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The Working Girl Problem in Twentieth-Century New York and Dorothy Richardson's *The Long Day* (1905)

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"Forth from the shop on a wintery night,
The working girl trips with heart so light;
Buoyant her step – a bread-winner she,
Surging along in humanity's sea;
Honest and fearless in life's busy whirl,
And proud of the title – a working girl."
− Laura Jean Libbey
(*Leonie Locke*, title page)

Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century, wage-earning women in progressive America had to succumb to a vicious, precarious system in which they were disadvantaged when compared to their male counterparts. In an attempt to illuminate on the working girl problem in big cities, Dorothy Richardson, a reporter from the *New York Herald*, took up undercover investigative journalism, publishing her experiences in *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* (1905). In her novel, Richardson stipulates trades-training and reminds her readers of the necessity of protective legislation. Introducing the life of her heroine as desirable, she emphasizes the value of a strenuous life, showing her readers how to climb up the social ladder towards the American dream.

Keywords

Progressive Era, Women's Labor Movement, Protective Legislation, Women's Writing, Dorothy Richardson

Yirminci Yüzyılın Başlarında New York'ta Çalışan Kadın İşçiler Sorunu ve Dorothy Richardson'ın Romanı *The Long Day* (1905)

Öz

20. yüzyılın başlarını da içine alan Progresif Dönemin Amerika'sında, kadın işçiler iş hayatında kadın-erkek eşitsizliğinin yaratmış olduğu ataerkil düzene boyun eğmek durumunda kalmış, erkeklere oranla çok daha zorlu koşullar altında çalışmak zorunda bırakılmıştır. Bu dönemde *New York Herald* gazetesi muhabirlerinden Dorothy Richardson büyük şehirde çalışan genç kadın sorununa ışık tutmak amacıyla kılık değiştirerek araştırmacı gazeteciliğe yönelmiş ve yaşadıklarını kurgusal unsurlarla harmanlayıp *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* (1905) romanında anlatmıştır. Richardson yazdığı bu romanda meslek eğitiminin önemine değinirken aynı zamanda okuyucularına kadın işçilere yönelik koruyucu yasaların gerekliliğini hatırlatır. Kadın kahramanın hayatını özendirerek anlatan yazar, çalışmanın ve emeğin değerini vurgulayarak, Amerikan rüyasına erişmenin yollarını okuyucuyla paylaşır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Progresif Dönem, Kadın İşçi Hareketleri, Koruyucu Yasalar, Kadın Yazını, Dorothy Richardson

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, women were working under harsh circumstances. They became the victims not only of economic factors which transformed the nation from agrarian to urban, but also of cultural and social limitations which denied them the right to exist in the public sphere as a woman. Unfortunately, wage-earning women

had to succumb to a vicious, precarious system in which they were disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. Their working hours were often longer and wages were unequal. In an attempt to relieve the problems of women workers caused by industrialization, progressive women reformers, mostly driven by humanitarian motives, turned to social activism, directing their energy towards helping their underprivileged (especially white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) "sisters" to organize. Women reformers believed that in order for women's labor not to be exploited, women needed to be integrated into a labor movement of their own. Thus, in order to alleviate problems concerning women's labor, they established organizations which would become outlets for their progressive energy, ensuring better working conditions at the mills, factories, and other workplaces where women were employed.

The National Consumers League (NCL), founded in 1891, became the nation's leading promoter of protective legislation for both women and children (Sklar 333). Under the leadership of Florence Kelley (1859–1932), it established the practice of labeling to ensure that products were manufactured under fair industrial conditions, opposed the exploitation of workers by employers, promoted food inspection, campaigned against child labor and lobbied to limit working hours and establish minimum wage laws for women. In *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of an Oregon state law that brought restrictions to the working hours of women in laundries (no more than ten hours a day) based on the argument that long working hours was detrimental to women's physical and mental well-being. The NCL adopted the case as a cause, and Kelley appointed her research director, Josephine Goldmark (1877–1950) to collect data from medical and other authorities and to compile a brief to demonstrate that ten hours of work per day was hazardous to women's health (Sklar 334). Goldmark persuaded her brother-in-law, Louis Brandeis, an attorney and a future Supreme Court justice, to take on the case, and their work was the first to rely on sources outside of the law to build a legal argument (Rosenberg, *Divided Lives* 50). The Court's ruling stated that women workers differed from male workers, and argued that women's reproductive role justified "special treatment" through limits on working hours and tasks, mainly for the preservation of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant race. Although it clearly encouraged Social Darwinism, eugenics, and sexist attitudes towards women's abilities by promoting biological determinism and

"anatomy as destiny," and later generations of women fighting for equality would question the effectiveness of this strategy, "protective legislation" was undeniably a first step towards ensuring the safety of women workers, and progressive women reformers considered what would become known as the "Brandeis Brief" a victory.

Progressive women reformers also helped working women to unionize. The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL, established in 1903) and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU, established in 1900) brought working class women into contact with wealthy progressive activist women (e.g., Alva Vanderbilt Belmont and Anne Tracy Morgan) who served as social and political supporters. Both unions organized female workers, particularly in the garment industry, at a time when the major unions, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Knights of Labor, excluded women. Clearly, women needed an umbrella organization through which they could tackle the plight of working women. In 1903, the Woman's Trade Union League (WTUL) was established by Mary Kenney O'Sullivan (1864–1943) at an AFL convention for this purpose. The WTUL was designed to educate and organize working and middle-class women for the cause of women's labor, specifically to improve women's wages and labor conditions (Banner 76). O'Sullivan hoped to achieve cross-class collaboration through an alliance between women workers and middle-class women (also called *allies*) in an attempt to overcome the opposition of male unionists by training future women leaders (Rosenberg, *Divided Lives* 41).

Much was written about women's labor during the Progressive Era, both in nonfiction and fiction. Nonfiction works included sociological studies conducted in industrial cities such as Pittsburgh, Chicago and New York, in which labor conditions were described in detail. *The Pittsburgh Survey* (1907–1908) and *The Social Evil in Chicago* (1911) provided thorough and vivid descriptions of labor conditions in such cities. Additionally, Edith Abbot's *Women in Industry* (1909) analyzed the working conditions of women, describing the wages they earned and their economic oppression. In *Women and the Trades*, the first volume of *The Pittsburgh Survey*, the college-educated social investigator Elizabeth Beardsey Butler drew progressive reformers' attention to the necessity of trade-training for women, stating that women were treated unfairly in factories compared to their male counterparts in terms of

the manual labor they did. She was dismayed by the fact that women were mostly employed in feminized work such as dressmaking and millinery, and even if they were employed in printing and bookbinding establishments, they were "feeders," "not rulers," and were denied opportunities for trade-training, unlike men (Powers 34).

The tide of Progressivism paved the way for investigative journalism, which led to the emergence of a new genre, "class-transvestite novels" (Schocket 105–142). The women writers of this genre either dressed in female workers' clothes and adopted a female worker's class identity, or created protagonists who did so. This essay aims to dissect the issue of women's labor through Dorothy Richardson's class-transvestite novel, *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* (1905). In her novel, Richardson argues that American institutions are unable to think of women as full economic participants in society, and fail to provide women with educational opportunities, trades-training, and the resources to unionize. Richardson exhibits a number of aims in *The Long Day*. By portraying harsh labor conditions, she displays the necessity of protective legislation for women, using precisely the same rhetoric as the Brandeis Brief, and also expresses the need for unions to protect women's rights. Moreover, she proposes two ultimate versions of womanhood which middle class readers could choose from. In one, she presents the idea that success and happiness can only be achieved through marriage and motherhood. In the second model, she introduces the life of her heroine as desirable, using the form of the *female bildungsroman* to emphasize the value of a strenuous life, climbing up the social ladder towards the American dream.

Dorothy Richardson took up journalism when she was twenty-four, and started working as a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. During the 1890s, she wrote for *Social Democrat* and a Chicago magazine *New Times*, and in 1899, she began working for the *New York Herald* (Sondik x). While working there, she published articles about the struggles of a young woman in New York searching for work and accommodation entitled "Work or Starve: Woman's Heartbreaking Search for Employment in the Great City" and "The Girl Who Lives on a $5 a Week" (Fahs 215). She used the pseudonym "Dorothy Adams" while writing her articles for the *Herald* as her employers demanded it. Later, in 1905, she turned the articles into the novel, published anonymously as *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working*

Girl as Told by Herself, adding fictitious details about the heroine such as her previous status as a schoolteacher. As stated by Cindy Aron Sondik, after Richardson left the *New York Herald*, she became a press representative for David Belasco, the theatrical producer who later worked for Paramount Pictures. She also published another novel in 1924, *The Book of Blanche*, which centers on a female musician who tries to stand on her own feet in New York City (x).

The Long Day is a semi-autobiographical, class-transvestite novel, a hybrid of Richardson's successful investigative journalism, personal experiences, and fictional elements. As Sondik documents, the novel became an instant success when it was published as the "simply told story of an anonymous writer" (ix). Although some critics at the time believed that the anonymous author was a working girl who revealed her story, others maintained it was "a sociological novel" that blended fiction with reality (ix). Apparently, such speculation resulted from the fact that, unlike other undercover journalists, Richardson never acknowledged being a newspaperwoman out on assignment in her novel (Fahs 216). Nevertheless, "[c]haracterized by impressively detailed observation, a beautifully polished style, and an unusual skill at capturing workplace personalities and thus conveying lived experience, [*The Long Day*] was greeted with enthusiasm" (Hapke 52).

Jessica Blakemore contends that while addressing the working girl problem, female investigative journalists brought to the table their own middle-class notions about working class women (44). In *The Long Day*, Richardson indirectly invites her audience to become allies or "[ladies] with something to give [their] sisters," which was the rhetoric of the Women's Trade Union League at the time, although this attitude enraged many working class labor organizers like Leonora O'Reilly (1870–1927) and Rose Schneiderman (1882–1972). Richardson was so successful at accomplishing her goal that the WTUL promoted and published chapters of the book in 1906 (Bularzik 483). However, the novel interestingly remained at the center of conflict and controversy because not all labor activists approved of the work. As conveyed by Meredith Tax, while middle class labor activists considered it accurate in its depiction of the working conditions of young women toiling in the sweatshops of New York, it garnered harsh criticism from working-class labor activists, triggering fierce class conflicts within the WTUL (117). Nevertheless, despite the conflicts between working and middle-

class audiences, most readers agreed that *The Long Day* successfully portrayed the plight of young working girls. Even Jack London, in his review of *The Long Day* published in the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1905, praised the novel which, he wrote, fulfilled his expectations as "an indictment of American industrial society" (London 79).

Dorothy Richardson details the experiences of an eighteen-year-old former teacher from Pennsylvania, reared in a Presbyterian family with Yankee origins. Referring to a nineteenth century Mother Goose rhyme, the nameless narrator describes herself as "Saturday's child," "doomed eternally to remain a wage earner" (267) because she was born on a Saturday. The young heroine tries to live by herself, looking for cheaper accommodation. First, she is employed in a box-making factory for three dollars a week. On her second day, she befriends Henrietta Manners, and decides to share a room with her in the boarding house where Henrietta is staying. Henrietta's immoral actions, which she explains retrospectively in the Epilogue, cause her to leave the room they share and quit her job at the box-making factory the next day. She moves to a Working Girls' Home, and obtains a flower-making job, where she works happily for a month for three and a half dollars a week. Because of the seasonal nature of the work, she is laid off together with her best friends, Eunice and Bessy. The narrator and her "lady-friends" then acquire work at an underwear factory, and later in jewel and silverware making.

After her friend Bessie dies from diphtheria, the protagonist loses track of Eunice, and takes a job in Pearl Laundry as a shaker. She quits soon after because she learns that the proprietor of the laundry is interested in her. The heroine coincidentally meets her long-lost boarding house friend, Minnie Plympton, who opens her home to the protagonist, and helps her obtain respectable employment. The heroine starts working in a department store, for four dollars a week; then becomes a salesperson for new brands of tea and coffee in the grocery department for eight dollars a week. She eventually decides to take an evening course in stenography; polishes her English composition and grammar; and does a lot of reading. She finds work as a stenographer, for a short period of time, for ten dollars a week, and finally becomes a vice-editor for fifteen dollars a week, which is a clear victory when compared to her three-dollar-a-week salary at the beginning of her journey.

Implications of Protective Legislation and Unionism

In *The Long Day,* Richardson, through her middle class lens, reminds readers of the necessity of protective legislation by depicting extended working hours, the difficulty of manual labor, and dangerous working conditions through potential accidents and illnesses. She conveys that factory girls almost work themselves to death. Working hours, as she expresses, are usually seven in the morning to nine in the evening on weekdays, and on Saturdays, until either noon or midnight, depending on the nature of the job. Considering that an average working girl in New York worked approximately seventy-five hours a week, Richardson's frequent references to working hours could be interpreted as a call to reform working hours. Richardson also depicts the potential risks of the jobs that women take. Almost as if prophesying, Richardson mentions the risk of fires in factories. Indeed, fire was every working girl's major fear, and as the narrator contends, it is a favorite topic of discussion in the box-making factory. The girls discuss the topic "with lowered voices and deep-down breathing. For fire is the box-maker's terror, the grim specter that always haunts her, and with good reason does she start at the word" (73). The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 1911 tragically proved that working girls were right to fear death by fire.

> "I'm always afraid," declared Phoebe, "and I always run to the window and get ready to jump the minute I hear the alarm."
>
> "I don't," mused Angelina; "I haven't sense enough to jump: I faint dead away. There'd be no chance for me if a fire ever broke out here." (73)

Because the doors at The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory were locked to prevent union organizers from visiting the factory and the workers from escaping on unauthorized breaks (Broyles 32), 123 female and 23 male workers lost their lives, dying of smoke inhalation, burning to death, or jumping out of the building to their demise. This horrific workplace disaster, the deadliest in US history until 9/11, definitely highlighted the importance of legislative reform to improve factory conditions. Within this regard, Richardson is justified in reflecting the fear of fire among factory girls.

Women's industrial labor at the turn of the twentieth century

was not only tiring, but also dangerous and "littered with the maimed bodies of female workers" (Sondik xx). Richardson mentions several instances of workplace accidents in which working girls either lost their fingers or hands. Adrienne, one of the strippers in the box-making factory whose fingers had been mangled by her machine, was taken to the hospital in a carriage provided by the company, which was "the only way" as Henrietta commented, "you'd ever squeeze a carriage-ride out of [the] company" (103). The main reasons for accidents were extreme fatigue, which would make the working girls more careless (Sondik xix), and not knowing "the general rudimentary principles of intelligent labor" (Richardson 1906:164). Whatever the reasons were, occupational safety was not only on the agenda of female progressives. Male political figures like Roosevelt, who, in his speeches, frequently appealed to employers' consciences, informed them about working girls who lost their fingers or arms in machinery but could not acquire compensation, or even safe working conditions (Dalton 372).

By underscoring the physical and mental dangers of overwork, Richardson draws the attention of middle class readers to the necessity of protective legislation. Her rhetoric is in line with the more conservative wing of the labor movement, especially when she implies (much like the Brandeis Brief would state) that being a working girl may not be suitable for young women, and could be detrimental to their physical and mental well-being. When she discusses, in the Epilogue, the conditions in Pearl Laundry, she defines physical labor as "the most brutal" (279). Emphasizing female frailty, she openly says that "young women cannot work long [in such places] under conditions so detrimental to bodily health" (280). Richardson's tone sometimes becomes condescending and maternalist, replete with biological determinist and eugenic sentiments: "For her incompetency she is not entirely to blame; rather is it a matter of heredity and environment. Being a girl, it is not natural to her to work systematically" (279). In "The Difficulties and Dangers Confronting the Working Woman", Richardson voices her sentiments much more explicitly than in the novel:

> I hope I shall not be charged with heresy to the working woman when I say that I believe the greatest danger and difficulties which confront her to-day in her struggle for industrial equality with man are to a great extent inherent in

> herself. I believe them to be not so much of an economic or social nature as they are physiological and temperamental limitations fixed by sex.
>
> So long as women continue to be the child-bearers of the Race – either in fact or in potentiality – will they be confronted by conditions which present graver dangers and difficulties than those come to the lives of workingmen.
>
> The conditions that confront men in factory, in workshop, store and office are, it must be admitted, bad enough. How infinitely worse then are they for women with their more delicate and complicated nervous organizations? An environment, in which man may labor equably for indefinite time will induce in the woman hysteria, disease and ultimate physical and nervous collapse. (1906:162)

Such popular maternalist and eugenic rhetoric would eventually undergird the Brandeis Brief, aligning Richardson with Florence Kelley and Josephine Goldmark in their premises for protective legislation. Depicting the difficulties confronted by the working girl, Richardson's novel became an influential and effective call-to-arms for protective legislation in New York. By 1900, fourteen states had already passed protective legislation for women workers, including Wisconsin and Massachusetts (Baker 33). Although it took the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire to pass workplace safety legislation in New York, the publication of *The Long Day,* and its promotion by the WTUL, seems to have had an impact on many progressive middle class men and women reformers, especially those who embraced the maternalist, pronatalist, and conservative rhetoric of the era.

Another important issue raised in *The Long Day* is the necessity of unions, and Richardson underscores their importance by depicting their absence throughout the novel. She asserts that had there been unions for working women, they would have been protected from the detrimental effects of sweatshop life. As she contends in the Epilogue to the novel,

> Personally, I have a strong prejudice in favor of trades-unions. I believe that working women should awaken as quickly as possible to the advantages to be derived from

> organization of the industries in which they are employed. But I seem to be alone in my cherished desire. The women and girls I have worked with in New York do not view the trades-union as their progressive and enlightened sisters of Chicago and the West generally choose to regard it. Chicago alone shows a roster of nearly forty thousand women and girls who are organized into their own, officered by themselves and with their own feminine "walking delegates." (283)

Indeed, in "Trades-Unions in Petticoats," an article she wrote for *Leslie's Monthly Magazine*, Richardson praises Chicago women for their unionization efforts, wishing the same for the women of New York (1904:491). As she comments in *The Long Day*,

> As for the working women of New York, they have so far refused to countenance the trades-union. New York has no woman's trades-union. A small percentage of women workers belong to labor organizations, it's true; but merely as auxiliaries to the men's unions, and where they work at trades that have been thoroughly organized for the benefit of male workers. (284)

Richardson states in *The Long Day* that the "idea of organized labor will have to grow among the ranks of women workers just as the idea has grown into consciousness of her father and brother" (284). Indeed, by 1912, organized labor among working women had already matured with the efforts of the WTUL and ILGWU, and with strikes women labor activists organized such as the Uprising of 20,000 and the Great Revolt.

Female Education and the Working Girl

As Alice Fahs contends, in *The Long Day*, Richardson provides readers with an updated version of the Victorian sentimental plot, a new *female bildungsroman* which embraces "an ethos of experience," or a female version of "masculine literature – most forcefully articulated by Teddy Roosevelt – that stressed the value of the 'strenuous life'" (218). In the novel, the heroine is driven by the motto "WORK OR STARVE, WORK OR STARVE" (5) as she seeks job after job. As quoted in Fahs, in her earlier article "Work or Starve," published in

the *New York Herald* on December 23, 1900, Richardson conveys that the adventures of a working girl were not like those portrayed in magazines, in which young girls had fun while engaging in light work such as washing handkerchiefs in face bowls (218). Initially, Richardson's alter-ego in the article romanticized the life of the working girl: "How jolly it was to be so poor that [working girls] hadn't even a street car fare and were obliged to walk all manner of distances in all kinds of unspeakable weather" (qtd. in Fahs 218). In *The Long Day*, however, Richardson's heroine experiences real life and unfortunately, it is not a romantic adventure, but a strenuous struggle for survival. Nevertheless, *The Long Day* proposes two different versions of worker-lady transformation through Minnie Plympton and the heroine. Richardson suggests that upward mobility can be attained either through marriage and motherhood as in the case of Minnie, or independence and education as in that of the narrator.

Richardson portrays Minnie Plympton as an independent, self-sufficient working girl. Yet, she clearly conveys to readers that Minnie finds ultimate happiness in marriage and motherhood, and not in her travails, which parallels the maternalist sentiments preached by Theodore Roosevelt and likeminded activists. The narrator contends in the Epilogue that Minnie "has been successful – successful in the only real way a woman can, after all, be successful. Minnie is married. She is the wife of an enterprising young businessman, and the mother of a charming baby. She has been married nearly two years, and lives in a pretty cottage in a peaceful suburb" (266). Not only does Minnie find happiness in marriage, but she also achieves upward mobility by marrying a middle class businessman. Here, Richardson clearly reveres the values of her own class — material comfort, marriage, and motherhood — suggesting them as possible solutions to the plight of the working girl.

Richardson, however, also presents the protagonist, her alter-ego, as a role model, maintaining that the American dream could also be acquired through American values such as self-reliance, perseverance, and education. The heroine rejects marriage, choosing instead to live an independent and self-sufficient life, thereby suggesting a "rags-to-riches, self-made woman" approach towards the worker-lady transformation — a route that was far more likely to appeal to the New Woman of the Progressive Era. Unlike Minnie, and more like Richardson herself, the novel's protagonist replicates the male literary

"Horatio Alger myth" to achieve success. Preaching the importance of female education, Richardson depicts how one could eventually be like the narrator, elegant and open to learning. Undoubtedly, her temporary adventures as a box-maker, flower-maker, garment worker, jewel-maker and finally a laundry girl were merely steps along the way to the American dream. Her employment in a department store and the stenography classes, on the other hand, were the true "avenues of upward mobility" as upheld by Richardson (Sondik xxx).

The narrator claims that if working girls educate and train themselves properly just as she herself did, they can obtain better, well-paying employment. The "fundamental need of the worker of either sex," she conveys, "is education" (293–294). Referring to "three Rs" — Reading, Writing and Arithmetic — she places blame on the public school system which allows girls to fall through the cracks: many of the factory girls with whom the narrator worked had minimal knowledge in the areas of spelling, geography, grammar and arithmetic. She also believes that there is more to education than the three Rs. The girls should be taught "how to work — how to work *intelligently*" (294). Like progressive educator John Dewey, Richardson maintained in the novel that they should acquire "the natural human instinct for making something with the hands, or doing something with the hands, and of taking an infinite pleasure in making it perfect, in doing it well" (294).

Richardson believed that trades-training, or vocational education, was crucial because the working girl lacked rudimentary skills which would help her evolve into a more qualified employee. In her novel, she differentiates between "working" and being "exploited":

> Not having learned to work, either at school or at home, she goes to the factory, to the workshop, or to the store, crude, incompetent, and, worst of all, with an instinctive antagonism toward her task. *She cannot work, and she does not work. She is simply "worked."* And there is all the difference in the world between "working" and "being worked." To work is a privilege and a boon to either man or woman, and, properly regulated, it ought to be a pleasure. To be worked is degrading. To work is dignified and ennobling, for to work means the exercise of the mental quite as much as the physical self. But the average working girl puts neither heart nor mind into her labor. (278)

In the novel, both the narrator and her coworkers have to quit their jobs in the undergarment factory due to their inability to run sewing machines. Thus, Richardson emphasizes the importance of skills training, just as reformers Elizabeth Beardsley Butler suggested in her survey. However, Richardson's arguments regarding trades-training are heavily influenced by biological determinism, which also informed her views about protective legislation.

> While it may seem harsh and is warranted to bring down upon me a chattering of disapproval, I must say that, as I have seen in the working women, her most fundamental difficulty lies in her inability and unfitness for sustained effort, as compared with her male competitors. Woman is not capable of doing well much of the labor she has essayed. She does not know how to work as men know to work. She has not been trained in the past. She has no inherited aptitude for doing things with a view to economic ends. She has not the faintest conception of rudimentary principles of intelligent labor, of conscious and carefully co-ordinated effort. (Richardson 1906:163–64)

Not only is anatomy destiny, but as stated by Sarah Eisenstein, factory girls' expectations regarding marriage also prevented them from directing their energy to training and preparing for skilled work. As she conveys, a turn-of-the-twentieth-century union of artificial flower-makers fell apart after a short period of time as potential members expected to marry and saw no need for trades-training and unionization (142). Nevertheless, as Richardson concludes, "until we have learned to be intelligent workers, capable of sustained effort, we are going to confront perpetually that greatest of difficulties — the wage problem and its attendant complications" (1906:164).

In addition to trades-training, Richardson also states in the novel that a very "important thing looking to the well-being of the working girl of the future would be the wide dissemination of a better literature" (299). As her working girls convey in the novel:

> "What kind of story-books do you read, then?" they demanded. To which I replied with the names of a dozen or more of the simple, every-day classics that the school-boy and-girl are supposed to have read. They had never

> heard of "David Copperfield" or of Dickens. Nor had they ever heard of "Gulliver's Travels," nor of "The Vicar of Wakefield." They had heard the name "Robinson Crusoe," but they did not know it was the name of an entrancing romance. "Little Women," "John Halifax, Gentleman," "The Cloister and the Hearth," "Les Misérables," were also unknown, unheard-of literary treasures. They were equally ignorant of the existence of the conventional Sunday-school romance. They stared at me in amazement when I rattled off a heterogeneous assortment from the fecund pens of Mrs. A.D.T. Whitney, "Pansy," Amanda M. Douglas, and similar good-goody writers for good-goody girls; their only remarks being that their titles didn't sound interesting. (84–85)

None of these books sound interesting to these working girls, who adore the books of Laura Jean Libbey (1862–1925), who "perfected the formula of the working girl genre and became its most popular and successful practitioner" (Peterson 20). It is apparent that working girls enjoy reading adventures involving women like themselves. In the Epilogue to the novel, Richardson strictly criticizes these sorts of dime novels and products of the penny press, categorizing such fiction not as true educational tools, but as "yellow-backs." She believes that "[g]irls fed upon such mental trash are bound to have distorted and false views of everything" (300), just as she articulated in her 1900 article "Work or Starve" (qtd. in Fahs 218). Instead, Richardson asks for assistance from fellow progressives who, she hoped, would establish libraries with appropriate educational material: "[t]here is a broad field awaiting some original-minded philanthropist who will try to counteract the maudlin yellow-back by putting in its place something wholesome and sweet and sane" (300).

The Long Day also implies that if working girls do not strive for education and self-improvement just like the narrator, they will succumb to prostitution. This presupposition appealed to the middle class audiences, who were obsessed with social evil at the turn of the twentieth century and were convinced that low wages and poor working conditions caused young working girls to go astray. As Richardson contends in the novel,

> The factories, the workshops, and to some extent the stores, of the kind that I have worked in at least, are recruiting-grounds for the Tenderloin and the "red light" districts. The Springers and the "Pearl Laundries" send annually a large consignment of delinquents to their various and logical destinations. It is rare indeed that one finds a female delinquent who has not been in the beginning a working girl. For, sad and terrible though it be, the truth is that the majority of "unfortunates," whether of the specifically criminal or of the prostitute class, are what they are, not because they are inherently vicious, but *because they were failures as workers and as wage-earners*. They were failures as such, primarily, for no other reason than that they did not like to work. And they did not like to work, not because they are lazy — they are anything but lazy, as a rule — but *because they did not know how to work.* (276–277)

Unlike the eugenicist sociologists of the time, Richardson does not see working girls as inherently corrupt. She believes they go astray because they do not like to work; and they do not like to work since they do not know how to work, which is an evidence for the lack of trades-training.

The Long Day also provides insight into the sexual and racial division of labor, which was a part of eugenic arguments concerning the working class and the middle class condescension towards working women. In Pearl Laundry, "[a]ll the workers were women and girls, with the exception of fifteen black, burly negroes who operated the tubs and the wringers" (235). The heroine asks the woman in charge, "Don't any men work in this place except for the foreman?" To which she receives the reply: "D'ye think any white man that called hisself a white man would work in sich a place as this, and with naygurs?" (243) Richardson tells the reader that the racial division of labor prevents white men from working with black men, but allows white women to work with black men, reinforcing their dual oppression at the hands of the WASP patriarchy. Clearly, she describes the American social hierarchy as white men at the top, followed by white women, black men and black women:

> "But we work here," I argued.
>
> "Well, we be wimmin," she declared, drawing a pinch of snuff into her nostrils in a manner that indicated finality.
>
> "But if it isn't good enough for a man, it isn't good enough for us, even if we are women!" I persisted. (243)

As this passage suggests, *The Long Day* includes examples of female solidarity and bonding reminiscent of the sisterly love that Carol Smith-Rosenberg describes in her influential article "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in the Nineteenth-Century America." Richardson does not conceal her affective appetite for working girls, deploying the emotional energy of the text only for women (Halverson 107). Men are not involved in the narrative, except for the foreman who hideously informs the protagonist of the boss's sinister desire for her. The only men who can empathize with the working girls are the imaginary heroes of the dime novels they read: "Once or twice there was mention of beaux and steady fellows, but the flesh-and-blood man of every-day life did not receive as much attention in this lunch chat as did the heroes of the story-books" (73). Richardson is well aware that the female bonding of working girls is misunderstood by society at large, and in their defense states:

> I know all the prejudices of polite society, which smiles at what is esteemed to be a piece of vulgar vanity characteristic of the working-girl world. And yet I use the term here in all seriousness, in all good faith; not critically, not playfully, but tenderly. Because in the humble world in which our comradeship was formed there is none other to designate the highest type of friendship, no other phrase to define that affection between girl and girl which is as the love of sisters. (198)

Richardson referred to her close female friends as "lady-friends," a term used by working girls at that time. However, such friendships were often not well-received by employers since they allegedly

decreased productivity, as one boss expresses in the novel: they are "as sweet as two turtle-doves, walking around the workroom with their arms around each other" (184). Despite such prejudices, Minnie Plympton and the protagonist are able to establish such a sisterhood. Minnie rescues the narrator from a very destitute situation at the end of the novel, and is a harbinger of change. She finds shelter for the protagonist and helps her climb up the career ladder through constant encouragement.

Conclusion

The plight of working women in big cities such as Chicago and New York, as well as those in the southern mills, inspired middle class women to seek cross-class sisterhood and spearhead reform. Richardson's experiences as an undercover journalist for the *New York Herald* help her portray her alter-ego as a self-made woman, positioning *The Long Day: The Experiences of a New York Working Girl as Told by Herself* as a female bildungsroman. She maintains that the root of these problems was the inability of American institutions to think of women as full economic participants in society, and the failure of these institutions to provide women with educational opportunities. Also acknowledging women's inability to work systematically due to their gender roles as wives and mothers, she stipulates trades-training and reminds her readers of the necessity of protective legislation. She indirectly invites her wealthy middle-class audience to become allies with their underprivileged sisters, which paralleled the late-nineteenth-century rhetoric of the Women's Trade Union League.

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