch. That this option does not exist for Finn becomes clear as Finn notices the full moon behind them. Fixing a hard stare at Finn, Anna says, "I never liked full moons. They give people an excuse to do foolish things." As do all good mammies, Anna seems to be aware of Finn's plans for the evening; the next scene reveals Finn making love with Leon in the garden under that same full moon. What is interesting about the setting of these scenes is the connection to Anna's own sexual encounter, initiated following an observation of the night sky as well. However, Anna's affair did not occur under a full moon, nor, despite the danger of sleeping with a white man, could it be considered foolish; after all, this affair was the means by which she found the true love of her daughter. However, Finn, on the verge of marriage, is not encouraged to explore an alternative and dangerous option for herself. Rather, she must follow Anna's crow, provided to guide her back to Sam, although neither Anna nor Marianna follow their grandmother's crow for themselves.

Finn and Marianna

The interaction between Finn and Marianna is an interesting one in light of the fact that Finn shapes for the viewer a particular perception of Marianna that deviates significantly from the source novel. Moreover, when Marianna does finally speak for herself near the end of the film, in a comparatively brief flashback, her revised story validates Finn's romantic fascination with her "otherness." Although Marianna does not speak directly about Finn's fascination, a couple of brief moments at the beginning of the film register her awareness of it. For example, as Finn nonchalantly attempts to explain her thesis on women's handiwork in "tribal" cultures to the quilting circle, the film cuts to a shot of Marianna's impassive face, rather than to the face of Glady who asked Finn to explain the project. Soon after, when Finn plays a tape of African-sounding, traditional music, a cut first to Marianna looking up in shock occurs before the reactions of the other women are briefly registered. These two subtle connections between Finn's interest in "other" women indicate, perhaps, that Marianna somewhat resents that presumptuous intrusion. This possibility is evidenced more strongly later, during a conversation between the two women, when Finn again references a primitive culture to argue against the validity of marriage in the modern world. Although Marianna responds patiently enough with the question, "Have you spoken with your fiancé about this?" her ironic tone is unmistakable and reveals Finn as a woman seeking definitions of womanhood in realms inaccessible to her.

Finn, following her tryst with Leon, looks in awe through Marianna's huge photo collection of lovers, all of whom wanted to marry her and all of whom she refused. Although Marianna rather smugly asserts that she would never be tied down by marriage, Finn's ironic endorsement of that stance (as an engaged woman) forces Marianna to change her tone and reveal the true reason behind her single marital status. In answer to Finn's question, "If you had to choose between marrying a friend and marrying a lover, who

would you choose?" Marianna replies that she would marry her soulmate, "the only man I don't have a picture of." Marianna then confides her story of meeting a wonderful man in Paris, who comforts her over the break-up of her latest affair. Although they spent only one day together and she never learned his name, Marianna mourns him as a lost soulmate, married to another woman. Instead of a picture, she keeps the poem that he wrote for her that day. Conveniently, he uses a quilting metaphor to describe the nature of love, an interpretation which applies well to Finn's dilemma over choosing a lover or a friend:

Young lovers seek perfection
Old lovers learn the art of sewing shreds together
and of seeing beauty in a multiplicity of patches.

A committed marriage, then, is not about an easy "happily ever after" but about repair and maintenance. Obviously this applies directly to Finn's relationship with Sam, but how does it work for Marianna? Ironically, the poem written to her by her soulmate reveals the very reason that she can never be with him--his commitment to his own wife.

Like Anna's life, Marianna's poem provides guidance for Finn, whose relationship with Sam may allow her to benefit from it in ways that Marianna cannot. Moreover, Anna passes the heritage of the grandmother's crow to Finn rather than to Marianna; if Anna feels dismay over Marianna's marital status, it does not appear on screen. And, despite the strikingly different circumstances of their lives, both Anna and Marianna, as in the novel, are the only single women in the film. The relationship between Anna and Marianna is described only by Anna, although the love and respect Marianna holds for her mother is evident, despite the lack of interaction between the two on screen. For example, although Marianna does challenge her mother at one point about a too strict adherence to the rules of design, her obvious pleasure when Anna looks at her quilt patch and declares it "good work" speaks volumes about the importance of her mother's heritage to Marianna's sense of self. Although Marianna's life is much different from Anna's, the two women still occupy a space of their own as black women in the film which Finn learns from but cannot,

as white woman, enter, but which provides a foil to Finn's eventual understanding of her own white womanhood.

Finn and Sophia

Significantly, the one white woman with the potential to challenge effectively constructions of white womanhood in the film fails fully to do so. Sophia, as the only woman whose flashback reveals a fundamental unhappiness with the institution of marriage, also demonstrates the greatest degree of interest in Finn as career woman. While the other women focus on the wedding quilt, Sophia seems more aware of Finn's position to carve out a different life for herself--perhaps the life that Sophia herself wanted. For example, when Em asks Finn when (not if) she plans to start having babies, Sophia immediately chimes in with the very private question, "Are you using protection?" The other women in the group, including Finn, are taken aback by the question, but Sophia's experience with the loss of opportunity following motherhood creates a context for the question that reveals her concern for Finn. Sophia also expresses a lack of understanding or sympathy for Finn's indecision about thesis topics; although scolded by the other women for her interference, Sophia undoubtedly resents Finn's flippant attitude towards her own freedom of choice.

The most telling moment occurs, however, after Sophia helps to gather the bits of Finn's thesis, blown to bits in a surprise wind storm. Not only does Sophia gather the paper, but she irons the wrinkled ones and takes the time to read the parts that fall into her hands. The camera then focuses on Sophia working on the quilt and looking up to watch Finn attempting to reconstruct the paper. Moving away from the other women to approach Finn, Sophia establishes a connection with Finn, apart from just another member of her grandmother's quilting circle. Sophia tells her that "It's really good. What I read so far. I'd like to read the whole thing when you're done with it. You're a good writer--I was a diver." When Finn replies, "I know," the two women maintain eye contact for several

seconds, before Sophia quickly turns to walk away. Here the connection between Finn and Sophia is made explicit, and the scene implies Sophia's unspoken encouragement to Finn to continue as a writer, even as she works on Finn's wedding quilt. For Finn, of course, career and marriage are not mutually exclusive as they were for Sophia, but only Sophia actively encourages Finn to remember this.

The following morning reveals the resolution of Finn's dilemma. Waking up under the finished quilt, and then following the crow at her window through the orchard to Sam, asleep in his bus, Finn tells us:

I'll tell you what makes me happy about marrying Sam. I know our marriage has as good a chance of being wonderful as it does of missing the mark. However, I'm banking on our love for each other to weigh a bit heavier on the wonderful side. As Anna says about making a quilt, you have to choose your combination carefully--the right choices will enhance your quilt. The wrong choices will dull the colors, hide their original beauty. There are no rules you can follow. You have to go by instinct and you have to be brave.

Watching the reconciliation between Finn and Sam during this voice-over, the camera slowly pulls away and up to a blue sky; an almost imperceptible fade to another sky occurs before the camera pans down to reveal Sophia, in long shot, standing on the high diving board above a deserted pool. Moving behind her, the camera then moves to a bird's eye view of her dive as the musical theme of the film swells. The final shot leaves the viewer with the image of Sophia, engaged in the activity she loves, takes the most pride in, and gave up when, as she tells her husband, she "became a wife and mother." This final shot, on the heels of Finn's decision, leaves us with a reminder of Sophia's resistance to the paradigm of white womanhood Finn chooses.

Although Finn recognizes the dulling effects of unhappy marriages in the lives of the women in the circle, she chooses to risk that possibility in the hope of a happy life with

Sam. Significantly, Finn links this decision to Anna's rules of quilting design, now using Anna's creative skill as a metaphor for her own life while she joins the ranks of all the other white women in the film by following her "instinct," a term which naturalizes her "choice." Finn's final assessment of her situation is that fear alone prevents women from making the choices they know they must make, a point her mother makes about her hesitancy to marry Sam. The unanswered questions remain, however, about why the white women seem to follow one instinct, despite all resultant pain-- an instinct which is encouraged, though not followed, by the black women.

Finn follows a different set of rules than either Anna or her daughter, rules modeled by the white women of the quilting circle. Anna and Marianna exist as black women in a white film world, updated versions of established film traditions which define black women as mammy or exotic other, and who function as points of comparison for appropriate white womanhood in the film. These traditional white perceptions of black womanhood remain unquestioned in the film but are used to establish the boundaries of Finn's options as those of white woman which are, as reviewer Leah Rozen describes them, to "suffer, suffer, and then suffer some more, all for love" (23).

Anna, in particular, is a significant character by virtue of her role as master quilter in a film which claims to represent the pain and choices of American women through the metaphor of the quilt itself. Contextualizing the art of quilting, within the film, from its importance in the African-American world rather than the white world (of which it is also a part) places Anna and her representation of black womanhood not only as creative/artistic center of the narrative but as the guiding hand behind the representation of white lives as well. Her influence in the lives of white lives is unmistakable and seductive: Anna is the supreme mother in the film, wise and self-assured. However, as supreme mother to a circle of white women, Anna's creativity and vision comprise a contribution to a white community, reminiscent of the contribution of the traditional mammy. Placing Anna at the

head of this circle, ironically, removes her from the community of quilters itself; although the traditional white power structure is overturned here, so too is the "egalitarian" community of a female quilting circle. Anna's life as African-American woman is defined differently from the white women in the circle, which it should be. However, the distinctions drawn between white and black lives assume recognizably traditional characteristics which ultimately validate white essentialist notions of black and white womanhood.

The reviews of How to Make an American Quilt fall into, essentially, two camps. The first dismisses the film as overly sentimental and shamelessly transparent in the use of a quilting metaphor to connect the lives of disparate women. The second camp views the movie as a powerful rendition of the joys and sorrows of love in women's lives, the narratives of which are effectively joined together in a circle of friendship under the guiding metaphor of the quilt. For example, although Leah Rozen, as noted above, sees How to Make an American Quilt as an irritating and melodramatic homage to women's suffering for love, other female critics, Caryn James and Jean Oppenheimer, find the movie to be quite true and moving. According to James,

Off camera and on, the women who put this film together obviously shared a vision that conspires to make the characters strong and sentimental, but never saintly, the film emotional but never sappy How to Make an American Quilt creates the best illusion a film can hope for: that we are not watching movie women but real women, with shaky judgments and lifetimes of reasons to resent and forgive one another as well as all the men in their lives. (C12)

Male critics also tend to focus on the emotional impact of the film and are equally divided over the effectiveness of this representation of women's lives. Leonard Klady of Variety views the film as "ambitious, poetic, muddled and softer than the inside of a

toasted marshmallow" (61). He goes on to make the interesting claim that, "While this tale of sisterhood is meant to offer some contemporary insights, it has an underlying anachronistic nature that harks back to wartime female bonding pictures of the nature of Tender Comrade and Since You Went Away" (61). On a lighter note, subtitled his review of several women's movies as "A Vision of Hell for Guys," the Rolling Stone reviewer, Peter Travers asserts that How to Make an American Quilt is just one more example of a "female- bonding" movie "in which women gather to share histories, feelings and the dirt done to them by men. No action--just talk, talk, talk. It's enough to drop a guy in the first round" (77). However, this reviewer makes an interesting plea at the end of his review, noting that "These touchy-feely female movies are as bad as the macho gut busters. What's needed is a movie in which women and men talk to each other" (71). The harshest review comes, not surprisingly, from John Simon of National Review, who describes the film as "deeply depraved slatternliness that piles soggy platitude on platitude for nearly two mind-dissolving hours" (60). He concludes that, "I allow for critical disagreement in most matters, but must declare anyone with the slightest use for this abomination beyond the pale of civilized discourse" (60), a statement that does not bode well for either the writer or the readers of this paper!

Several male reviewers, however, find value in the film. Richard Schickel, of Time, describes the message of How to Make an American Quilt as "sweetly subversive. It usefully insists that beneath the placid surface of middle-class life strong currents rush and eddy, carrying everyone in directions utterly unpredictable when they are young and sure of themselves" (84). David Denby of New York endorses both the style and the content of the film when he writes, with something of a patriarchal bent, that "The many parts of How to Make an American Quilt are fused so smoothly, and with such shrewd and loving craftsmanship, that I would describe the movie not as a quilt but as *something more solid and complicated* [my emphasis] By the end of the summer, Finn knows what she

has to do" (108). However, John Powers of Vogue notes the ironic juxtaposition of the final shot of the film with its overall message, claiming that "[F]or all the movie's optimism about Finn's romantic possibilities, the final image doesn't show us a happy, loving couple, but an aging woman diving from the high board, all by herself" (188).

Obviously, then, all the reviewers recognize, to some extent, that the film claims to represent the lives of women for women, and, therefore, comment upon the validity and success of the film in that sense. However, unlike the reviews of Imitation of Life from the 1930s, these writers avoid the question of race as they judge this representation of American women's experiences. Like the film itself, the reviewers tend to collapse definitions of womanhood into a universal white experience, which is itself based upon and perpetuated by stereotypical needs and desires of both black and white women. Moreover, the black press seemed to ignore the film, despite the participation of Maya Angelou. For instance, although Angelou was voted by Ebony readers in 1994 as the "Black woman who best exemplifies the sass, style, and unique beauty of the African-American woman" (39), the publication did not choose to review How to Make an American Quilt. Other mainstream black publications, including Essence and Jet, also failed to review the film, suggesting perhaps the editors' assumption that the film would not hold much interest for their readers. That this woman's film is actually intended for all women, then, remains debatable.

Questioned by Jean Oppenheimer of Premiere, Maya Angelou explains her reason for accepting the role of Anna: "When I was told the names of the actresses who would be in it, I thought I wanted to be part of that" (48). With no further explanation, then, Angelou's perception of the character Anna, in particular, is unknown. She does give her interpretation of the film, however, as "a story about some opinionated women. It's about expectations: women's expectations and also society's expectations of women. And they don't always jibe" (Oppenheimer 49). Here again, the answer is vague enough to lend

itself to multiple interpretations; however, it does seem clear that Angelou chose to identify herself with the film because of the possibility of exploring women's issues with other women, and was interested in working with her [white] co-stars in particular. The question, of course, is whether or not the universalizing of the female experience is a desirable method with which to deal with interracial female friendships and experiences, particularly in light of its inevitable reinforcement of familiar stereotypes. As the next chapter reveals, African-American filmmakers continue to grapple with these questions of representation of African-American women's lives, although fuller representation seems to demand the absence of white women from the picture, and continues to erase potential for cinematic dialogue.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The validation of cultural norms on screen is often crucial to the acceptance of a film by its major audience. Arguably targeted primarily towards white women, then, both Imitation of Life and How to Make an American Quilt demonstrate something of that audience's expectations. Despite the difference in context from 1934 to 1995, and the necessary changes which accompany those contexts, the representation of African-American women in the space of these family melodramas does not show the fundamental changes one might expect following the Civil Rights and feminist movements. Instead, the stereotypes assume another guise and are re-packaged, validating Bogle's claim about the persistence of these negative stereotypes in Hollywood film (17).

Jackie Byars investigates more fully the persistence of stereotypes in All That Hollywood Allows, an investigation of 1950s melodrama. Drawing primarily on the theoretical work of Tessa Perkins, Byars explains:

Stereotypes draw their strength from their ability "to operate as conceptual (cognitive) resolutions of contradictions"; they allow people to think it "natural" that they themselves are "inferior." The political consequences are obvious. The concepts of "responsibility" and "leadership" are generally attached to the stereotype of the white, heterosexual, upper-class male But though stereotypes are primarily evaluative, they are not, as most assume, necessarily simple or rigid and unchanging such flexibility, Perkins argued, allows stereotypes to maintain credibility. (73-74)

Here we see that in American culture, the dominant white patriarchy and those complicit with it both create and sustain stereotypes that work to maintain its status quo. Important and, at times, successful challenges to that dominant group have occurred, particularly

during the era between the two films in question. Nevertheless, the persistence of negative African-American stereotypes, especially the mammy, from one film to the other demonstrates that the traditional powers still maintain the distinction of a "natural" superiority, which suggests the way in which its audience (whether white or black women) is expected to view itself.

The mammy construction or stereotype, as noted in Chapter One, is historically a white creation intended to demonstrate, in part, a racial harmony that results from the "natural" legitimacy of the slave system which created her. As a mother figure, responsible for the welfare of a white family's women and children, the mammy, as Sybil DelGaudio points out,

reflected the opposite of the myth of social mobility for blacks. As presented in Hollywood films, her image persists as a unique one of apparent strength for both blacks and women. Yet if we look more closely at the structures in which this apparent strength is "allowed" by white culture--both in the larger social myth and in Hollywood cinema--we can see the limitations of the Mammy image and understand why this particular depiction of black power has remained largely unattacked by whites. (23)

DelGaudio goes on to argue that the mammy image accomplishes two things: first, it removes the power from white women in the home, "transferring maternal authority from white mothers to black surrogates," while also destroying the stability of the black home and community. She quotes Robert Staples to suggest that the illusion of black woman's power as matriarch is actually "[T]o burden [her] with other accusations, such as robbing the black man of his manhood" which "serves to foster the kinds of antagonisms in the black community that perpetuate the continued exploitation of the oppressed group" (DelGaudio 24). Here, the explanation for why the mammy myth holds value for the white patriarchy, and a closer examination of the "power" mammies often seem to wield provide

valuable insight in the transformation of the mammy from a 1930s to a 1990s context. With the flexibility of a true stereotype, the mammy figure continues to define, into these family melodramas, notions of white and black womanhood still at work in American society.

A combination of both the Civil Rights and the feminist movements works to create a very different context in which to approach issues of white and black womanhood; nevertheless, the genre of family melodrama significantly continues to investigate the same core issues for its generally white protagonists. The problem of juggling a career and family, for example, or the conflict between single independence/ loneliness or marriage still exists for women in America, and is arguably more pressing today as more women must enter the work force out of economic necessity. However, the validation of marriage and motherhood as the appropriate career for women, in these films, does not necessarily account for the near impossibility of the traditional one-income family. Moreover, despite the gains of the Civil Rights movement, the black experience from a black perspective has only recently emerged in mainstream Hollywood cinema through the work of such black male filmmakers as Spike Lee or John Singleton. As a result, the images of black womanhood in relation to white womanhood have gone virtually unexamined; even a film such as How to Make an American Quilt, created primarily by white female filmmakers, continues to explore issues pertinent to white women, relying on black counterparts to help define and naturalize the parameters of white womanhood.

The characters of Delilah and Anna, then, are black women constructed from a primarily white perspective and, as such, perform the primary function of revealing and guiding white women to their true vocations as wives and mothers. While the image of Anna is updated for a 1995 white sensibility and reflects an awareness of African-American issues (such as Anna's outright denunciation of the master/slave relationship), that image is

belied by the totality of her contribution to and her very decision to remain in a predominantly white world.

Anna exhibits a greater aura of power and self-confidence than does Delilah; as Finn tells us, the other quilters defer to her artistic judgment, and we certainly do not see her rubbing or kissing the feet of the white women around her. Nevertheless, the contribution of her own family tradition to a circle of white women is reminiscent of Delilah's willing divulgence of her grandmother's "secret" pancake recipe to Bea. In both cases, white women obviously benefit from the expertise and skill of the black women, while a reciprocity of that contribution is neither portrayed nor expected. Delilah's actual articulation of white supremacist notions is replaced by Anna's virtual silence on the subject of race relations; what we do see in the sequences with Marianna's father and the young Gladys are safely in the past. The issue simply does not arise within the quilting group itself and, as a result, the adult and present Anna contentedly guides the white quilters and doles out advice to Finn, effectively returning Finn to the same sphere of domesticity that Delilah does Bea.

Delilah and Anna are also alike as anomalous mammy figures in that both do have daughters to whom they maintain a relationship of responsibility. Generally, family and community ties for the black mammy are missing from the narrative to avoid any conflicts with her duty and loyalty to her white family. This anomaly does flesh out the lives of both characters but also significantly provides additional insight into the definition of black womanhood that these mothers pass along to their own daughters. Important to note as well is that both daughters are fathered by white (or extremely light-skinned) men so that the audience is aware of their ability to choose between the white and black worlds. Both, then, function as mulattos in the films, Peola attempting whiteness and Marianna choosing blackness. Although both daughters do end the films with their sense of black selfhood affirmed, the interpretation of that choice is markedly different from 1934 to 1995. For

Peola, the event is a "tragic" but necessary capitulation to the white desire for a separation of the races; for Marianna, the white world is never entertained as a possibility, while a sense of black pride and affiliation with her black mother emerges instead. Significant as well is her identification with a black "soulmate," although an actual marriage to him is barred from her.

Nevertheless, Peola and Marianna are alike in that their lives represent another image of black womanhood for the white characters which serves to differentiate and define white womanhood. And all the definitions are ultimately derived from the guidance of the black mother. For Peola, her outright resistance to the paradigm of the mother creates a space in which Delilah is forced to respond and articulate the expectations for black womanhood in relation to whiteness, essentially claiming that Peola will have to "learn to take it" and accept a role as substandard woman in society at large. While Marianna certainly does not embrace a paradigm of subservience, she does embody an image of nearly oppositional "otherness" to white womanhood. Finn articulates that otherness, in this case, rather than does either of the black women themselves, but both Finn and Delilah articulate the similar message that the lives of white and black women are completely distinct from one another in particular ways. And these particular ways, not coincidentally, offer a foil to the understanding of white womanhood within each film, maintaining an emphasis on the white role as wife and mother. Although Anna does not articulate lessons about black womanhood to Marianna, and although their lives are quite different from each other, Marianna and Anna share the distinction of being the only single women in the film. Moreover, although both women engaged in extramarital affairs (Anna one, Marianna multiple), both women tacitly endorse Finn's commitment to Sam, although neither is permitted to find (or keep) a Sam of her own.

Finally, the absence of the mammy's own desires, subsumed by the demands of her white charges, occurs in both Imitation of Life and How to Make an American Quilt.

Both Delilah and Anna do unambiguously express a desire for the love of their own daughters, and Delilah one for her own funeral; otherwise, the films do not investigate the tensions or desires of these mothers in their own lives. The film version of Anna, in particular, completely erases her experiences as budding astronomer as a child and successful businesswoman as an adult. Delilah turns down well-earned financial independence and rest for herself (although she hopes aloud that "Peola won't have to keep house for no one") in favor of retaining a status as Bea's domestic and "taking care" of her. Anna, unlike the other women of the story, is never seen in her own home but always in the home of a white woman, either leading the quilting group or engaged in domestic work for the white women. Although Finn explains that she "used" to work for Glady, what she does instead is never mentioned, and Anna is repeatedly portrayed in the film as a domestic. Most importantly, though, both women demonstrate contentment with their relationships with white women; ties to a black community, with the exception of their daughters, never appear except after Delilah's death. The support of that community or the tensions Delilah or Anna might feel as a mediator between two worlds are never explored; only their relationship to whiteness constitutes and justifies their inclusion in the films.

The absence of the black experience in these Hollywood films, then, is attributable to the films' focus on white womanhood, which finds black womanhood useful only as a counterpoint. White perceptions and beliefs surrounding black women construct the black characters, who may evolve in response to changing levels of white awareness and sensitivity to black issues but who cannot honestly be said to represent a black voice itself. As mentioned above, only very recently have black filmmakers found a voice in mainstream Hollywood, and that voice, like that of white Hollywood, remains predominantly male. However, when the voices of black women are heard in these films, they may offer a strikingly different interpretation of the relationship between white and black women in America today than either the subservient stance of Imitation of Life or the

universal sisterhood of How to Make an American Quilt. Rather, some films made by black filmmakers, male and female, offer a much more strident resistance of black women to definition by any standard of whiteness. Examples of that black female voice in recent films occur in Forest Whitaker's Waiting to Exhale (1995), Lisa Harris' Just Another Girl on the IRT (1992), and Mira Nair's Mississippi Masala (1992).

One recent representation of the African-American woman's experience in Hollywood film is Forest Whitaker's Waiting to Exhale (1995). As are Imitation of Life and How to Make an American Quilt, Waiting to Exhale is an adaptation of a best selling novel published in 1992 by a woman novelist, in this case African-American writer Terry McMillan. A fairly traditional woman's film in many ways, Waiting to Exhale focuses on the narratives of four single, upper- middle- class African-American women who must navigate the difficult choices of marriage, motherhood, and career. No white women appear in the film as protagonists or as friends of the protagonists so that the four women, Bernie, Savannah, Robin, and Gloria function as individual and fully developed characters without relation to whiteness. However, although white women are almost entirely absent, physically, from the film, their presence is invoked throughout by the black women's predominantly hostile references to them. These references consistently place white women in a negative context as competitors for, if not predators of black men. Within this particular film, then, white women are targeted as partially responsible for the prevention of the African-American woman's attainment of desire as *women*, still defined within traditional Hollywood parameters as wives and mothers.

Bernie's narrative, in particular, revolves around the incursion of a white woman into the black community as Bernie's husband files for divorce in order to marry a white lover. The only scene of literal interaction between white and black women in the film occurs when Bernie slaps the face of her husband's "white bitch." Another example occurs earlier in the film as Bernie clears out her husband's perfectly organized closet in a blind

rage ranting, "I bet there are serial killers less anal. You'll need a white woman; probably the only one who will tolerate your smug ass." Similarly, Bernie's friend Robin breaks up with a deadbeat boyfriend by informing him that "a white woman can have your sorry ass." Remarks like these reveal that, despite their absence from the film, white women here function much as black women do in a white woman's film; white women represent an other against which black women can define themselves. Nevertheless, Waiting to Exhale exploded the traditional Hollywood assumption that African-American women are fundamentally different from white women based solely on race. Rather, the difficulties of middle to upper-class women American women seem strikingly similar across racial lines in this first African-American "woman's film."

Independent women filmmakers of color Mira Nair and Leslie Harris, however, explore other possibilities for the representation of, respectively, Indian and African-American women outside of the dominant, established Hollywood paradigm. Harris, in fact, labels her Just Another Girl From the IRT in the credits as "a film that Hollywood dared not make." Her narrative follows a young, intelligent African-American girl living in the Brooklyn projects who becomes pregnant and, in confusion and desperation, almost discards her child in a plastic garbage bag. This protagonist, Chantel (Aryan Johnson), voices her desires, hopes, and expectations stridently and frequently throughout the film--she wants to go to college and become a doctor, she wants money to finance a higher standard of living. She also wants a man with a car, a red leather jacket, discussion of contemporary African-American issues in her history class, and recognition of her unquestionable intelligence.

Chantel neither tolerates nor capitulates to negative attitudes and expectations for her life from either the black or white community. During one of several direct addresses to the camera, Chantel informs her audience:

The other day I was on the Number 2 train with my friends just buggin' out and havin' a good time and people started staring at us like we was some kind of street girls with no future. When I'm with my friends, I act like it don't matter because it don't. But between you and me, that shit pisses me off. When they think they can just judge you by the way you dress. I always get A's and B's in all my classes; I'm the best student in my calc class. People be tripping when they find out how smart I really am.

Here Chantel reveals a strong sense of self-worth as well as an expectation for her life that does not match the stereotype of African-American women in American film or culture. Although she does not refer specifically to race here, the two interactions she has with white characters in the film (a white male history teacher and a pretentious white woman) clearly demonstrate that Chantel's self-perception as black woman is in no way dependent upon an adherence to white standards for her conduct. Further, the problems in the movie tend to focus on Chantel's struggles with class and gender, as a poor teenage girl who finds herself pregnant and incapable of dealing with the ramifications of that situation for her future plans. Measuring herself by a white standard does not seem to occur to Chantel; neither does Chantel act as guiding mother figure or exotic foil to a white woman. The creation of a complex African-American woman in these films, then, occurs in the absence of white women, focusing instead on the protagonist's life within a black community. The lack of screen interaction for the black protagonists of Waiting to Exhale and Just Another Girl with women other than their ethnic counterparts also characterizes Indian filmmaker Mira Nair's 1992 film, Mississippi Masala.

Nair's narrative focuses on a twenty-four-year-old Indian woman, Mina (Sarita Choudhury), whose parents immigrated with her to Mississippi from Uganda. Mina's Indian father, raised in Uganda, is ousted from the country when Mina is only a child. Despite her father's loyalty to Uganda, his Indian heritage makes him a target for those in

the regime who believe that "Africa is for black Africans" alone. Mina, as a young woman, finds herself in a similar situation when she must face the hostility of both the Indian and African-American communities in Greenwood, Mississippi, after being caught in bed with African-American small business owner, Demetrius (Denzel Washington). While the film does not focus exclusively on Mina, investigating as well the interracial tensions between minority communities in the American south, Mina becomes the center of the conflict, blamed by all sides, including her lover, for the devastation created by the affair. Thus, while Nair does explore the relationships of minority groups to one another as they survive under and compete for access to white power structures (or "Americanness"), the film does not depict any interactions between white women and women of color.

Mina, a self-described mixed "masala" ("a bunch of hot spices") of cultural diversity (having lived in Uganda, England, and American while being raised by Indian parents-- there seems also to be some suggestion that her biological father is African), embodies the actual fluidity of rigid racial and cultural constructions, calling into question the validity of the communities' response to the "mixed" couple. Throughout the film, other characters constantly question Mina's ethnic identity, trying and failing to accurately identify and label her "appropriate" cultural niche. The inability to label Mina allows Nair to effectively resist the reduction of the character to a racial type--that she is not white is, obviously, of extreme importance, but of greater importance is the thwarting of her fulfillment as a human being. Her financial situation prevents her from attending college, despite her obvious intelligence, and her love for Demetrius is undermined by racial tensions as well as a double standard of respectability for Indian women. Mina does not encounter or interact with white women at any point in the film, but instead demonstrates the existence of other cultural standards by which to define herself. As an Indian woman with close ties to her family and community, Mina is held accountable to Indian standards of womanhood rather than white.

The perceptions that white and black women hold of each other in Hollywood film reveals, at the least, the very real tensions that exist between them in American culture, but which tend to be subdued in white women's films by falling back to what are for whites familiar and safer stereotypes. Using each other to define ourselves, both white and black women hold certain assumptions and expectations for the "other" that often negate any sense of true friendship, either in "real life" or on-screen. Observing and analyzing these film interactions is a relevant point of departure for the ongoing feminist debate over definitions of womanhood and the desired goals and expectations that should focus a continuing conversation between and among American women. Obviously, the standards and concerns of "white womanhood" do not accurately represent all women, including all white women. Neither is it accurate to assume that, despite significant cultural differences, similar desires and tensions cannot exist among women of different ethnicities. The continued emergence of female voices, of all ethnicities, in mainstream cinema should be a positive and powerful influence towards a more truthful articulation of women's issues in Hollywood and, by extension, American culture.

WORKS CITED

Works Cited

- Aaronson. Rev. of Imitation of Life. Motion Picture Herald 1 Dec. 1934: 39-42.
- Balio, Tino, ed. Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939.
History of the American Cinema 5. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993.
- Basinger, Jeanine. A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960.
Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993.
- Benenson, Laurie Halpern. "Of Women and by Women: Talking Love." New York Times 15 Oct. 1995: 17H.
- Berlant, Lauren. "National Brands/ National Body: Imitation of Life." Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text Ed. Hortense Spillers. New York: Routledge, 1991. 110-140.
- Bogle, Donald. Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.
- Brown, Sterling. "Imitation of Life: Once a Pancake." A Son's Return Ed. Mark A. Sanders. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996. 287-290.
- Byars, Jackie. All That Hollywood Allows: Re-Reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama.
Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- DelGaudio, Sybil. "The Mammy in Hollywood Film: I'd Walk a Million Miles for One of Her Smiles." Jump Cut 28 (1983): 23-25.
- Denby, David. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt. New York 30 October 1995: 108.
- Diawara, Manthia. Black American Cinema. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal." Imitations of Life
Ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- DuBois, W. E. B. The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America.

- Boston: The Stratford Company, 1924.
- Fischer, Lucy. Imitation of Life: Douglas Sirk, Director. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
- Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy. "Imitations of Life: The Black Woman's Double Determinism as Troubling 'Other.'" Literature/ Psychology, 34.4 (1988): 44-57.
- Freeman, Judith. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto. Los Times Book Review 24 March 1991: 3.
- Harris, Trudier. From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Hawthorne, Mary. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto. Times Literary Supplement 26 July 1991: 19.
- hooks, bell. Black Looks: Race and Representation. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- How to Make an American Quilt. Dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse. Universal Studios, 1995.
- Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt. Rolling Stone 2 November 1995: 77.
- Hurst, Fannie. Imitation of Life. San Bernadino: The Borgo Press, 1933.
- Imitation of Life. Dir. John Stahl. Universal Studios, 1934.
- Rev. of Imitation of Life. Literary Digest 8 December 1934: 31.
- Rev. of Imitation of Life. Time 3 December 1934: 47.
- James, Caryn. "Marriage, Betrayal and Turning Points." New York Times 6 October 1995: C12.
- Just Another Girl on the IRT. Dir. Leslie Harris. Truth 24 F. P. S., 1992.
- Klady, Leonard. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt. Variety 28 October 1995: 61.
- Land. Rev. of Imitation of Life. Variety 27 November 1934: 15.
- Lichtenstein, Diane. "Fannie Hurst and Her Nineteenth Century Predecessors." Studies in American Jewish Literature. 7.1 (1988): 26-39.

- Maltby, Richard. "The Production Code and the Hays Office." Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939. Ed. Tino Balio. History of the American Cinema 5. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993.
- McCorkle, Jill. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto. New York Times Book Review 24 March 1991: 10.
- Mississippi Masala. Dir. Mira Nair. Twentieth Century Fox, 1992.
- Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Penguin Books, 1970.
- . Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Random House, 1992.
- Oppenheimer, Jean. "'Quilt' Trip." Premiere November 1995: 48.
- O'Steen, Kathleen. "Piecing Together a Circle of Artists." Los Angeles Times 12 October 1995: 3E.
- Otto, Whitney. How to Make an American Quilt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.
- Powers, John. "Six Wise Women and One Wise Guy." Vogue November 1995: 186
- "Readers Poll." Ebony September 1994: 38-39.
- Rozen, Leah. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt. People Weekly 16 October 1995: 23(2).
- Rubenstein, Roberta. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto. Chicago Tribune 28 April 1991: 14.
- Schatz, Thomas. Hollywood Genres. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1981.
- Schickel, Richard. "Leftover Lives." Time 9 October 1995: 84.
- Seeger, Linda. When Women Call the Shots: The Developing Power and Influence of Women in Television and Film. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.
- Showalter, Elaine. Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Simon, John. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt. 23 October 1995: 60.

Smith, Valerie. "Reading the Intersection of Race and Gender in Narratives of Passing."

Diacritics 24. 2-3 (1994): 43-57.

Spring, Joel. The American School, 1642-1990: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1990.

Tonkin, Boyd. Rev. of How to Make an American Quilt by Whitney Otto. The Observer 26 July 1991: 51.

Tucker, Veta Smith. "Reconstructing Mammy: Fictive Reinterpretations of Mammy's Role in the Slave Community and Image in American Culture." Diss. U. of Michigan, 1994.

Waiting to Exhale. Dir. Forest Whitaker. Twentieth Century Fox, 1995.

Wallace-Sanders, Kimberly. "A Peculiar Motherhood: The Black Mammy Figure in American Literature and Popular Iconography, 1824-1965." Diss. Boston U., 1995.

Wilenz, Gay. "White Patron and Black Artist: The Correspondence of Fannie Hurst and Zora Neale Hurston." Library Chronicle of the University of Texas 35 (1986): 20-43.

Winsten, Archer. Rev. of Imitation of Life. The Bookman 76 (1933): 197-198.

Vita

Sarah McKee was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on December 2, 1971 and raised in both Fanwood, New Jersey, and Kingsport, Tennessee. She graduated from Sullivan South High School in Kingsport in 1990, and entered The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the fall of 1990. In May of 1995, she received the Bachelor of Arts degree in English, literature concentration, with minors in cinema studies, botany, and zoology. She then continued at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, entering the Master's program in English in the fall of 1995, and graduating in August, 1997.

She is currently employed by Asheville-Buncombe Community College in Asheville, North Carolina where she teaches developmental writing and reading.