A New Reading of Ruth Suckow

Judith Pierson

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A New Reading of Ruth Suckow

(TITLE)

BY

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THESIS

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Thesis Abstract

By 1950, after three decades of writing, Ruth Suckow (1892-1960) was a well-respected writer whose work seemed headed for a permanent position in the canon of American literature. Instead, Suckow’s fiction steadily became less known through the following decades. The question of why her work came to be ignored and why such a position is unwarranted is addressed in A New Reading of Ruth Suckow. The conclusion is that a regionalist categorization and a related gender bias in the literary canon have adversely affected Suckow’s works.

Gender bias is reflected in the critical assumptions which ascribe an inferior position to regionalism and, in turn, place a number of women’s works in this category while excluding similar male fiction. Further, a male-dominated literary tradition indicates a related prejudice in discounting the sphere of home and family--found in many women’s works--as sites of representation for the human condition.

Suckow’s works, with a predominant Iowa background and an emphasis upon themes presented through women’s lives within the private sphere, therefore, have been critically disregarded for gender-biased reasons. A reconsideration of regionalism and the setting of the private sphere illustrates that significant exploration of character by Suckow is not precluded within the context of a specific environment.
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I

In 1924 Ruth Suckow's first novel, *Country People*, the story of German immigrants in an Iowa locale, placed her squarely in an ongoing debate about the value of regionalist literature. For them, the crux of the debate was twofold. First, were regionalist writers producing a significant literature speaking to more than the particularities of locality or were they simply a continuation of the nineteenth century local color movement?¹ And second, if regionalism was a valid category, which writers should be included?

Indicative of regionalism's importance in the early decades of the twentieth century is the number of new journals the movement spawned. To name just a few: *Southwest Review* and *The Frontier* in the Northwest; *The Midland* in the Midwest; and *The Sewanee Review* in the South. Out of these regions literary reputations were established, with Suckow, Willa Cather and Sherwood Anderson in the Midwest, for example; Ellen Glasgow, Elizabeth Madox Roberts and William Penn Warren in the South; and Mary Austin in the Southwest.

Springing from the ideals of the Southern Agrarian movement, regionalism in the 1920s and 1930s was considered different from local color by proponents.² Regionalists insisted they were seeking to renew organic ties not only with an area of the land, as Benjamin T. Spencer wrote, but
"with the human values which had accrued upon it" (249).

Focusing on the practicality of regionalist literature, Mary Austin in 1932 wrote:

Probably the American reading public never has understood that its insistence on fiction shallow enough to be common to all regions, so that no special knowledge of other environments than one's own is necessary to appreciation of it, has pulled down the whole level of American fiction. (99)

Regionalists, such as Austin, cited the size of the United States with its varied natural environment as a primary reason of advocating a literature of geographical differences. By recognizing the differences and using setting as a way of understanding characters, they reasoned, writers of a true American fiction could emerge.

No matter how regionalism was defined and how often the connection with local color was disclaimed, however, confusion over the two terms was persistent. Because Suckow's works at first glance seemed to use the "picturesque" as material, she was often labelled local colorist even though emphatically repudiating it. "The local quality is what gives form, color and flavor," she wrote in her 1932 essay, "Middle Western Literature," for The English Journal; "It does not give ultimate significance" (178).

As much as she sought to avoid the local color label, other labels, including regionalism, seemed to be equally as
pernicious to Suckow. Especially useful to this discussion is her article in *The English Journal* which, from a writer who publicly spoke little about her work, indicates her opinion of being included within such a movement.

Regionalism was a simple idea to Suckow, a limited, temporary expedience to encourage and to awaken the sense of young artists who felt that "all their opportunities lay over the hills somewhere" ("Middle Western" 176). Once this awakening came about, she felt writers would turn from imitation of European movements and move on to producing an American literature to take its "place on the bookshelves of the world beside *Robinson Crusoe* and *Don Quixote*" (178).

The progress of her own work seems to bear this out, with *Country People* relying more heavily on regional placement than later works.

Further in her *English Journal* article, Suckow explained her distaste for labels in general:

> No cause, regionalism, classicism, realism, romanticism, economic significance, the soil, humanism, mass consciousness (none of the familiar labels) matters after a very little while, except as the accomplished work of art matters. (181)

With such attempts, Suckow tried to disavow critical placement in any category, correctly realizing the limiting effect such placement would ultimately have on the work of art.
In her own work, Suckow did, in fact, hold a preference for the Iowa background for her fiction; however, the use of this setting seems to owe more to pragmatic reasons than philosophical ones. She was well-acquainted with the people and landscape of Iowa since, as the daughter of a Congregational minister, she lived in a number of Iowa communities in different areas of the state. A pleasant childhood contributed to her feeling of connection with the state, as evidenced in a journal entry written in Iowa after living in Boston and Colorado for several years while she finished her formal education: "O loveliness of my world of beauty--mountains, swamps, and aspen valleys--all incomplete without this vision of early spring sunlight in the Iowa fields" (qtd. in Kissane 27).

But an even more compelling reason for using the Iowa setting may be the development of Suckow's intellectual belief that as a writer she should write about what she knew best. Critics and established authors were exhorting young writers to do just that, as shown in Sara Orne Jewett's advice to Willa Cather after Alexander's Bridge (1912) that she would do better to work with scenes and characters and life that she knew best--those of the farms of the Middle West (Sherman 472).

Suckow explained why her focus on the day-to-day existence of the average person was anchored to a specific locality in the Midwest: the writer who is "brought up with
that as the very weave of his tradition [and] tries consciously or unconsciously to get too far away from it, is apt to produce something either strained or feeble" ("Middle Western" 180). One of her goals was transforming the particulars of time, place, and circumstance into the thoughts and feelings which she described as "the particular way, the fresh way, in which the ancient stream of life manifests itself, colored and shaped by local conditions" (182).

In her choice of background, that of the simple Iowa landscape void of dramatic scenery, Suckow, too, reflects much of her own personality. As her biographer, Leedice Kissane, writes, Suckow "possessed . . . a total disdain for pretentiousness" (5). Underscoring Kissane’s conviction is Suckow’s statement in her 1952 A Memoir in which she describes the beauty of her hometown’s simple church, which paralleled her feelings towards the state: "Nothing pretended to be more than it was" (21). This belief by Suckow translated into a choice of using the "authentic" quality of the Midwest in her work. She described it as such:

This section is naturally what it is. It has not the pure, stylized distinction of New England . . . nor the thrilling picturesqueness of the Southwest, nor the forlorn charm of the South. But it has, in a sense, a greater homogeneity, a firmer stamp,
than any other section. It is the solid center, the genuine interior of the United States. ("Middle Western" 179)

In a critical analysis of Suckow's works, Margaret Stewart Omrcanin, too, decided it was Suckow's own temperament and artistic motives which directed her choice of story background:

With her own inclination to use the specific and the concrete as a medium of expressing an idea, presenting a character, or evoking an atmosphere, it was natural for her to turn to the familiar scenes of her native state. To her the advantage of examining regional materials lay in the intensified perceptiveness of the writer. (16)

Omrcanin finds, therefore, that if regionalist qualities are inherent in her works, their stimulation occurred more on the basis of personal grounds and impulse than adherence to any regionalist philosophy. Omrcanin's analysis would, therefore, agree with Suckow's disavowal of critical placement in any category.

While Suckow strove to present a realistic portrayal of her native state, she distinctly attempted to speak beyond the particular locale. She was concerned with the situations common to any time period, with the desire for self-fulfillment, with individual isolation, and with the individual dealing with societal change. Kissane refers to an unpublished manuscript of Suckow's written for talks
given at writers' conferences later in her career, in which the purpose that impels all writers is mentioned:

She puts it in the words of Lady Murasaki who in The Tale of Genji, an eleventh-century masterpiece, disclosed that novels are written because of something in life that has so impressed the writer, either for good or evil, that he wants others to know about it. . . . [Suckow] taught herself to perpetuate these impressions in a form she thought worthy, so that people might know about them and so that they might last. (29-30)

Suckow's achievement in depicting the impressions of life was apparent to at least some critics during the 1920s and 1930s, since it was often mentioned along with the particulars of the Iowa background. H.L. Mencken stressed her discernment and evocation of "the eternal tragedy in the life of man" (8). The analysis in The Bookman found: "Her characters, from the first move they make, the first word they speak, become people one has known always. Their expressed emotions and those not expressed are alike known to the reader" (Waterman 216). In the Saturday Review of Literature came the conclusion: "In her own style and field she has produced work that will assuredly live" (Nevins 666).

Even with these reviewers and other writers such as John T. Frederick, holding the opinion that Suckow, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Carl Sandburg "transcend regionalism" (8), placement in a kind of catchall category
became increasingly common whenever specificity of locale was used. Critics began to make general assumptions which tended to pigeonhole writers into distinct categories. An apt illustration is shown by a review of Carry-Over in which Josephine Herbst emphasizes the local aspect:

Miss Suckow repudiates the overemphasis on locality placed on her work, and I agree with her that the deeper implications are most certainly not bounded by state lines. But in the long run her work appears to rest considerably on the delight readers feel in recognizing known things. (318)

No matter what the book's message, to a faction of critics the mode of saying it through a particular locale was the decisive factor in determining placement in a literary category. Of particular relevance is what Emily Toth refers to as the "disproportionate influence" of critics at Eastern and Ivy League schools. Concomitant with these critics' inability to "empathize with the day-to-day realities of life in the Wild West, on the Northern Plains, or even in New England," is the placement of such work in a regionalist (or non-"universal") category ("Regionalism" 7). The effect on many writers, designated by these critics as regionalist, is that it placed them outside of the primary literary canon which these same critics had the power and influence to define. The result of being marginalized, according to Paul Lauter in Reconstructing American Literature, was that it "effectively helped limit perception of their values as well
as their use in curricula" (xx). It became a kind of vicious cycle for such works then; when they were not anthologized because of editor bias, they were not available for curriculum use. Conversely, when they were not wanted for curriculum use because of critical opinion, they were not anthologized.

The fact that many of the writers assigned to the regionalist category are women leads recent critics to not only question the Eastern bias in designating regionalist writers but also the relationship of gender bias to such a designation. Calling it a case of "bad faith" that women authors "are belittled by assigning them to the wrong category," Joanna Russ examines the patterns of placing writers in a kind of wastebasket category of regionalism (48). She writes:

Why was Willa Cather described to me twenty years ago in college as a regionalist . . . while Sherwood Anderson was not a regionalist? More pointedly, if Cather (who concentrates on several large, western states) is a regionalist, why is Faulkner (who concentrates on one, small southern county) not a regionalist? What on earth is a regionalist? If "regionalism" means concentration on one geographical area, is Thomas Wolfe a regionalist for writing so much about New York City? (52-53)

Such questions cannot be overlooked when decisions regarding a category’s importance and the resulting placement of writers are scrutinized. Dale Spender explores the idea of
the literary canon as primarily a white male contrivance and concludes: "Men have been in charge of according value to literature, and they have found the contributions of their own sex immeasurably superior" (1). By assigning women writers to an inferior category outside the canon, women are effectively dealt with by assertions that they write only in a limited sphere which does not relate to the universal human condition.

An example which illustrates the power an editor wields over such designations is evident in a 1959 anthology in which the regionalism inherent in the male work is successfully sidestepped while in the female's work it is emphasized. Writing an explanatory note about William Faulkner, Ray B. West asserts, "Faulkner's stories, like his novels, cover a wide area of Southern life, but utilize that life as a symbol for the modern world" (186-87). Of Eudora Welty, on the other hand, he writes: "She is a native of Mississippi and she writes humorously and sensitively of the inhabitants of the Delta country" (225). Suckow's fiction suffered no less from such literary placement. Editors of anthologies in the 1940s, such as Tremaine McDowell in American Literature and Charles Lee in North, East, South, West: A Regional Anthology of American Writing, compartmentalized Suckow's works into a regionalist category.
Significance must be found in Margaret Stewart Omrcanin's list of Suckow's anthologized works which show that over 50 anthologies included stories by Suckow from the 1920s to 1950, but a drastic reduction occurred after that when regionalism was pronounced not only secondary but outmoded. The result of being dropped from anthologies is all too apparent when looking at a number of women writers who acquired the term "regionalist," including Suckow, Ellen Glasgow, Dorothy Canfield, Kate Chopin and Harriette Arnow; little was written about them and their names slipped into relative obscurity. The effect on the literary canon cannot be understated, as shown in Elaine Showalter's 1970 conclusion that women's representation in mainstream literature courses was never more than seven percent. Similarly, in 1977 Joanna Russ found in her survey that representation was between five and eight percent (Spender 19).
II

Gender bias in relation to Suckow’s placement in the regionalist category is a strong interconnecting element effecting the eclipse of her works. As the qualities of the canon of great literature are described in terms reflecting the male experience and the male perspective, the works by women who choose to write about a more private domain must suffer. When women, such as Suckow, use the private sphere—the sphere of home, women, and region as Emily Toth describes it—the primarily white male canon finds it less than representative of the human condition (Regionalism 9). Virginia Woolf succinctly stated what qualities had become important in literature in her 1929 *A Room of One’s Own*:

It is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are “important,” the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes “trivial.” And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop. (128)

Suckow’s critics fail to find interest in her characters for the very reason Woolf describes, that of location of her stories in the private domestic sphere, outside of the masculine province. In the same way as she is found to not represent the universal in her depictions of a specific region, she is found to not represent the universal in her
representation of female values. Such criticism of Suckow's works is found in Margaret Stewart Omrcanin's 1973 analysis that "emphasis upon the domestic scene limits the range of character types and the scope of their actions" (57-58). This criticism directly descends from critical assumptions and dispositions of the male canon, where the experience of the male historically hasn't focused on the domestic scene—the nursery and sickroom, the parlor and kitchen, and the home duties to church and community—for its own sake. The full meaning embedded in the actions coming out of these places cannot be discussed when critical convention relies on "universal" values exclusive to public male experiences and perspectives. Within the male dialogue, Suckow's focus on human relations within the home sphere is seen as concentrating on experiences which are limited in scope.

It is easy to draw a correlation between the decline in valuation of Suckow's works in the late 1940s following World War II (i.e., non-placement in anthologies, lack of inclusion in college survey courses, failure to reprint) with an observation made by Elaine Showalter about formation of the literary canon and the effect of gender bias. In *The New Feminist Criticism* Showalter writes that canon formation is particularly aggressive following wars, when nationalist feeling runs high and there is a strong wish to define a tradition. The result, she theorizes, is the formation of a model "so quintessentially masculine as to exclude women
writers from any serious consideration" (11). Applying that to Suckow, one sees that coupled with a regionalist classification confining her works to a narrow category, a strong male orientation excludes her work from the canon for her interest in women's affairs. While Emily Toth argues that "what is most universal, most representative of 'the human condition,' is not necessarily war, or hunting, or the pursuit of a white whale" but rather those experiences happening in "the sphere of home, women, and region" (Regionalism 9), her statement is the result of an evolution of feminist thought in literary criticism, constructed after the post-war literary canon was formed and well after Suckow was disenfranchised.

The insidiousness of gender bias is demonstrated by looking at the process which transformed American literature into a legitimate subject for academic study after the First World War. Arbitrating public reading choices, which had been the function of literary clubs, families and certain magazines--all with a strong female influence--became the function of academics, the great majority of whom were white and male. In Paul Lauter's examination of gender bias, it was found that:

As white women were excluded from the emerging scholarly power structures and blacks--female or male--were kept almost entirely ghettoized in black colleges, "their subjects," women and blacks,
remained undeveloped in a rapidly developing profession. ("Race and Gender" 443)

The shift of influence over what was considered significant in literature from women who were not academic professionals to primarily male academics almost insured a lack of integration of women’s works in the canon. Inevitably, when issues of the canon were decided, women were not there to demand inclusion. What resulted was a central concern of literature outlined as "man’s struggles with nature, God, fate, himself, and not infrequently nature," as Cheri Register describes it (qtd. in Hoffman and Rosenfelt 16). The home environment--historically women’s concern--was thus made peripheral.

To certain readers, no matter what theme emerges from Suckow’s fiction, it becomes secondary to the fact of the setting which is outside what had been embodied as acceptable masculine territory. Lauter explains this:

For, as professors and male novelists seemed to perceive it, the problems of the United States were not to be encountered over the cup of proverbial tea, in reading novelists at once genteel and sensual, or in fretting over village life in Maine or Louisiana. . . . The strenuous nationalism of even the most professional scholars, the masculinist attitudes of otherwise refined novelists, defined the issues for the art of the time as fundamentally distinct from the concerns of the domestic sphere which, it was insisted,
were to occupy most women, including most female writers. ("Race and Gender" 449)

Canon developers found the antithesis of the exploration of masculine experience in the writing of women about the private sphere. Since women's experiences overall have been confined to the home in past history, to not accept this experience is to invalidate the importance of women's lives. What results is the disenfranchisement of a number of women writers. The canon has, therefore, been exclusionary and writers, such as Suckow, who are women, and have written regionally, and of something they know about—the domestic sphere—are excluded by a gender-related definition of what is great literature.

The dominant male view of literature gives the content and style of women's writing a negative assessment. When Anthony Burgess criticizes Jane Austen novels for failing "because her writing lacks a male thrust," (qtd. in Spender 29) he is articulating a commonly held male opinion about women's style. Hortense Calisher makes the facetious argument that since "Major Art is about the activities of men," it only follows that: "A Major Artist writes only in a 'masculine' style. 'Which uses short words.' Like Faulkner. 'Whose sentences don't inch foward on little iambs but are rough and clumsy.' Like Hemingway's" (qtd. in Olsen 230-231).
Describing Suckow's strengths as "delicacy of sentiment, a poetic feeling for her scene and a tender compassion for pitiable lives" (150), Margaret Stewart Omrcanin underscores, quite unwittingly, in a non-feminist critical voice, one of the very reasons for the decline in interest of Suckow's oeuvre: a male canon which extols a strong "male thrust."

Since the major artist was synonymous with male gender, only a token consideration has ever been allowed for women within the literary canon. Few women were considered as major literary figures before the 1960s; however, some were accorded status as minor figures. Willa Cather is an example of a writer upgraded from a regionalist status to at least a minor literary position. It is only in recent years that such barometers as reader's encyclopedias and anthologies acknowledge her as one of the major fiction writers of the twentieth century. Several consequential tendencies in her works may mark the difference in the critical treatment of her fiction as opposed to Suckow's. Much of this, accepted in pre-feminist criticism, indicates a failure of male-oriented literature to fully understand women's literature. However, it did allow for Cather to emerge as an important writer.

Cather's works often were interpreted as identifying with male experience concerned with exploring, taming and overcoming the frontier. _O Pioneers!,_ for example, tells
the story of Alexandra Bergson, a capable woman of almost mythic proportions, leading her family in its aim of taming the prairie of Nebraska. In such a struggle against nature and the land, the protagonist was beyond the "female" world which the male canon dismissed as not universal experience. *O Pioneers!* was, therefore, more accessible to the male reader who can relate to such experience.

While Cather became better accepted by the male critic through such readings of her work, other women's works which could not fit into such an interpretation were not accorded the same consideration. Since Suckow's women were neither in the male image of the heroic, nor compatible with Victorian ideology, with their challenge to the position of woman in the home, they fell outside the traditional constructs defined by the male canon.

An elementary, but notable, difference accounting for contrasting male acceptance of Suckow and Cather was the use of point of view. In *My Antonia* Cather fashions the story from a male perspective, that of Antonia's childhood friend, Jim Burden. While the purpose of Cather's male perspective has been questioned in recent criticism, the fact remains it proved acceptable to a male canon.

Suckow's continued use of the female perspective within the home sphere, on the other hand, was not acceptable to a male-dominated critical process. The following example illustrates how the home typically affected many of the
women in Suckow's fiction. In *The Kramer Girls* Rose Kramer has returned on a visit to her family's home from her job in Chicago. The familiar kitchen in the Kramer household as seen through Rose's eyes is something very special:

> Whenever she looked out of the window, she could see--above the muslin sash curtain--her own little plum tree, that she loved as no other, because it seemed to have shared in all the personal happiness and unhappiness of her life. Sunshine poured in through the window and glinted off the clean wet dishes. (122)

When a character such as Rose looks around the well-ordered kitchen, something more than a description of place is transmitted; we learn much about Rose's inner self through how she as a woman feels about home. Literature like this leads to Emily Toth's observation:

> When women writers are called "regionalist," it is not their concern with place that is really being called into question or relegated to a minor category: it is their concern with women's lives. It is not so much *place*, but *women's place* that is being regarded as "minor." ("Regionalism" 9)

What one sees then is writers such as William Faulkner writing about place, but with the male critic still able to relate since it is still a man writing and a man's view of that place being written about. When a woman such as Willa Cather writes about place, since it is a place male critics can be comfortable with, it can be accorded at least minor
status. When women like Ruth Suckow write about place that is typically a woman's region, the full extent of gender bias becomes apparent as the works are left out of the canon.
III

Suckow contributes to our knowledge of human nature by using the means at her command, the individuals comprising the family within intimate scenes of life. While numerous other novelists of her time concerned themselves with exploring themes in the public sphere, Suckow achieves depth and meaning by concentration on the everyday life within the family. Within this setting the story depends less on overt action than subtle suggestion for transmitting a dominant theme of the search for fulfillment. Through Suckow's discerning voice, the concepts of sacrifice, isolation, conformity, discontent, disillusionment, resignation and helplessness achieve archetypal significance reaching beyond region, time and gender.

While it is often preferable to trace authors' themes and ideas chronologically through their works, with Suckow's, each work instead illuminates another. The major theme of the search for self-actualization and fulfillment is entwined throughout her work, with each new story giving a varying perspective and insight.

In Suckow's fiction the search for meaning and substance in the character's life is a principal motivation. This theme of the search for self-fulfillment is inextricably bound with the psycho-social development of the individual, whether one has a feeling of acceptance or
isolation. Further, societal changes have a profound effect on the outcome of this search. Suckow's female characters especially tell important stories of our culture and the manner in which a woman as an individual deals with it. A vague dissatisfaction, precipitated by changes in society, is felt by Annie Ferguson in *The Folks* as her role as nurturer draws to a close. Mrs. Myra Bonney represents the homemaker who offers sustenance to others to the extent of denial of self in *The Bonney Family*. Georgie Kramer, a primary protagonist in *The Kramer Girls*, suffers frustration as she is thwarted in any pursuit of personal goals by the obligations she feels to an invalid mother and younger sister. The success-oriented Cora, the driven woman in the novel of the same name, as a child equates the American dream of prosperity with happiness and works with singular vision to achieve that end. Margaret in *The Folks* represents the "new woman" during the early decades of this century, rejecting what she sees as the limitations of conventional marriage and conventional domestic roles.

*The Folks*, approximately thirty years in the life of the Ferguson family, especially illuminates the variety of perspectives in women's quests for personal satisfaction. Annie Ferguson, the mother, believes she has achieved fulfillment by giving of herself to her home, family and husband. Only later does she find fulfillment has been an illusion. Margaret, the Ferguson's oldest daughter,
searches for it through men's admiration. Even minor characters contribute to Suckow's exploration of women's lives. The self-centered Mrs. Spencer and Annie Ferguson's sister, Louie, have no feelings of responsibility for others in their lives filled with luxury and ease. Another character, Lillian Ferguson, a daughter-in-law of Fred and Annie, feeling powerless in her marriage, attempts suicide. The immigrant Charlotte Bukowska, who marries Fred and Annie's youngest son, searches for fulfillment through a political ideology--a sharp contrast to the other women in the book, especially Annie, her mother-in-law.

Annie Ferguson is a wife to Fred, a homemaker, and a mother to Carl, Margaret, Dorothy and Bunny. We are introduced to Annie as a new member of the Monday Club, which "marked her first real entrance into the social life of Belmond." Annie has the family's laundry done for her and has help with the sewing (50). Acting as a hostess for the Monday Club for the first time, she even has a domestic helper to prepare the food. All seems perfect on the surface, an image which Annie carefully projects.

With Annie, Suckow presents the homemaker and mother who must, above all else, maintain the pretense that all is well with the family. An outer facade shows contentment; however, underneath resentments can smoulder a lifetime. Since Annie's marriage to Fred, she believes she "forced her girlhood self into what Fred seemed to want without regard
for her own desires" (56). She consistently tries to conform to what everyone wants of her, the be all and end all of the model homemaker. In her housekeeping she always tries to please penurious "Scotch" Grandma Ferguson. By attending the Presbyterian church rather than the Congregational, "where all the ladies she liked best belonged," she tries to conform to the family's wishes (39). To Annie, these are small conflicts to be subordinated, sacrifices necessary in order not to ruffle a smooth family life. This portrayal of Annie in a kind of peacekeeping mission underscores society's demands upon homemakers since it is apparent Annie makes more conciliatory moves than her husband or his family. Even with her children, Annie maintains this peacekeeping function. Illustrating this is the following passage from the point of view of Carl, Annie's son, taking place after Annie has disciplined the young Margaret:

Supper was horrid. A cloud of disgrace seemed to hang over the table, and Carl felt that he was included in it, and that it wasn't fair. Margaret shot him one look of hatred from her swollen eyes. He tried to look virtuous, but he couldn't when mama didn't say anything to him. And she wouldn't because she didn't want papa to notice--she would cover anything up rather than have papa scold the children. Papa didn't see things most of the time unless he was told. Mama was being nice to Margaret to get her to eat. She had got Margaret to come downstairs and not spoil supper, but Margaret just took her fork and made patterns on her cream sauce. (35)
While a brief incident, the role of Annie as peacekeeper illustrates a much larger attitude inculcated by a generation of middle class homemakers: protecting father from the day-to-day problems of the family, presenting lovely meals in a lovely setting, making sure the children eat properly—all part of everyday life on the homefront. It is the merit of such an attitude that seems questioned here by the author since the demand to keep up pretenses about family life results in a terrible burden on the woman's shoulders, acting as an obstruction to her self-development.

The impression that Annie's life is defined by her role as homemaker and mother is further indicated by infrequent mention of her between parts I and V of the book. This in itself can be interpreted as the way in which she is defined by society only through her involvement in her homemaker and mother roles. Societal change invades Annie's world only through her children's action upon her position in the family as homemaker and mother. Carl's marriage is unhappy because he wishes for a more stimulating life in a big city and his wife, his provincial childhood sweetheart, does not. Margaret "took her own way" to a Greenwich Village lifestyle with connotations of experiments in an unconventional lifestyle which includes sex and alcohol (529). Dorothy is in California with a husband who threatens their financial security by unsound business ventures. Bun marries an
immigrant girl who rejects everything for which the Fergusons stand. These changes invading her life act as the catalyst for Annie's feelings that her life has been without meaning:

Terror came upon her. The whole house seemed unreal. The familiar furnishings were all around her but they had lost their meaning. She dreaded to have Fred come home, because it seemed as if he, too, meant nothing to her now. He had things outside, she charged that up against him—the church, the bank. She had nothing. All her pleasant activities, the club, the efforts at civic improvement, existed only on the circumference of her life. Her children were at the center. The home was nothing without them, she knew it, and she knew they were gone. (572)

Annie, now in middle age, must begin a search for self: "Maybe there was no self anymore. It was all dissolved and lost. She had gladly given it away—but now she felt defeated" (573). She is forced to recognize that her dream of an invincible home is disintegrated and she must decide how she is to continue on with her life. The final view of Annie is on a note of defeat. She decides that, "She had made herself into a wife and mother, bent and shaped herself to that role; and she could never go back to what she had been before [marriage]. . . . She would be here, at any rate, when the children wanted to come home" (723).

If there is one fault that critics commonly find in Suckow's work, it is upholding what is viewed as an
anachronistic social attitude towards the woman's traditional role in the home. There are, however, several important points to consider. First it is necessary to look at Suckow's approach in terms of the era in which she wrote. While it is true of her fiction that women are frequently pictured as traditional homemakers and nurturers, it is evident that Suckow was not unaware that the inner life of women can suffer under such a structure. Her comment, however, is subtle. In addition to her complex portrait of Annie Ferguson, for example, the ending to Cora shows Suckow's awareness of the homemaker's inner thoughts, as described in an elderly woman neighbor's admiration of Cora's independent life:

It seemed to Mrs. Rawlings, that Cora was one woman who did as she pleased. She bought what she liked and no one had a word to say about it. She could not forget the long timidity in regard to even the tiniest material thing, that Mr. Rawlins' "closeness" had ground into her being. (333-34)

The poignancy of an oppressed life is captured in this elderly woman, a part of an older generation in which it was scarcely possible or acceptable for a woman to be in a position to be self-sufficient.

Even where Suckow represents some of the homemakers as having some self-determination in their lives, it is questionable whether it is enough to lead to a satisfactory sense of fulfillment. One illustration of this is with
Mrs. Myra Bonney in *The Bonney Family*. Mrs. Bonney, as she is most often called, is a homemaker and mother, guiding her children, Warren, Sarah, and twins Wilfred and Wilma, into responsible adulthood and providing a clean, orderly haven for the family. At first glance one never sees her acting anything but content as she does her daily work of sewing, cleaning and cooking:

> The stairway, nicely repolished, shone through the wan snowy light. On the square landing, Mrs. Bonney paused again to pick up a handkerchief that Wilma had left in the window seat--then dropped it, for she was firm in her policy of making Wilma take care of her own belongings. She glanced out of the window at the snowy earth and the tall black trees. The home that she had made for her household was firm and enclosing about her . . . (153).

This passage illustrates a certain felicity in competently managing house and children but one may also interpret the phrase "firm and enclosing" as meaning something quite different from security. For example, though Mrs. Bonney in her competent manner may have influence over family decisions, she understands it is a limited influence. While she urges the change in location from Morning Sun, where her husband, Fred, holds a pastorage, to Frampton, a college town and the denomination's headquarters, where the family's interests may best be served, it is ultimately Fred's decision. When he wants to return several years later, even though Mrs. Bonney sees such a move as "a plan doomed to
disappointment," she neither argues nor discusses it with him but only responds: "I'll be contented with whatever you decide, Fred" (168). The "firm and enclosing" feeling she has in the earlier passage quoted here, therefore, could be seen as representation of the confinement and restriction of her full potential.

Suckow shows a solemn perception of the problematical aspects of the homemaking role for women in a changing society through characters like Mrs. Bonney. Assuming the part of the self-sacrificing matriarch who subordinates self to husband and family inherently poses problems of loneliness and isolation for the woman. Mrs. Bonney's true self is unimaginable to both her husband and her children. They all would have been surprised to know that during the 40 minutes her husband preached, she did some of her "hardest thinking." Mrs. Bonney "never felt so detached, her mind so clear and free to function, as when she was sitting here in her accustomed pew . . ." (28). The only Mrs. Bonney they know is the one whose role includes finding cufflinks for her husband on Sunday morning, sewing for Wilma, listening to Sarah discuss religion or literature, and comforting Warren in his agony of adolescence. After Mrs. Bonney's death, some recognition of her inner life is finally given when daughter Sarah looks at her mother's photograph:
Mother's eyes in the photograph were clear, remote, a little sad—as when she used to sit in their old pew in the church in Morning Sun, with her hands in their grey lisle gloves quietly folded. That look was mother's intimate, secret self, and none of them, not even Warren, had ever reached or comprehended it. (259-60)

Ironically, after Mrs. Bonney's death, her husband marries a flamboyant, much younger woman, seen by Sarah as "passionate, cruelly ambitious, temperamental, self-absorbed—all that mother had not been, nothing that mother was" (267). The family, in disagreement over the marriage, becomes estranged and the efforts of Mrs. Bonney through the years to maintain a strong sense of family seems for naught. This same sense of futility is seen in the character of Annie Ferguson, too, as the children she had devoted her life to become alienated from her and from one another over petty matters, so that "the ideal household which she had always dreamed that her own would become some day had vanished, even from the dream . . ." (722).

Society's ambivalence towards the woman's role in the home is indicated not only through such endings but also in a more overt statement by a minor character in The Bonney Family: "I always thought your mother was a great woman. She might have directed some great work if she hadn't had her family." Then, as almost an afterthought, the character adds: "Though that's a foolish way to put it. Not that she
'might have'--she did" (292). This statement reflects ongoing questions posed by many of Suckow's characterizations. What we learn, however, is that for Suckow there are no answers, only continuing questions.

A variation of the mother/homemaker is depicted in Georgie Kramer in The Kramer Girls. Georgie is a convincing illustration of how events can control a life, blocking avenues leading to complete autonomy for the individual. After their "mama" becomes a paralytic invalid, the girls, Georgie and Annie, who are close in age, and the much younger Rose, are left by their father to take care of her. Georgie is unselfish, self-sacrificing, giving up her own hopes for an education and career to take on other responsibilities which entail not only the care of the helpless mother but of both Rose and the less competent Annie. She gives up small town church socials, out-of-town trips and visits to friends to give her sisters an opportunity for a social life. When the subject of a church supper comes up, it is Georgie who stays home: "Georgie suddenly wanted to go, too. Her own unselfishness made her cross. But she could stand the brunt of it so much better, really, than Annie that she took more of it than was necessary" (10).

The gregarious Georgie sacrifices not only social interaction in her caregiver role but the pursuit of an important work which she had envisioned for herself: "Old
visions of her own stirred in her mind. She thought of herself as a doctor, or the manager of some big business--she hadn't quite given up these crazy dreams. But all her conscious plans were centered on Rose" (54). Thwarted in her own dreams, Georgie has a life of self-denial, caring for her mother, raising Rose, giving Annie more opportunity than she herself has. Seeing herself as "nothing but an old hack horse," Georgie seems to believe that her role as a woman requires giving of herself utterly to her family (84). Anything less and she feels ashamed.

The idea of women sacrificing themselves for family obligations is a strong current running through Suckow's stories. Cora Schwietert spends the greater part of her youth providing for her family. Marjories Schoessel in The Odyssey of a Nice Girl is called home to help when her mother becomes ill and stays on to help care for a nephew after her brother dies. Many of Suckow's short stories, including "Home-coming," "The Daughter" and "Mame" in Iowa Interiors act as further examples. Leedice Kissane interprets it to mean that with Suckow's fiction, "sacrifice is coincident to feminine destiny" (137).

There is, nevertheless, a certain amount of ambivalence presented by Suckow in many of these characters, especially evident in the portrayal of Georgie Kramer. Georgie learns too late that sacrifice can't be the equivalent of fulfillment. After her mother dies and Rose marries,
Georgie, finally free to pursue her own goals, studies to be a chiropractor, moves to a larger town and sets up a thriving practice. Ironically her first really self-actualizing experience is cut short when she is diagnosed with cancer. Although the friends, patients, and family she has sacrificed herself so long for overwhelm her with love and concern, she has no feeling of accomplishment for her life: "It didn't matter how many people called at the hospital, how many of her patients sent messages--Georgie felt that she had accomplished nothing" (217). The accomplishments she had desired were always pushed aside in the work for others. Now, at the end of her life, the sacrifice she made is little consolation to her as she concludes the cost was her happiness: "It was all unnecessary. As I look back on it, it seems as if we didn't really have to do a thing that we did. Papa would have hired somebody to take care of Mama--he'd have had to" (218-19).

Again, much like with the friend's appraisal of Mrs. Bonney, a common estimation by society that the value of homemaker and nurturer is less than for other roles is spoken by a character about Georgie in *The Kramer Girls*. A friend remembers Georgie after her death: "I liked Georgie. She was too big for the place. That was the trouble. If she'd lived in the right time, and in the right place, I think she might have been a great woman" (256). With these
comments, Suckow seems to suggest that, as a whole, society finds these women's efforts may have been better directed elsewhere than exclusively inwards to the family.

With Cora, Suckow takes a different direction with her female protagonist, placing her out of the homemaker role and into a business career, although many of her efforts are still directed towards the family. Even the domestic setting is not relinquished since the character is located most often in that setting and infrequently in the business office. Cora Schwietert is different, too, from many other characters in Suckow's books, since she takes a purposeful, self-ordained action to find the missing element in her identity. This search becomes important to her as an adult, owing much to the fact that from early adolescence Cora's self is completely subordinated to the needs of her family. As not much more than a child, she assumed responsibility for her family and almost singlehandedly changed their status from poor immigrants to a comfortable American family. This was not accomplished, however, without bypassing certain developmental steps.

From childhood, Cora, along with the rest of her siblings, is moved frequently by her German parents, the Schwieterts, as they struggled economically in each place. Reluctantly relocated with her sisters and brother to Onawa from Warwick, Iowa at 14, Cora thinks incessantly of achieving security. She goes to work first in a store, then
in an office where she realizes studies at a business college will help her achieve success. When her father fails in his factory job and wants to move on once again, Cora demands that they stay and all but becomes the head of the household. The reader gets the strength of Cora’s resolve as she determines that it is she who will pull the family up by the bootstraps:

She was going to do what she could do. It was no use to depend upon any one but herself. If people wanted to get anywhere, they had to go into work for all it was worth—something papa never could do! . . . She couldn’t stop to rest. She must get on. The others would work—Rosie and Sophie—but it depended upon her. Cora’s whole firm body stiffened proudly to take the weight. (53)

This shouldering of the burden is a recurring personality trait of women in Suckow’s fiction. Cora at a young age realizes she has the strength, determination and intelligence to change the material status of her family and sets out to do so. Similarly, Georgie Kramer knows there is “never anyone strong enough” to override her in the running of the household and so takes the load upon herself (68).

The preoccupation of the strong family member surmounting various family plights by selfless action most often is to the detriment of the women involved since they cannot achieve self-fulfillment when they are fully encumbered by the needs of others. This is clearly seen in Georgie Kramer, who by subordination of her personal needs and
longings to her family's, suffers from a sense of failure and lack of fulfillment at the end of her life.

Cora, much in the same way, takes her place as the resolute leader of the family and achieves her goals of building up a solid prosperity at the expense of her own self-realization and personality. Even though she does work outside the home, family duty and responsibility have constricted Cora's life as much as they have Georgie Kramer's. As demonstrated by Cora, a public role outside the homemaker one in Suckow's fiction doesn't necessarily make the woman any less immune to self-sacrifice. Cora perseveres as a clerk in the ten-cent store and a menial office position not just for herself but for her mother whose life has been one of toil and drudgery. The responsibility she accepts is less because of choice than necessity since no one else in her family can accept it: "everything had been left to her" (54).

In acceptance of such a heavy responsibility, the young Cora was not allowed to develop normally. A conversation between the Schwietert family and the prosperous Andersons, whom they have not seen in eight years, indicates the extent to which she was pushed into early maturity. In the two families' conversation, Cora, who has been working all the time since they last met, is shown in contrast to her childhood friend, Evelyn Anderson:
'I only wish my girls could have had your advantages,' Mrs. Schwietert told [Evelyn]. 'Girls need their time off. See how serious Cora is, beside you' . . . It hurt [Cora] to have her mother talk like that. It was as if she were bared before them. She knew very well how mature she felt beside Evelyn's sparkling gaiety; that it was difficult to relax that hardening of her will. (80)

In this early maturity which results in Cora's serious nature are the fruits of lessons she learned as a child: "She remembered shrewdly how people in Warwick had lived, working, accumulating, sticking to it, gradually building up a slow prosperity" (53). She understands nothing is to be gained materially by frivolity and gaiety and thus suppresses this from her personality. Her attitude towards depending on others, especially in a marriage, likewise results from observation as a child:

She had never forgotten how her mother had looked after the big family, had taken in ironing and all sorts of other work besides, while her father had sewed in a leisurely fashion, humming as he sewed, in his little tailor shop, with plenty of time to tell funny stories to the children and to play his flute in the evenings--thinking . . . well if things didn't go here, then they could go somewhere else again! (111-12)

These circumstances precipitate Cora's views that by working hard she will achieve financial security. Paralleling this is her resoluteness as an adult not to risk the financial security or independence she has gained for marriage since the rewards are few for the woman.
It is during her father's last illness, however, that Cora first begins to feel a "great, strange loneliness" (114). For the first time she fully realizes the devotion and love her parents held for each other through the years: "In spite of the hardships, they had always been together" (114). After her father dies, Cora's questioning about her basic values and views towards life deepens. Her younger sisters and brother have left the house and the struggle which consumed her for so long is over. She has a business position which pays well, she is respected as indicated by her invitation to be a member of a business and professional women's club and she has a comfortable social life. Yet, Cora thinks: "There had to be something else . . . something inside of things . . ." (133). The questions of whether the material values she has internalized are sound and whether the picture she has drawn of marriage is accurate begins to nag at her. She decides a vacation, something she has never experienced, will help her.

On an extended trip to Yellowstone Park, Cora meets Gerald Matthews and becomes involved with him. She marries in the flush of romance, quits her job, and moves with him to Colorado, becoming a full-time homemaker. She soon finds she is deluding herself about Gerald, that he can't keep a job: "He was unstable, he lied, he made easy promises to customers that he couldn't keep" (254). She discovers she
impulsively married a man who utterly lacks the work ethic and any of the values she holds. Gerald, realizing he can’t live up to Cora’s expectations or her abilities, eventually leaves after failing miserably at providing for her. Cora, pregnant but too proud to try to find Gerald, has the baby without his knowledge.

The final section of the book returns Cora and her baby to Onawa with her mother and Aunt Soph where she suffers a breakdown. When she sees the household losing the financial stability for which she had always worked, however, her strong will surfaces and she returns to the business world and the pursuit of financial security. Relying now on a network of women friends as support, she finds a career opportunity as a partner in a children’s clothing store which she succeeds at building up into a thriving business. She again is financially responsible for her daughter, mother and Aunt Soph, who lives with them, and returns to her position as the head of the family. At the end of the story Cora is independent and noncommittal in her relationships with men. She has come to the conclusion that she “needed men” although it seems to be a limited utility since she does not intend ever to “give herself away” again as she did in her first marriage (329).

At this point in her life, Cora is back to what had been her initial motivation: financial security. In her achievement, she reflects on the irony: “People really did
get what they were after—only in such queer, unrealized ways, changed and unrecognizable, and, perhaps at the price of everything else" (332). Cora has incorporated within herself the need for financial security to the extent that it abrogates any other personal needs. She finds the security she needs but realizes it isn't without cost since her ability to be close to another person, even her daughter, has been submerged.

Cora is one of the very few women observed in the public sphere in Suckow's fiction; most often her characters are or become homemakers. Not only are many of the main female characters shown in this role, as indicated by Mrs. Bonney, Annie Ferguson and Georgie Kramer, but minor characters are as well. Of primary importance in their actions is the fact that they act as further delineation of the idea of women's sacrifice to the family as a hindrance to self-development.

Mrs. Schwietert, Cora's mother, toils throughout her married life in the care of her husband and brood of children. When finally her children are grown, her husband gone, and the family financially stable, she finds herself at loss. Mrs. Schwietert has been defined by her family for so long that a true self doesn't exist.

Aunt Soph in Cora illustrates further the consequences involved in the sacrifice of self for others' benefit. On the surface, Aunt Soph is happy and contented, the unmarried
relative always willing to help different branches of the family as they face various crises. It is, however, sacrifice to the family's needs that acts as a continual impediment to her dream of working in a dressmaking shop. At the end of the story, without the work she really wanted, and even "without chick nor child belonging to her," she lives with Cora and Mrs. Schwietert, acting as caregiver for Cora's baby: "She felt as a heaviness in her own breasts the disappointments and emptiness of her hard-working life . . . (296). The characterization of Aunt Soph exemplifies the attributes of charity and sacrifice that society holds in esteem for its female members but, as Suckow emphasizes in her women characters, this usually results in self-abnegation.

Sarah Bonney, too, finds the role of sacrifice to the family not only requires subordinating the self but also that it can abruptly end, leaving the woman to struggle with the consequences. As an adult, Sarah willingly sets aside her settlement house work in Chicago when she is called home to keep house for her father after her mother's death. When Sarah's father remarries, however, his need for her ends. On his wedding day, he is barely aware of her existence. She is suddenly thrown back upon herself, realizing "there was nothing for her here," that she must begin her own life once again (262). Commitment to others' needs is settled so
deep into her personality, though, that she decides to pursue nurse's training.

Suckow also makes important observations about the psychological makeup and conditioning of an individual through her female characters. Cora as an adult is motivated by a feeling of inferiority resulting from her impoverishment as a child. In much the same way, Margaret Ferguson in The Folks is motivated by her feelings of inferiority caused from childhood feelings of unattractiveness. Her search is different from Cora's in that she seeks the one man who will disprove the inferiority she continues to feel, while Cora looks to material things to prove her adequacy. Both needs prove strong and overpowering in the women's lives since the needs come to rule their lives.

Integral to understanding Margaret are her childhood and the feeling of being unloved which irrevocably molds her personality. When she find passionate love with a married man who finds attractive the very things other people seemed to deprecate, he becomes a fulfillment to her dreams. In the end, nothing less than keeping that is acceptable to her.

An early indication of Margaret's psychological development is given through her mother who thinks of her as "always so different, always at odds, an incalculable" (12). Margaret is shown in contrast to both her older brother and
her younger sister who are more or less conformists from childhood. Much of Margaret's unconventional behavior seems to result from harboring a child's resentments. She never forgets a statement she overhears her mother make about her younger sister to visiting friends: "Yes I'm so glad she's so fair, Margaret is so dark" (32). Even a neighbor seems to contribute to her resentments as Margaret sees him rejecting her in favor of sister Dorothy as he pats Dorothy's head:

He had called them a nice little pair, but it was Dorothy's curls that he had noticed. And they weren't even very curly. Margaret's pride in her long braids was suddenly gone. She loved Dorothy, her own little sister. But she wanted someone to notice her, to pick her out. And it should have been Mr. Spencer, because she was the one who liked passing his house and secretly put him among her own special people. (21)

The physical differences between the two sisters leads Margaret to brood about being an adopted child, a typical childhood fantasy which in Margaret produces lasting effects as she learns to revel in her differences. She thinks of her "real home" as "some place that she had read of, or dreamed of" (32). She treasures comments by a family friend that "she's going to work havoc some day" and by a special girl friend that the boys would like her when "they grew up." She grows to believe "through her misery, that somewhere there would be a wonderful, shining, special fate for her (32). When she enters adolescence the local boys, in
Margaret’s opinion, fail to appreciate her dark eyes and hair and opt for the blonde, fair girls instead, giving her one more umbrage to carry into adulthood. She watches the marriages of her sister and friends taking place and dreams of leaving Belmond to lead the exciting life she feels she deserves: “To marry anybody in this town would be to forfeit the real story of her life. What she wanted was to look down upon this town—to know something wild, rapturous, free . . . .” (329).

Not until she is suspended from college for helping a friend to elope and convinces her parents she needs library training in New York does she begin to live “the real story of her life.” She lives in Greenwich Village, drops her library studies, changes her name to Margot, has love affairs, and attracts a handsome, married business executive, Bruce Williams. In his loving appreciation for her dark beauty, Bruce gives her what she has desired since childhood, recognition for her uniqueness.

Margot assures not only Bruce but herself that she doesn’t want to be married that instead she wants to be perfectly happy, firmly believing the two are mutually exclusive. On an extended vacation in the southwest, however, a change of attitude takes place. In their rented adobe house when Bruce calls her “‘a charming little hausfrau,’” she responds: “‘That doesn’t bother me a bit. . . . I like it. For you!’” (439). She experiences a
"strange yearning inside of her, quite different from simple desire" and tells Bruce that she "can even see why women want children--of someone they really love" (439-40). Soon after Margot expresses her desire, however, Bruce, unable to forgo his responsibilities to his wife and two children, returns to New York. Devastated, Margot goes to Belmond and her family to reconcile herself to the broken affair. While there, she is driven by her sense of inferiority to attract several men at a Rotary picnic and feels vindicated for her unpopular adolescence:

She thought of the thin, dark, hungry girl who had lived in this place hidden and alone. She felt that girl avenged. . . . She saw that she had become, more or less, what once she used to dream of being, in those stuffy afternoons at the library, reading other women's poetry--she was returning home after what she used to think of as a great tragic experience. (473)

While devastated over losing Bruce, Margot feels fulfilled in a rather false way. Her love, she rationalizes, like her beauty, transcends society's norm: "She shuddered at the perception of the long, bitter, pitched, marital battles, and pressed to herself the sweet, painful knowledge of her love" (473). Away from Bruce and the situation, in her mind Margot agains romanticizes the relationship as the realization of the dream she had kept close to herself since childhood.
Returning to New York, Margot finds a position in an advertising firm, wills herself to forget Bruce and fashions herself into a new career woman instead: "Margot saw herself now as a kind of feminine misogynist, making use of men when she wanted them, but no more romantic about sex than about liquor" (507). As she tries to reconcile herself to this new role, Bruce returns but still lacks an offer of marriage. Somewhat ironically the same woman who "shuddered at marital battles" accepts Bruce back into her life but in their embrace lay "reservations, resolves, reluctances, streaks of hardness, half-estrangement" (521). It would seem that Margot is settling for less than she had dreamed, not fully understanding the situation as a legacy of her childhood deprivation of the need to be loved unconditionally.

While it seems that Suckow’s fiction presents little alternative for women, she does allow one of her characters to make a healthy, harmonious adjustment to life. Rose Kramer at first seems to be destined for the all too familiar sacrificial role, but through changes in her life is able to develop a contentment and satisfaction in The Kramer Girls.

While being raised by her older sister, it seems to Rose "that Georgie had put a great destiny upon her" (40). As a young woman, Rose complacently follows Georgie’s directions for her life, going to college, making Phi Beta
Kappa and beginning a business career in Chicago. She is not, however, without feelings of conflict between the home she desires and the career Georgie wants for her. On a visit home when her paralytic mother's death seems imminent, Rose falls in love with Archie Carpenter, a local carpenter, who represents "all that was best and dearest to her in the old life, the life of home" (148). She marries him, unwittingly exchanging the strains of Georgie's aspirations for Archie's lack of enterprise and initiative. While forcing herself into Georgie's mold caused Rose to resent her sister, she finds Archie's ineffectuality equally aggravating, much like Cora Schwietert in her short-lived marriage to Gerald Matthews in Cora. She grows restless with their financial difficulties and recognizes her own need to take action: "Abilities, long ago awakened, rusting now, were not to be silenced, ached to be used" (192). Although pulled in the two directions of home and business, she makes the decision to stop denying her capabilities and education and take work outside the home in order to provide a better life. While the life of Archie's mother in its uncomplicated domesticity looks appealing, Rose knows this is a passing age and that to provide for her two children, she must do differently.

Varying from many of Suckow's characters, Rose discovers a comfortable point at which she can be content through a compatibility of home life and a career, and she
adapts accordingly. While defeat and disappointment are common to Suckow's characters as they strive for contentment, Rose is allowed a healthy self-reliance.
IV

Suckow’s fiction should be appreciated by readers for its regionalist features: its careful description of place, its precision of language and its devotion to a portrayal of ordinary people. Significantly marking her work from the 1920s and 1930s as enduring, however, is the writer’s critical observation of matters affecting self-fulfillment, examined principally through women’s lives. While Suckow primarily set these stories in a specific time and locale, in Iowa during the early decades of the twentieth century, important statements are made about culture and how society’s expectations affect women.

In the context of a redefined regionalism, Suckow’s work, along with the work of many other writers, can be judged as not simply reflecting a region and an era but instead as expressing important values within a specific environment. When the term “regionalist” ceases being a perjorative one, regional settings will not be considered as inherently precluding stories of the human condition. The critic can then enter into "the spirit of the work," as suggested by Emily Toth, rather than standing "outside as a labeller" ("Regionalism" 8).

In much the same way, recognition that a significant part of any individual’s life is conducted within the private sphere makes possible credible evaluation of works
focused on home and family. A re-evaluation of Suckow's stories, centered around the domestic sphere, consistently reveals her perception of matters affecting a woman's need for personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Suckow's overriding assumption in these works concerns the basic worth of the woman as an individual and her right to reach the fullest potential as a human being. Her portrayals of Annie Ferguson, Mrs. Bonney and Georgie Kramer, for example, are salient examples of how narrowing sacrifice can be to the individual personality. Suckow presents the idea of self-sacrifice to home and family, depicted by these women, as not only pitiable and unnecessary but as a definite obstruction in achieving self-fulfillment. From their lives, the reader can ascertain that living one's life through other's is not only frustrating, but futile. Both Annie's and Mrs. Bonney's families went their own way despite the women's devotion and sacrifice to them. Georgie's devotion to caring for an invalid mother is finally recognized at the end of her life as fruitless when she admits that her father would have provided for her mother's care if Georgie had not.

With Annie, Mrs. Bonney and Georgie, the results of sacrifice are clearly delineated. Suckow, however, does not reinforce a status quo which finds such sacrifice as inevitable. In her portrayal of Rose Kramer, for example, Suckow presents an alternative. Once Rose realizes that
continual sacrifice to her husband, family and societal
expectations ends in frustration and self-abnegation, she
finds a middle ground in which she can successfully function
in various roles while maintaining self. The character of
Rose suggests that a family system can leave room for
individual development if all the individuals' needs are
accommodated.

In recording the lives of women in The Bonney Family,
Cora, The Kramer Girls and The Folks, Suckow is successful
in writing fiction which transcends the place and time in
which it is set. Her observations of women wanting to
escape domestic limitation, but at the same time feeling
pulled by family needs, recounts the contradictory desires
faced by many women, no matter where and when they live.

Suckow's objective of writing fiction with ideas
extending beyond a limited time and place is accomplished in
her use of the day-to-day experience: family conversation,
a walk along a familiar street or the view of clean dishes
in the sink. As she once wrote: "I think every piece of
literature holds some aspect of reality presented through a
concrete instance but possessing wider implications and
applications" (Millett 602). An in-depth study of women
characters from her fiction written in the 1920s and 1930s
yields the conclusion that in this Suckow is successful; it
is the subtlety with which it is accomplished that often
belies the achievement.
NOTES

1. The definition of the nineteenth century local color movement is also cause for debate. It is used by these critics to denote any work in which decorative local details and picturesqueness are used to add interest to the narrative.

2. A typical discussion of regionalism is found in The New Regionalism, in which Carey McWilliams analyzes the validity of B.A. Botkin's philosophy of the New Regionalism outlined in the 1929 Folk Say: A Regional Miscellany from the Oklahoma Folk Lore Society. Botkin found regionalism to be historical, resting not on direct observation but on retrospection. It required a detached viewpoint; it did not photograph, but instead brought to the local scene sensitive and critical interpretation.

3. While male characters are not included in this thesis, an interesting characteristic seems to predominate in Suckow's stories, that of ineffectual men. Besides the examples cited here of Archie Carpenter and Cora Schwietert's husband, Gerald Matthews, other men are frequently treated similarly. Fred Bonney is satisfied in a small town pastorate, reluctantly relinquishing the position at his wife's urging for a better one in a larger city in the interests of the family. Mr. Schwietert in Cora is content in doing small tailoring jobs to "get by" at the expense of an economically suffering family. Other men, like Fred Ferguson in The Folks, while providing well for their family's material needs, are completely inadequate in understanding their wives' or children's emotional needs.
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