

T W E L V E

The "Exceptions That Prove the Rule": Daisy and Violet Hilton, the "New Woman," and the Bonds of Marriage

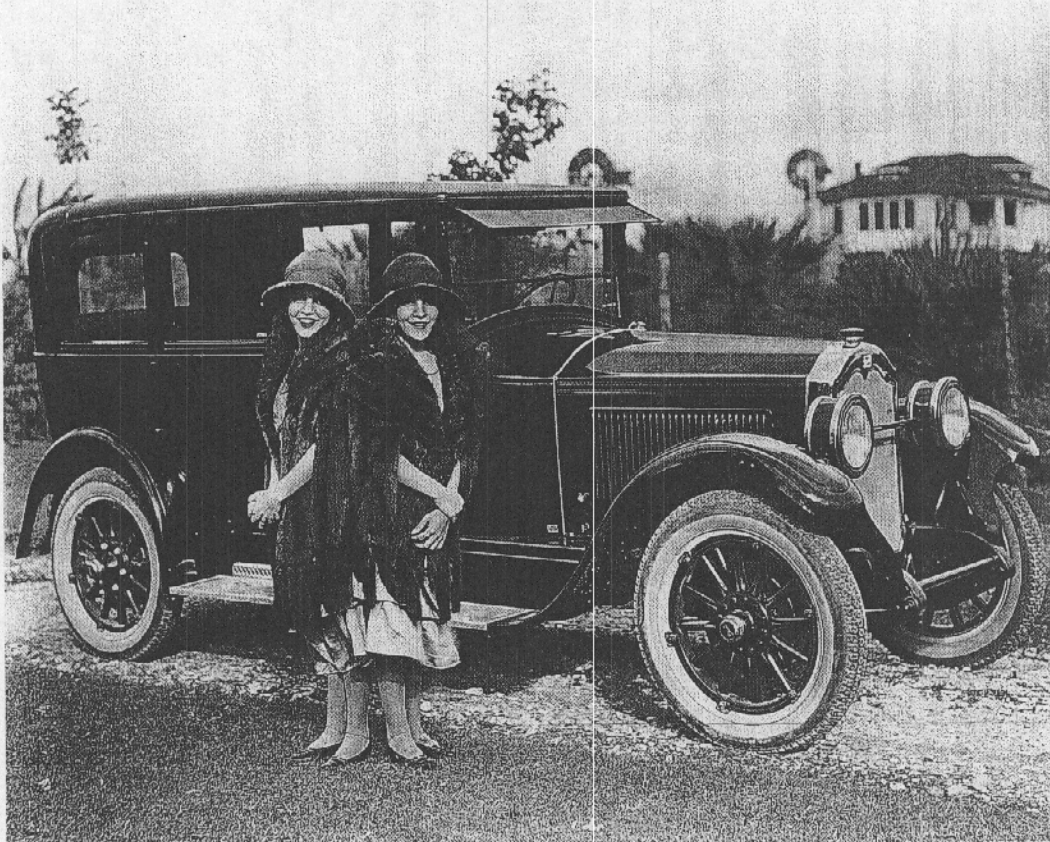
ALLISON PINGREE



To vaudeville crowds of the late 1920s, Daisy and Violet Hilton (fig. 12.1) presented a remarkable sight. The teenage girls with long, dark ringlets and fancy dresses danced, sang, and played the saxophone, seemingly unimpeded by the fact that made them famous: they were conjoined twins, fused together at the base of their spine.¹ Born in 1908 in England, Daisy and Violet were trained in performance arts early on and were exhibited in different parts of the world from the time they were three (Drimmer 1991, 54). After coming to America in 1916, they became vaudeville sensations, earning up to five thousand dollars a week and hobnobbing with such figures as Harry Houdini, Eddie Cantor, and Bob Hope. The twins eventually made their way to Hollywood, where they appeared in two films, Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), and *Chained for Life* (1951).

The allure that these joined twins held for their early twentieth-century American audience worked at many different levels; according to Robert Bogdan, spectators wondered such things as how the twins "performed such normal activities as walking and sitting. . . . Did they feel the same emotion? When one was touched, did the other sense it? How similar were they in personality and taste? . . . How intertwined were their bodies? Could they be separated?" (1988, 201).

Similar questions have intrigued the observers of conjoined twins in a variety of cultural contexts. For centuries, scientists, physicians, and philosophers in the Western world have been both plagued and fascinated by conjoined twins' confounding mathematics of personhood—the fact that they are both more than one yet not quite two. Teratological studies ranging from Ambroise Paré's *On Monsters and Marvels* (1573) to George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle's *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1897) include extensive taxonomies of various types of "in-betweenness"—of bodily absence and overabundance (of arms, legs, heads, genitals, etc.). As with other corporal anomalies, the fleshy link between conjoined twins provokes a variety of emotional responses, from wonder to confusion, curiosity to pity, amusement to awe, and most of all, an intense desire to contain and interpret. More specifically, a survey of teratological treatises reveals that conjoined twins pose a most literal



12.1. Daisy and Violet Hilton. Courtesy of the Hertzberg Circus Collection and Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

challenge to the borders of personal identity by placing a multiplied self where there is usually only one, and by questioning where individual agency begins and ends.

Such concerns are particularly pressing in the American cultural context. Not surprisingly, America has long been transfixed by conjoined twins, beginning with the so-called "original" Siamese twins, Chang and Eng, whose popularity here in the early to mid-nineteenth century, widely promoted by P. T. Barnum among others, was so vast that the country of their origin, Siam, now is used to connote all joined twins.² Conjoined twins arrest the attention and imagination of the American public because they embody both a national fantasy and a national nightmare. That is, the prospect of merged selves corporealized in conjoined twins both reflects a democratic imperative—where all selves are in a sense the same, interchangeable self—and imperils the stability of unique selfhood so stressed by American individualism.

But the case of Daisy and Violet provoked even more particularized and historically grounded responses in the American populace observing them. When the Hilton sisters emerged as celebrities, certain questions dominated the cultural landscape—questions that applied very readily to the twins themselves. That is, dramatic changes in the political, economic, and domestic circumstances of women in the early twentieth century created a highly controversial environment for a figure that was doubly female.

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The decades before and after 1920, the year when women achieved suffrage, were fraught with heated debates about women's roles in marriage, motherhood, politics, and employment. And such issues were certainly at play as American audiences viewed the Hiltons; Bogdan claims that marriage in particular was a "constant issue in full public view" for Daisy and Violet, and was one of the main sources of their "publicity," for it "titillated the general public. Being normal meant establishing nuptial ties, yet the intimacies of marriage were allowed only under the most private circumstances—to which, of course, joined twins had no access" (1988, 201).

A brief exploration of some of the changes fueling these debates over women's roles will show more clearly how and why representations of the Hiltons were so charged with cultural meaning. In *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, Nancy Cott explains that in the early 1900s the increase of "women's new experiences in public, organizational, and occupational life marked one of the ways in which the outlines of twentieth-century America were already taking shape" (1987, 22). For example, while only 35 percent of all those in college in 1890 were women, by the 1920s, a full half of that group were (Cott 1987, 148). Moreover, between the 1870s and 1920s, while about 10 percent of all American women did not marry, of those who graduated from college 40 to 60 percent did not (Smith-Rosenberg 1985, 253). In short, the "noticeable growth of single women's employment outside the home, the diversification of living patterns and family relationships that implied, and the emergence to social concern of a new type of woman leader, educated in college and perhaps graduate school and trained to analyze social problems, set the stage for a new era in the woman movement" (Cott 1987, 22).

The "new type of woman leader" to whom Cott refers is frequently described as the "New Woman," a term, as historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, originally coined by Henry James. Smith-Rosenberg uses the phrase to refer to "a specific sociological and educational cohort of women born between the late 1850s and 1900" who, in "rejecting conventional female roles and asserting their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded bourgeois men" (1985, 176). Indeed, the New Woman "constituted a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon. Eschewing marriage, she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical economic and social reforms, and wielded real political power" (245). Not surprisingly, the New Woman—often educated at women's colleges—frequently spent more time in the company of women than men, and derived much of her own delight and empowerment there; in some cases, these female-to-female relationships had an erotic component, while others remained more platonic. Smith-Rosenberg claims that such a "loving world of female bonding and traditional female familial concepts" worked to the New Woman's great advantage, allowing her to "forge a network of women reformers and social innovators into a singularly effective political machine" (255).

Another development in the 1920s and 1930s that similarly challenged traditional roles of women in and outside the home was an increased emphasis on "companionate marriage." The label, originated by Judge Ben Lindsey of Colorado, contained several components: birth control; divorce by mutual consent for partners who had no children, with no automatic alimony payments to the divorced wife; and a program dedicated to educating "youth and married couples in the art of love, the laws of sex and life, to equip them better for the serious duties of marriage and parenthood" (Lindsey 1930, 195). As Cott explains, though

conservatives very much opposed such notions, others supported them since they located the family as a "specialized site for emotional intimacy, personal and sexual expression, and nurture among husband, wife, and a small number of children" (1987, 156). Those advocating the companionate mode saw Victorian marriage as "hierarchical and emotionally barren, based on dominance and submission," and preferred an "ideal of intimate sexual partnership, in which female sexuality was presumed and marriage was valued for eliciting the partners' individuality as well as for uniting them" (157). The companionate marriage, then, was "symmetrical" instead of a "system of domination that imprisoned women's individuality" (158).

Because of both the rise of the New Woman and the popularization of companionate marriage, close relationships between men and women—and between women and other women—were seen very differently by the turn-of-the-century American public than by previous generations. Even as companionate marriage gave women some measure of greater equality within the home, marriage also came to be seen much more as "normal," "natural," and socially necessary; Lindsey's model, moreover, implied that a woman's economic place still was within the home (Cott 1987, 157–58). Predictably, female friendships were now more suspect; whereas in earlier decades—when male authority was less in question—close female bonds were seen with impunity, now "same-sex relationships came to be suspected as alternatives to women's relationships with men, and therefore threats to existing sexual and social order" (159). Moreover, the concrete emerging reality of "unmarried women's earning power" provoked a "specter" of "women who had no evident male partners or guides" (159). Similarly, as Smith-Rosenberg (citing Havelock Ellis) explains, the New Women, "unmarried, career-oriented, politically active, often lovingly involved with one another," were criticized as "selfish," "unnatural" and androgynous and/or lesbian (278).

Representations of such radical changes in women, and of men's responses to them, took many forms. In 1928, Henry Carey published an essay in *Harper's* claiming that "woman's emancipation" was a "threat to family life"; while this argument was a predictable one, the title Carey chose was not: "This Two-Headed Monster—The Family."³ It is striking indeed that Carey symbolizes domestic and marital transgression through the corporeal anomaly of conjoined twins.

In particular, Carey lays down two grievances: first, women's "financial independence," which creates an "unnatural" erosion of men's "authority" by turning things "upside-down"; and second, women's attitudes reflecting "the craze for independence" associated with the "feminist movement and its egocentric doctrines" (Carey 1928, 165–66). Arguing that "the very essence of feminine love lie[s] in the idea of surrender" and that men seek women who will give themselves "with that completeness which alone can call forth [their] single-hearted and unselfish devotion" (169–70), he maintains that a "woman's chief function on this planet" is to "attract and hold a man, with the object of reproducing and educating children. Man's job has always been to feed the family. It is not natural that the role of woman should be so suddenly modified" (167). Indeed, he argues that if a woman "does her duty by the race" and raises her children "with tender care," then "she has all the career that she needs, and her outside interests will then take their proper place as hobbies or pastimes" (169).

In addition to this division of labor, another crucial element in Carey's model of an acceptable family is that the deciding vote, in the case of a difference of opinions, always lies with the man. Presenting a typical scenario of a disagreement between husband and wife, he

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exhorts the woman to yield, for "a wife who will not surrender . . . is, from a man's point of view, not a wife at all" (170). To intensify his argument he draws on the vivid imagery of conjoined twins: "Feminists, note this well! It is the double-headedness of the modern American family which is causing it so frequently to split down the middle, . . . The heads are at war with each other. The house divided against itself does not, we observe, stand" (170). Herein, Carey extends his rhetoric about the "unnaturalness" of women's independence by imaging a marriage of equals as a freakish, conjoined set of bodies. Indeed, instead of invoking such a bond as a harmonious symbol of married life, he uses it to critique contemporary developments in female emancipation, portraying them as monstrous.

Even though Carey does not mention Daisy and Violet directly, they certainly possess many of the characteristics he most fears in women. At a variety of levels, the Hiltons' celebrated union raises contested issues regarding women's power, voice, earning capabilities, and their right and ability to be "on their own," separate from and outside of marriage and the home. The twins were beautiful and flaunted that beauty for their own ends; they were (for most of their lives) single; they were never burdened with child rearing; and most importantly, they were very financially successful, becoming among the highest-paid performers in vaudeville and Hollywood during their career. They were women joined together, seemingly happy without men, just as the New Woman was with her feminist sisters. Indeed, the twins had the potential to be seen in the same way that Smith-Rosenberg describes the New Woman, as a "condensed symbol of disorder and rebellion" (1985, 247).

It is, of course, a great irony that the twins would be seen as reflections of the new, independent woman when neither Daisy nor Violet ever *was* "free"—in physical terms—for a day of her life. Yet it was precisely their attachment to each other, rather than to a man, that made them so threatening, and made their image more haunting to a conservative male audience than other female "freaks" who also might have been earning lots of money. That is, the conjunction of Daisy and Violet, one that literally and symbolically approximated the marriage bond, was precisely what made them so profitable and so dangerous. The power behind the image of Daisy and Violet was that they were both permanently single because they were permanently doubled. They were already each other's "other half"; their bond thus superseded, and rendered unnecessary, the companionate, heterosexual spouse. Indeed, instead of being fused in marriage to someone else, they were each fused to each other, and that very fusion—the "monstrosity" they displayed—was the key to their financial independence and thus to the economic power that Carey saw as a threat to marriage.

Representations of the twins, constructed mostly by men, responded to this power in various ways. Some attempted to control it, either by using the conjunction as a playful symbol of harmonious marriage or by representing the twins as espousing beliefs that counteracted the trends toward women's independence. Through normalizing narratives that used the twins' bond to reaffirm traditional women's roles, such representations strove to transmute them into safer feminine figures and to contain the chaos that their threatening bodies presented. Other representations depicted the dangers that the twins' bond presented in a more straightforward way, imaging them as domineering and emasculating. In short, the twins were used both as containers or embodiments of cultural danger, as well as symbolic representations of solutions to that danger.

Always, though, these representations betrayed a deep awareness of how, as a symbol, the twins' bond represented the power of women united together, and of how, as a concrete

commercial fact, the bond ensured that the twins were independent, financially prodigious women. Indeed, for most of their performing years, the Hilton sisters embodied a threatening substitute for marriage, ironically, by enacting and literalizing the very things that conservative marital norms of the time advocated. The twins could not be governed by a husband because they were already physically fused to each other; they were unable to enter a companionate marriage because they already were each other's own symmetrical "companions"; and they undermined the distinction between public and private by constantly witnessing each others' lives, and by inverting their own intimate bond into economic advantage. The bodies of Daisy and Violet simply concentrated, onto one corporeal site, much broader cultural debates about gender, domesticity and power.

Two years before Carey published his article and six years after American women received the vote, Daisy and Violet performed on vaudeville a playful, lighthearted song that parallels their relationship with that of a heterosexual couple, and thus normalizes their potential danger. From the outset, "Me Too" (written by Harry Woods, Charles Tobias and Al. Sherman) presents itself as being about male-female romance; the cover drawing (fig. 12.2) boasts a young woman in the foreground and her well-dressed suitor in the sporty convertible behind her. She is drawn as shapely and high-heeled—flirtatious yet also demure; the lyrics reveal that "[i]n a bathing suit she looks great." This energetic romance leads up to marriage in verse two: "Got a ring and a horse and a horse and a ring / And we're ready to go / Giddyap! Giddyap! Giddyap! Giddyap! / Oh the parson will know / That I don't care I don't mind / Anywhere that she goes you'll find / Ho Ho! Ha Ha! ME TOO." Moreover, many lines imply that this marriage will be a companionate one: "She loves the things I do / Morning, noon and night / I'm right in her sight / She can't get away / . . . I do what she does / And she does what I do / And I'll tell you right now / That I don't care I don't mind / Anywhere that she goes you'll find / Ho Ho! Ha Ha! ME TOO." Likewise, the affluent speaker treats his sweetheart to an elaborate vacation ("She wants to go to Europe / So I said 'Honey, that's O.K.'"). In short, when the assumed speaker of "Me Too" is male, the song is a model for a companionate marriage: man and woman enjoy the same things and go places together; satisfied as a consumer of sex and material goods, the woman plays her proper role as the wife.

However, the other image on that same cover—that of Daisy and Violet—reminds the audience of a different prospect altogether. That is, when sung by Daisy and Violet, the lyrics take on a different meaning—one of two women, rather than a man and woman, joined together. By putting into their mouths this heterosexual script, the Hiltons' promoters could attempt to reduce the threat the twins posed of two young women who go everywhere together—with no man in sight—and thoroughly enjoy themselves.

A similar vacillation between revealing the transgressive sides of the Hiltons and attempting to contain those threatening elements emerges in a variety of publicity material on the twins. One such example is an early pamphlet (circa 1926), *Souvenir and Life Story of San Antonio's Siamese Twins*, written most likely by Myer Myers, the twins' domineering manager.⁴ At one point, the pamphlet relates that the sisters share an intense bond—one that could easily evoke what many feared about the New Woman and her female friendships: Daisy and Violet supposedly claim that they have decided never to marry, explaining that there is a "closer

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12.2. "Me Too" with the Hilton Sisters, "San Antonio's Siamese Twins." Courtesy of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

spiritual cord between us than between other human beings" and that "[heterosexual married] love can only complicate the business of living for us" (13). Thus, they conclude, "there is no way for either of us to find happiness that others find in marriage" so instead, "we are merely spectators" (14). Such descriptions are exactly the kind of thing that, when spoken by independent women, would have threatened traditional marital patterns; they invoke feminist "sisters" bonded together by a "spiritual cord," in lives not "complicated" by men and marriage.

But such an admission is rare in the pamphlet; rather, the rest transmutes Daisy and Violet into representatives of more traditionalist norms, decrying the views that such feminist sisters would hold. It reads in part like a handbook on American girlhood, sketching out model feminine conduct and appearance. For example, it claims that the twins "radiate happiness" and have "all the joy that comes to those who really love to make other people happy"; similarly, the twins "have a home development that is both interesting and instinctive. . . . [They] love to sew, get meals, cook, sing, dance, swim, . . . romp, raise pets, play tennis, golf, handball, go to the theatre, the movies, read good books and converse with cultured people." Daisy and Violet, the text claims, are "stimulated by higher ideals and nobler aspirations" than common girls (3). Moreover, the pamphlet places an unquestioned emphasis on the necessity, timelessness, and "naturalness" of marriage as an institution: "That the thoughts of girls, budding into womanhood, turn naturally to marriage, has been a theory of mankind since the dawn of the ages, and it has been a theory borne out by facts. It is human nature, that's all" (12).

The text's most overt appropriation of Violet and Daisy as advocates for traditional roles for women comes when it presents them as purportedly "speaking for themselves"; therein, they offer direct injunctions on the proper role and behavior of women:

We do not care much for women in business, in offices. We believe in the so-called bromide that "woman's place is in the home." . . . [W]e believe that the career of every woman is marriage, or should be. It seems to us that Nature meant the race to go on, or men and woman [*sic*] would not have been created in the first place. We seem to feel that a woman who puts marriage behind her for the sake of a business or artistic career is not doing her allotted task. (13)

Such advice—strongly reminiscent of Carey's rhetoric—is startling, coming as it does from two women whose lives were spent in continuous employment and who themselves eschewed marriage. The text attempts to explain this bizarre juxtaposition by having the twins claim, "We are the exceptions that prove the rule" (13).

Such defenses of marriage and domestically inclined women, of course, beg the question of their necessity: if the value of traditional female roles were not in question, such moralizing most likely would be superfluous. It seems that Myers, intuiting the latent threat that the twins pose, forms them into mouthpieces of the conventional norms that must have seemed endangered by current cultural debates regarding marriage and women's power. By framing the Hiltons as the "exceptions to girls in everyday life," he could advocate certain traditional standards for what that "everyday life" should be.

Another publicity article, written in the early 1930s, reflects many of the ways in which the twins posed a threat to conventional marital roles and similarly moves between identifying the dangers the twins present and attempting to contain them. Unlike the souvenir booklet, which claims that the twins will not marry, "One of the Hilton 'Siamese Twins' to be Married" explores what might happen if they did. Announcing the engagement of Daisy to Jack Lewis, a young orchestra leader from Chicago, the article presents Jack as the protagonist in a melodrama, facing challenge after challenge in his love quest. Each impediment arises from the unchanging fact of the twins' bond, and the representation of each confrontation reveals the complications that the twins present. For example, the article implies that the marriage could become a "two against one" relation, with Daisy and Violet ganging up on Jack—and winning: "Anyone can see that if Violet disliked Jack he would have no chance at all." An image of double monstrosity follows, revealing the implicit power the twins wield over the male suitor: "Presumably, if Jack ever comes home at an unholy hour, he will face an angry double figure in a nightgown. Many a husband has faced just such a double menace, but he can always make the double figure turn into one by closing one eye. Jack cannot do this. He may expect the left half of the apparition, which is Daisy, to stretch out a hand and in a terrible voice, say: ' . . . I wish to speak with you.' " Even if, as a result of such domination, Jack wants a divorce, the article warns that such efforts will be in vain: "It would be hopeless to contest her divorce because Daisy has an eye-witness to corroborate every act of her life who was present at all of her conversations." While such descriptions undoubtedly could cause a chuckle in readers, they nonetheless bespeak the underlying threat that the twins represent.

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which the twins' physical conjunction collapses the border between public and private—between external, masculinized realms of politics, enterprise, and spectacle, and intimate, feminized realms of domesticity—upon which the ideology of traditional marriage depends. Once again, the article attempts to cast the problem in a humorous light by focusing (through description and a photograph) on a clever gimmick the twins have devised to ensure privacy in courtship: a phone booth with a wall that slides up and down, so that one twin can have a secret conversation by phone while the other waits outside.

But such attempts, of course, were really a fiction of privacy, since any romantic attempt would always be witnessed—and thus participated in—by both twins. Indeed, Jack is constantly confounded in his attempt simply to be alone with Daisy:

Next to murder, love-making is about the most personal and exclusive job in the world. All the world may love a lover, but lovers don't want anyone in on the loving. The question at once arises as to how Mr. Lewis managed to woo and win Miss Daisy, with the inseparable Miss Violet always welded to her. . . .

As many a man learns to his cost, courtship is impossible while a girl's young brother is hovering about the room. However, that can always be fixed. The suitor whispers a few words in the ear of the grinning boy, a piece of silver changes hands and the young nuisance abates himself. But millions could not bribe Violet to go away, because it would be death to both.

Violet's never-ending presence appears again and again in the article, in terms that reveal an underlying anxiety: "Thus far he has managed to walk that tightrope without a slip, but what about the honeymoon and later more prosaic days of married life? In all the literature of the world there is not a word of advice on how to manage a bride when her sister is present on all occasions." In the end, despite its comic twists and gimmicks, this article betrays the intensity of the twins' threat in its extreme and often violent language.

Such a threat was made abundantly clear in the responses that Daisy and Violet received when they attempted to get married in actuality. The representations of those marriages (as well as of their foiled marital attempts) reflect the way in which, once again, the twins' conjunction eroded the boundary between the public and private and was thus met with moral outrage.

Violet and Daisy each had engagements with different men that were broken off for various reasons through the years, yet each eventually married—Violet in 1936 and Daisy in 1941. Of the frustrated attempts, those made in 1934 for a marriage between Violet and Maurice Lambert, a bandleader, were the most adamantly opposed. In fact, Violet and her beau went to twenty-one different states and were refused in all of them for essentially similar reasons: "on moral grounds"; "on ground that bride is a Siamese twin"; on "the question of morality and decency"; as "a matter of public policy."⁵ Even when they did each marry, neither marriage lasted more than a few weeks or months—Violet's because it was staged for publicity reasons alone (taking place before 100,000 people at the Texas Centennial celebration in Dallas), and Daisy's because her new husband moved out after ten days, claiming: "I guess I just am not the type of fellow that should marry a Siamese twin. . . . As far as being a bridegroom under such conditions is concerned, I suppose I am what you might call a hermit" (Drimmer 1991, 54). Thus, in both the article describing Daisy and Jack's engage-

ment and in public responses to other marriage attempts of the Hiltons, there emerges a keen awareness of the ways in which as a doubled wife, Daisy and Violet may wield too much power, and of the ways in which their conjunction fundamentally destroys the adamantly defended boundary between public and private.

What is presented as a dangerous possibility in "One of the Hilton 'Siamese Twins' to be Married" becomes an actuality in Browning's film *Freaks*. Although the twins appear in only a few scenes of the film, the events depicted there resonate strongly, given the cultural context in which they appear. One scene in particular focuses on the transgressive and dangerous aspects of the twins in marriage. Daisy has recently married Roscoe, a fellow circus performer who stutters frequently and who dresses up as a woman for his act; Daisy and Violet are making the bed in their small bungalow, and upon hearing Violet mocking him ("Oh, well, if he's going to say anything, let him say it. Don't let him p-p-p-uh for an hour"), Roscoe enters. The ensuing dialogue depicts an uneasy back-and-forth movement of a husband fighting to maintain control of the married female body—where it will reside and what actions it will pursue:

ROScoe: Say, you're going to d-d-d-do as I say. *I'm* the b-b-boss of my home.

VIOLET: Half of it, you mean. . . . Come on, Daisy, let's get out of here.

ROScoe: Oh no she d-d-don't, she's going to stay right here.

VIOLET: Come on, *I* gotta go.

ROScoe: (as the twins exit) Aw, pahooey, you're always using that for an exc-c-c, for an exc-c-c, for an alib-b-i.

In this scene, Violet embodies many frightening aspects of the New Woman: she speaks out, goes where she wants, and is not regulated by a husband. She implies that a man can, at best, be in control of only "half" of his house—himself. Tellingly, in a previous scene Violet has confronted Roscoe's male authority by taunting sarcastically, "her master's voice is calling" when Roscoe beckons to Daisy; by the end of the above scene, it is all too apparent how little "mastery" Roscoe truly has.

Likewise, in a scene soon following the domestic quarrel, after Violet accepts a marriage proposal she and her fiancé suddenly kiss with great passion; Daisy—who until then has been oblivious to them as she reads a book—looks up in surprise, closes her eyes, and relishes the erotic pleasure right along with her sister. Such a sequence serves, once again, to reveal the frightening prospects that the twins pose—prospects such as women sharing simultaneous sensual enjoyment, or husbands unable to control altogether when, where, and how their wives experience sexuality.

In short, the creators of *Freaks* spell out in no uncertain terms the threatening impotence men could feel when confronted with these joined women. Placed as a representative of all husbands, Roscoe is emasculated directly, through Violet's rebellions, and in more subtle ways—linguistically through his stuttering and visually through his female circus act. These emasculations, combined with the twins' undifferentiated sexual pleasure, ultimately comment not only on Daisy and Violet, but also on other types of single, yet united, women. Indeed, the scenes involving the Hiltons condense the gender politics drama playing itself out in America at the time the film appeared.

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rounded them, for on the palimpsest of their bodies were written the contradictory messages of a culture at war with itself about women. By replicating, literalizing, and thus supplanting the marriage contract, their fleshy bond kept them single, facilitated their education and cultural training, and, most importantly, earned them large fortunes that guaranteed them a place as career women. The twins' particular form of aberration perfectly embodies what many by then had come to fear: that a woman's body might not be able to be controlled; that heterosexual, companionate marriage might not be the only form of intimate "bonding" between two people; and that the division between public and private might not be so clear after all. Despite a host of attempts—futile as they were—to master this enigmatic figure, the image of Daisy and Violet remained, like the New Woman, a symbol of "disorder and rebellion."

NOTES

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2. For my analysis of the cultural uses and representations of Chang and Eng, see "America's 'United Siamese Brothers': Chang and Eng and Nineteenth Century Ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

3. I am indebted to Cott (345n. 27) for introducing me to this article.

4. A full analysis of Daisy and Violet's relationship with Myers—which I lack the space to do here—would further enrich my argument about the twins' engagement of issues of women and power. According to many accounts, until the twins were twenty-three, Myers (who was their guardian as well as their agent) kept them in "virtual 'bondage,'" giving them none of the money they earned and never letting them out of his sight except to attend their voice lessons. Finally, in 1931, the twins caught the sympathetic attention of an attorney, who helped them escape Myers's domination in a highly publicized court trial in San Antonio (Vasquez 1969).

5. See "Bars License to Siamese Twin," *New York Times*, 26 January 1935, 13; "City Bars Wedding of Siamese Twin," *New York Times*, 6 July 1934, 19.

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EDITED BY

Rosemarie Garland Thomson



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