

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

Reading Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*

Ryosuke Yamazaki

The readers of 1930s American literary works will easily see the plight of the working-class family as their central theme. For instance, in the 1930s, novels such as Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) put the family unit in the foreground, highlighting both the dehumanizing system of capitalism and the necessity of familial solidarity to resist the system. In these works, while the male members of these families are represented as battered by unemployment and layoffs, the female characters, especially housewives, are often portrayed as bulwarks of parental affection who unconditionally protect their families from accelerating exploitation and individualization. These female characters are entrusted with an important duty to resist the destruction and dissolution of their families. This representation, however, naturalizes housework as a female task, presenting it as inherent to femininity. When those 1930s narratives seem to praise "the earth mother" for her unwaged work as a virtue, these housewives are inevitably forced to play a role in justifying patriarchy.

In the works of Tillie Olsen (1912–2007), however, descriptions of female family members do not always follow the predominant tendencies of the 1930s literature. Reconsidering and reexamining the oppressed figure of mothers as alienated subjects, my project will reinterpret Olsen's text as problematizing the sexual division of labor,

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

which represents females' unwaged labor as non-work. Through an analysis of her incomplete work *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (1974), this paper focuses on how Olsen attempts to visualize the process in which forced housework is naturalized as women's labor.

Yonnondio is an autobiographical fiction based on Olsen's youth, and it gives a detailed account of the plight of a working-class family, the Holbrooks, whose miserable situation drives their wandering journey in search of better working conditions. Among the family members, Jim, the father, has a strong desire to escape from his low-income life, and this motivation drives the family into a journey with no particular destination. They first live in Wyoming, where Jim works in a coal mine and experiences repressive working conditions. After the family's daughter, Mazie, is involved in a horrible incident caused by McEvoy, one of the coal miners, they decide to leave the place. Though their first move to an abundant nature of farmland in Nebraska brings some peace and stability, their growing financial difficulties make this serenity temporary, pushing them to travel further to urban areas to earn money. In the second half of the novel, the description of the Holbrook family is filled with ceaseless hardships: exploitative wage labor in a slaughterhouse; the family's self-indulgent children; domestic abuse and violence towards Anna, the mother, from Jim and in turn from Anna to her children; housework weighing on Anna's body during pregnancy; and the unbearable midsummer heat of the urban areas of Nebraska. These problems occur together. In the midst of this intolerable situation, however, this story suddenly ends.

Yonnondio has some curious formal aspects. This story, originally written in the 1930s and first published in the early 1970s, retains the crudity and plainness of her original youthful narratives; Olsen herself dismissed the possibility of making further additions to the text.¹ The novel comprises eight chapters, the first four chapters of which have been edited for grammar and plot transitions. But the second part, from

chapter five onwards, remains as originally written. This part is opaque, not only because the transitions between scenes are hard to follow, but also because it is sometimes unclear which characters some personal pronouns refer to. In addition to these idiosyncrasies, another difficulty in obtaining a coherent reading of the novel is that it is not told from the viewpoint of just one person, even though the first part is told from Mazie's perspective. She appears to be the main character onto whom Olsen projects her childhood experience. However, the author sometimes dismisses Mazie from her role as a protagonist, and replaces her with her mother or a third person on some occasions.

While *Yonnondio* has been labeled a proletarian novel by some American scholars of 1930s literature, its literary value has also been underestimated as a failed instance of the genre. According to Constance Coiner, the proletarian label, originating in the 1930s, is inseparable from "the sexism of the Communist Party U.S.A." ("Literature" 145). On the one hand, the genre of proletarian literature affiliated with the party, which focuses on the struggle for better working condition for the physical labor mainly done by males, welcomed novels filled with concise, consistent, and direct political calls to anticapitalism. On the other hand, however, the genre did not kindly regard works without such strong political messages, considering them less genuine and labeling their "psychological and emotional categories as unmaterialist, as unrelated to 'real' politics, labeling introspective novels febrile, self-indulgent, and bourgeois" (146). The notion of proletarian literature therefore adapted to focus less on the description of women's struggle inside the Holbrooks' domestic sphere than on its peculiar form of the text itself. As Scott Herring noted about *Yonnondio*'s historical reception, there have been no small number of critiques considering its unfinished form as "a loss, as a failure, as an 'if only' wish, and as a thwarted revolution for the working-classes" (82). In other words, the proletarian's masculine

discourse, which prefers stable and coherent political messages, has embedded *Yonnondio* in this hardened framework, rendering its unfinished form the cause of dishonorable labels such as “defective,” “imperfect,” and “failed work.” Thus, Olsen’s publication in its incomplete form might make *Yonnondio* appear peculiar in light of the 1930s convention, since at that moment a number of literary radicals presented coherent appeals to social upheavals by writing novels. However, at a distance from such interpretation, this paper attempts to analyze these points not as eccentricities of this novel, but as gaps engendered by the subjugation of women’s labor to men, which enables male dominance to fuel capitalism. To grapple with this concern, it is important to grasp the context of Olsen’s novel in the 1930s, and how the story of the Holbrooks differs from that of other contemporary literature in terms of the representation of family.

The Holbrook Family’s Journey as Incorporation into Capital Accumulation

Stephanie Coontz emphasizes the idealization of the family in capitalist society in the US context (65). In this society, which accelerates competition between individuals, such “sanctification of family” is considered altruism, that is, the bulwark against the system. This sanctification, of course, infiltrates the working-class family, in which women’s housework is dedicated to providing a welcoming homecoming for men exhausted by physical labor. Family is thus idealized as a place where parental affection is unconditionally exchanged. This idealization entails the assumption that the family exists in opposition to the rationality of the market mechanism and, therefore, unpaid housework is necessarily assumed to be a woman’s responsibility. However, despite her secondary position as a support to her man and her family, the inequality laid on the sexual division of labor is hidden behind women’s own internalization of the norm, which

casts housework as a virtuous deed based on a woman's love for her family. What is worse, many working-class novels present female altruism as valuable as a woman's "natural" virtue. The presentation of women as devoted, patient, and cheerful, especially mothers, who have the "Ma Joadism" of Steinbeck, seems to support the idea that mothers' altruistic behavior is indispensable for protecting the family from dissolution in poverty.² However, at the same time, the stereotyped and problematic image of mothers is also advantageous to patriarchy and its retention of power. In those novels, the devoted figures of mothers often accord with the image of "earth mother," a symbol of attunement who brings peace and serenity to others. In contrast to that image, the Holbrook family's mother, Anna, diverges from the image of an ideal mother.³ In describing Anna, who experiences many hardships, *Yonnondio* poses a question: Is it true that women take genuine pleasure in sustaining their families through housework? The answer to this question would gradually emerge in the process by which Anna's unpaid housework is fixed as women's labor. And this process is closely related to the course of the Holbrook family's journey from the coal mines to the farmland, and finally to the slum and the nearby packing slaughterhouse.

The novel starts in the darkness of the coal mines; the surfaces of coal, the soot-covered skin of workers, the shadowy areas within the mine that work lights do not reach, and a dark night. All of these settings seem to lay stress on the occlusiveness of the leaden coal mines. McEvoy describes the weird interior of the mines as if they had a mind of their own:

Sometimes an old forlorn wind, with the tired voice of dead people, barely touching him [Sheen McEvoy], creeping along the sensitive surface. Sometimes the wind spoke or laughed in him. Then awful prophecies came to his tongue. To him, the

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

mine was alive—a thousand-armed creature, with ghosts hanging from the crossbeams, ghosts living in the coal swearing revenge when their homes were broken into. Once fire had risen from earth to sky, clutched at his face, borne it away. Looking in the mirror at himself, he thought now some ghost in the coal was wearing it, laughing. (15)

McEvoy becomes obsessed with the notion that the anger of the mines will lead to labor accidents, and blindly believes that he must appease this anger by sacrificing the fresh body of a child. Murmuring in delirium, he kidnaps Mazie to throw her into the shaft. Though his horrible deed ends in failure when a night watchman catches him, this traumatic event gives Jim a reason to leave the mine and move.

Although the coal mine is referred to with the feminine pronoun “she” by McEvoy, the space is actually organized by masculinities.⁴ In addition to holding a hegemonic idea that men are the only proper subjects of waged labor, some male characters in this novel further secure the sexual imbalance by exercising authoritative power over females. The incident in which the night watchman rescues a little girl from a threat represents male justification for managing and controlling the family, for whom he excludes the cause of a problem from his territory to keep order. Moreover, Jim represents the primary role of the father as a conductor who leads his family to a better life by moving, and his decisions are made without consulting other family members. Devoting themselves to these heroic acts, these male characters naturalize the legitimacy of the sexual division of labor. At the beginning of the novel, Mazie's position is already secondary to those of men because she is not only in the custody of her father but also in danger of being a victim of unpredictable violence by males. Meanwhile, Anna can do nothing except be dismayed by the events happening with her daughter. Thus, the physical-labor place

represented by the coal mines becomes a confined space that only men can access and belong to. Even if the family's moving seems to be a private issue in which Jim makes a decision for his family, it is by no means true. Their moving is not spontaneous but extrinsic, since the exclusive space forces them to move to seek more appropriate labor. Moreover, considered together with their next destination, this act of moving shows how the Holbrooks as a family unit have become incorporated into the dynamic system of capitalism for producing and accumulating capital.

Anna's Little Rest in Nature as Part of the Preparation Process of Capital Accumulation

From the farmland scene in Nebraska, Anna is prominently featured, and this nature scene is indispensable for evaluating her motherhood. Throughout the story, Anna rarely shows the vigor of the stereotyped figure of the mother, since the accelerating pressure on the family undermines her composure as the story unfolds. As Anna is singing "with bright eyes folded and unfolded memories of past years" (39), the serenity found in nature enables her to regain hope for the future, previously deprived by life in the coal mines. In contraposition to the oppressing space, the scene of nature functions to lead the family into a secure life. In another description of nature in the latter half of the story, the family faces difficult conditions in which they survive from day to day. By that time, several serious problems stemming from Jim's unemployment have destroyed the family's stability. Jim and Anna's marriage has become irreparably broken because of incidents such as her miscarriage, which resulted from his domestic violence and rape. Although she begins to ignore her husband, this does not mean that Anna is liberated from being a housewife. As if to escape from the depressed mood of the house, she goes out into nature with her children and temporarily restores her motherhood.

Mazie felt the strange happiness in her mother's body, happiness that had nought to do with them, with her; happiness and farness and selfness.

...

The fingers stroked, spun a web, cocooned Mazie into happiness and intactness and selfness. Soft wove the bliss round hurt and fear and want and shame—the old worn fragile bliss, a new frail selfness bliss, healing, transforming. Up from the grasses, from the earth, from the broad tree trunk at their back, latent life streamed and seeded. The air and self shone boundless. Absently, her mother stroked; stroked unfolding, wingedness, boundlessness. (146)

In comparison to other proletarian novels, this seemingly apolitical scene differs slightly from those of typical 1930's novels, which reflect direct hostility to capitalism. I will read this scene of natural beauty not simply as an aesthetic presentation but as a potentially political representation that reveals how capitalism reforms and disciplines the family unit for capital accumulation by tormenting women's bodies. In the quote above, terms such as "selfness" and "latent life" suggest Anna's memory of a past serene life. She knows that non-industrial places give her "wingedness" and "boundlessness" because, in such places, no man forces her to relieve his exhaustion through housework. But such pleasures are missing in the devastating life in the slum. Therefore, those words simultaneously reflect how Anna's reality alienates her from not only herself but also from her labor. Every time that she visits nature for rest and peace, those feelings re-emerge to chain her to an unrecoverable past and reinforce her hatred of returning to her intolerable daily labor. This is the significant process in which women's housework is formed as non-work, unpaid labor. According

to Joseph B. Entin, *Yonnondio*'s serenity described in nature is always inseparable from the industrial places "when the wind shifts, bringing the stench from the packinghouse, a reminder of the economic conditions that dominate their lives" (167). While this scene of nature brings a little rest to Anna, this temporal rest simultaneously reminds her of the fact that she receives nothing as a material reward for her housework. In this case, there is no other way for Anna than to replenish her energy for her never-rewarded labor from non-capitalist natural resources. That is, this scene not only supplements Anna's uncompensated labor with the serenity found in nature but also naturalizes the unmateriality of women's unpaid labor when she restores her vigor in motherhood.

Considered together with the moving process during the Holbrooks' journey, the serenity shared between the mother and daughter is also inseparable from the social inequality and the absurdity that most modernist writers are unwilling to address. Therefore, it is crucial to examine all the scenes of the family's destinations holistically, rather than separately. The whole process of the Holbrooks' journey needs to be considered in its entirety as part of the form of the novel because it demonstrates another process in which capitalism embeds the working-class family into the assembly line format under which capitalistic society operates. Thus, women cannot take refuge from housework by retreating to nature, which is itself part of the preparation process, further incorporating spontaneous housework into unpaid labor as women's responsibilities. Women are given rest not for ethical reasons but because it enables them to continue their participation in unpaid labor. And when Anna likewise tries to reengage in housework, her body becomes an important factor in exposing the injustice of the sexual division of labor.

Capitalism controls the domestic domain of the working class, along with all other working conditions. Customs, chores, ways to

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

spend leisure time, and even the expression of feelings, are all embedded in the existing frame of social administration. For Silvia Federici, all these means of control are exercised with the aim of “reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it” (16). To resist the power men wield over women, demanding payment for their unpaid labor should become the starting point for women’s emancipation from subjugation to housework. For the sake of this achievement, visualizing women’s housework as labor is indispensable.⁵ It is apparent that there would be qualms about approving of wages paid for women’s housework under a capitalist regime, since that would mean explicitly acknowledging that every social relationship is incorporated into “capitalist relations” (19). Although this demand for payment might be, therefore, in danger of fixing women’s housework as capitalist labor which cannot subvert the system and its exploitation, Federici is well aware of this criticism and clearly explains the value of this approach toward visualizing women’s unpaid labor:

When we struggle for wages for housework we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role. In the same way, there is a qualitative difference between the struggles of the waged worker and the struggles of the slave for a wage against that slavery. It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for a wage we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we have never been out of them. We struggle to break capital’s plan for women, which is an essential moment of that division of labor and social power within the working class through which capital has been able to maintain its hegemony. (19)

For Federici, who has tackled the problem of the sexual division of

labor through the 1970s, this suggestion has been quite significant for the reconsideration of women's "social role" embedded in the process of capital accumulation. The visualization of women's labor renders the smooth operation of capitalism unstable because capitalism can no longer justify the inequality in the sexual division of labor. In other words, women's housework is no longer non-work, but it is definitely as much a form of toil as men's physical labor. There is constant friction between the system and women's unpaid labor. Therefore, a sign of visualization emerges not from an idealized "earth mother" but from a figure like Anna. In *Yonnondio*, this friction is reflected as a tremble of Anna's body.

***Yonnondio's* Resistance Emerged from Anna's Cramping Body**

In the novel, workers in the meatpacking slaughterhouse are transformed by a monotonous and repetitive sped-up system into "geared, meshed" cogs. In one scene, the narration enumerates the divided labor roles in a line as a series of nouns: "*Geared, meshed*: the kill room: knockers, shacklers, pritcher-uppers, stickers, headers, rippers, leg breakers, breast and aitch sawyers, caul pullers, fell cutters, rumpers, splitters, vat dippers, skimmers, gutters, pluckers" (166). This line underscores the alienated subjectivity of workers by eliminating their names from the jobs they do. Disciplined and regulated, the body is subordinated to the production line, and a worker's limbs are no longer his property. The influence of the alienating system over workers permeates the workers' domestic spheres as well. Anna also feels a sudden discordance between her will and body: "A gaunt Anna who could not understand this body of hers that tired so quickly and quivered like a naked nerve: this stranger self" (131). In the second half of the novel, Anna begins to cramp when she tries to absorb herself in an overwhelming amount of housework. This is expressed by several

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

adjectives such as “shuddering,” “quivering,” “trembling,” “vibrating” and “convulsed.” There is no doubt that her overwork is the cause of her cramps. However, if her overwork is merely attributed to poverty resulting from Jim’s low wages, this could cause us to overlook an opportunity to reexamine the problem of the sexual division of labor. Such an interpretation merely reinforces heteronormativity and the stereotyped idea of motherhood derived from “Ma Joadism” because it evidently assumes women engage in housework while simultaneously obscuring the naturalization of women’s unpaid work. Therefore, rather than seeking the cause of her excessive labor in terms of quantity, Anna’s cramping body must be reconsidered in the historical context of the sexual division of labor. In other words, a reexamination of her cramps suggests the idea of resistance, which capitalism is eager to obscure. If the dissimulation that women’s reproductive housework must be exploited to support capital accumulation enables the operation of capitalism to function effectively, her cramps can be viewed as the threatening error that “the capitalist system has to obfuscate as far as possible, because of its potentially explosive capacity to spark resistance and rebellion” (Colley 231). Her body subconsciously becomes a latent form of resistance to the ideal of motherhood, and symbolically draws a subversive awareness to the mythical glorification of women’s housework as unpaid labor. And, in terms of reconsideration of women’s unpaid labor, this perspective allows us to reexamine not only Anna’s forced housework but the incompleteness of this unfinished novel.

Regarding her writing potential as thwarted, Olsen explicitly states this belief in an essay written in 1962, collected in *Silences* (1978):

If I talk now quickly of my own silences—almost presumptuous after what has been told here—it is that the

individual experience may add.

In the twenty years I bore and reared my children, usually had to work on a paid job as well, the simplest circumstances for creation did not exist. Nevertheless writing, the hope of it, was “the air I breathed, so long as I shall breathe at all.” In that hope, there was conscious storing, snatched reading, beginnings of writing, and always “the secret rootlets of reconnaissance.” (19)

Although it is known that the birth of her fourth daughter, Julie, separates Olsen from “her thwarted attempts to complete *Yonnondio*” (Coiner, “Better Red” 147), this should be considered not as the cause of the novel’s label as an incomplete failure as noted above, but as the deprivation of a woman’s capacity for “creation” by forced mothering, which is naturalized as feminized labor. Referring to the historical root of “housewifization,” Maria Mies recounts the fixed state of the sexual division of labor, constructed by the beginning of twentieth century.⁶ According to Mies, capitalism’s aim in maintaining the sexual division of labor and women’s housewifization has dual intentions: retaining abundant numbers of (male) labor forces, and accelerating the incorporation of not only families but housewives into the market mechanism for consumption (106). When the former purpose deviously succeeds in removing men from the domestic sphere, the second furthermore makes women devote themselves to housework because “scientific home-management had become a new ideology for the further domestication of women” (106). That is, it is not Julie’s birth but this sexist strategy that is the root cause of Olsen’s impeded writing. As Olsen made a decision to withdraw herself from new writing for the rest of the 1920-30s, *Yonnondio*’s permanently unfinished form has the continuing potential to shed light on the illegitimacy of the sexual division of labor.

What the Novel's (Incomplete) Form Discloses

In addition to the potential of the novel's incomplete form, the description of the mother-daughter relationship between Anna and Mazie likewise has the potential to recast the novel's reputation as a failure (according to the standards of proletarian discourse) as the "significance of creative interruption" (Lee 115). The description also applies to Anna's cramps caused by mothering in plight.

In the latter half of *Yonnondio*, Anna's initial cramps emerge in chapter five, when Mazie awakens her mother from a nap (94). The insanitary surroundings of their new home, far from the former residence in the farmland, torment the Holbrooks; the horrible stench gradually dampens Anna's energy for housework. The daughter worries about their baby Bess' crying, and asks her mother to soothe her. Even though her maternal training forces her exhausted body into childcare, her "shuddering" limbs impede her actions as "she clutched the table edge" (96). This scene monotonously ends in a conversation between Anna and her son, Ben, who is apprehensive of her sickness, as if Anna's labor-induced distress always happened in their working-class life, and as if it were of little importance. However, the immediately following description and the textual one-line space retrospectively recall the need to reconsider women's subjectivity:

Jimmie here too. But best dont get up. Sit here and let your strength gather up. (The main thing, not to wander off, not to let the fever bear her away.) "Ben, you and Jimmie want to help Momma make dinner now? You bring me the pan over there and a knife, first, Ben, and you and Jimmie take the potatoes out of the sack, and bring them to me till I tell you to stop. Thats right. Thats right."

Clutching a pail of lard, dreaming a sweet dream of twilight on the farm and darkening over a fragrant world, her face not shadowed by the buildings above, her nostrils not twitching with the stink in the air, her eyes not bewildered by the seething of people about her, dreaming the sweet dream unutterable, a hard body crashed into her and a voice thundered. (98)

Although the final paragraph of the former scene clearly ends with Anna's appearance, the person referred by the pronoun "her" in the next scene is not Anna, but Mazie, whose name is identified two pages later with "Mazie ran" (100). Even if Anna's introspective voice on the previous page, which reveals that "she reminded herself scornfully, 'and it was you sent Mazie to the store'" (97), can serve as a clue indicating Mazie's absence from home on an errand, the lack of an address by name and the use of the feminine pronoun instead (for almost two pages) makes it difficult for readers to identify the character whose viewpoint is being conveyed. In other words, this difficulty in transitioning to the next scene causes a disturbance in the identification of the female characters by the readers. Furthermore, this disturbance underscores the femininity embedded in feminized labor through the transition from Anna's viewpoint to Mazie's scene; Hapke interprets this dissolved selfhood of the mother-daughter relationship as resulting in "a sense that Mazie is not a daughter but a part of Anna's troubled consciousness" (85). This passage symbolically condemns the domestic process of the inheritance of housewifization, in which mothers train their daughters to take feminized housework for granted.⁷ That is, as with the exploited workers in the meatpacking slaughterhouse, the alienated subjectivity of female workers is also discovered through a descriptive sequence of women's labors, comprised of Anna's cramping body, her persistence in performing

housework despite her pain, and Mazie's errand. Just as Anna's vibrating body seems to imply resistance to being a controlled labor force as secured capital, the disturbance also reveals the contour of the naturalized operation of women's forced labor. Thus, *Yonnondio's* incomplete form, including not only its well-known unfinished ending but its textual difficulty in reading, is not a mark of failure. Rather, it is a surviving lament for women's silence in the face of patriarchal dominance wherein, as Entin states, "their speech has been drowned out by the immense noise of capitalist production" (179).

***Yonnondio*: A Dissenting Voice against Women's Expected Role**

As for the significance of rereading American 1930's novels by female writers, some feminists have found importance in reexamining history as told by males. Paula Rabinowitz observes, "Women's revolutionary fiction rephrased the rhetoric that encoded the proletariat as masculine by putting female sexuality and maternity into working-class narratives" (181-82). This approach successfully exposes the deceptive character of the sexual division of labor, which many canonical proletarian novels portray without challenge. According to Rabinowitz, the process of naturalizing the sexual division of labor has regulated working-class women's roles in the male-centered family and, therefore, "the working-class woman embodies the historical process" (135). In other words, it is necessary to examine working-class women to expose the goals of the sexual division of labor, in which the idealization of the male-centered family model coerces people to praise women's labor as an irreplaceable virtue under the guise of unconditional love. And when the working-class woman begins to recognize that her housework is historically forced, and it is unpaid labor and not her natural responsibility, this awakening can impede the smooth operation of capitalism because this recognition would induce

her to think about the inequality inherent to the sexual division of labor. Returning to the novel, this paper has proposed that the wandering journey of the Holbrook family embodies the process of the production and accumulation of labor power. It also suggests that Anna's body has already been disciplined through their back-and-forth traveling between exploitative spaces and nature. Although the system tries to compel her into further subjugation to unpaid labor, her trembling body is the manifestation of her inexpressible dissenting voice against her expected role as a devoted "earth mother." Therefore, as Anna's shrinking responsibility as a devoted wife effectively reduces the influence of Jim's masculine power, the cramping in her body also potentially represents resistance because her body thus violates the ideal of the labor force performing as ordered. Describing the Holbrook family to represent the systematic exploitation of the working-class family, *Yonnondio* and its form clarify how capitalism incessantly produces labor forces by imposing the sexual division of labor on the worker's family. When this visualization successfully problematizes the naturalization of women's unpaid housework, it also visualizes Anna's involvement in the process of primitive accumulation.

Notes

1. After the (unfinished) ending of the story, Olsen leaves her firmly held opinion that "Judgment had to be exercised as to which version, revision or draft to choose or combine; decisions made whether to include or omit certain first drafts and notes; and guessing had to be done as to where several scenes belonged. In this sense—the choices and omissions, the combinings and reconstruction—the book ceased to be solely the work of that long ago young writer and, in arduous partnership, became this older one's as well. But it is all the old manuscripts—no rewriting,

- no new writing” (196).
2. Laura Hapke calls the stereotyped writing of mothers “Ma Joadism” and states, “Le Sueur’s artistic celebration of the solo mother who had no nostalgia for or much memory of a marital past was a form of rebellion against Ma Joadism. In its opposition to the earth mother as mainstay of a patriarchal family, her revision of proletarian literary tradition was as radical as Olsen’s” (89).
 3. Barbara Foley states that “While none of these texts excuses men for reproducing the dynamics of class hierarchy in the home—Smedley and Olsen are particularly harsh in their indictments of male domestic violence—all clearly suggest that men and women alike suffer from the degradations of class society and would alike benefit from the abolition of the wage relation” (236).
 4. Regarding Olsen’s usage of the feminine pronoun, Michael Szalay relates its implied meaning to men’s feeble masculinity in poverty. Referring to Steinbeck’s men, who have no guarantee of secured income due to unemployment, he argues that males’ beaten bodies in the Depression era symbolically underscore the major influence of females’ “reproductive labor” on lost male authority because they seem to be “terrified by the collapse of separate spheres ideology.” Szalay also applies this analysis to Olsen’s description of the fearful coal mines presented by the pronoun “she,” and states that “gothic renditions of reproduction and pregnancy suggest that male labor is literally eaten up by pathologically voracious female bodies. Try as they might, Olsen’s men are no match for the gaping female maw—figured as a mine shaft—that swallows them whole” (183).
 5. For Federici, waged labor and holding a job cannot be the goal of the struggle. She clearly expresses it in a way that avoids the misunderstanding that “In fact, to demand wages for housework

does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do this work. It means precisely the opposite. To say that we want wages for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity” (19).

6. Mies also explains the naturalization of the sexual division of labor to such an extent that the idea is endowed with hegemonic irresistibility: “Since the rise of positivism and functionalism as the dominant schools of thought amongst Western social scientists in the 1920s, the search for the origins of unequal and hierarchical relationships in society in general, and the asymmetric division of labour between men and women in particular, has been taboo” (44).
7. In a later essay appearing in the photograph collection *Mothers & Daughters* (1987), Olsen clearly mentions the figure of motherhood as the alienated subject constructed through the sexual division of labor, that “Motherhood is idealized, mythified, sentimentalized, yet (twentieth-century phenomenon), it is ridiculed, indicted, blamed” (15). And she continues that “Whether we mother or not, we do not, cannot as adults, remember the details, hours, tasks of our mother’s work, only isolated moments out of the years of care. Nor can we (how could we?) remember her as the person—besides our mother—she was in those years” (17).

Works Cited

- Coiner, Constance. *Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur*. U of Illinois P, 1998.
- . “Literature of Resistance: The Intersection of Feminism and the

Toward a Visualization of Women's Unpaid Labor

- Communist Left in Meridel Le Sueur and Tillie Olsen.” Eds. Bill Mullen and Sherry Linkon. *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture*. U of Illinois P, 1996. 144-66.
- Colley, Helen. “Labour-Power.” Ed. Shahrzad Mojab. *Marxism and Feminism*. Zed Books, 2015. 221-39.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trip*. Revised and updated ed., Basic Books, 2016.
- Entin, Joseph B. *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America*. The U of North Carolina P, 2007.
- Federici, Silvia. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. PM Press, 2012.
- Foley, Barbara. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Duke UP, 1993.
- Hapke, Laura. *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*. The U of Georgia P, 1995.
- Herring, Scott. “Tillie Olsen, Unfinished (Slow Writing from the Seventies).” *Studies in American Fiction* 37.1 (2010): 81-99. *Project Muse*, muse.jhu.edu/article/404108.
- Lee, Corinna K. “Documents of Proletarian Fiction: Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.4 (2013): 113-32. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.36.4.113?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.
- Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. Zed Books, 2014.
- Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1978.
- . *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*. U of Nebraska P, 1974.
- Olsen, Tillie, with Julie Olsen Edwards. “Introduction.” *Mothers & Daughters: That Special Quality: An Exploration in Photographs*. An Aperture Book, 1987. 14-17.
- Rabinowitz, Paula. *Labor and Desire: Women’s Revolutionary Fiction*

Ryosuke Yamazaki

in Depression America. The U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Szalay, Michael. *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Duke UP, 2000.