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“The World is Less Than Perfect”: Non-traditional Family Structures in *Deadwood*

by Paul Zinder

Over the course of three seasons, the HBO series *Deadwood* charts the development of a cluster of nontraditional frontier families. Archetypal patriarchs with figurative “children” often compose these family units, although powerful women also assume roles usually attributed to male characters in the Western. Typically, the significance of the dynastic family in the Western genre relates directly to the importance of property and the “appropriate” distribution of wealth within the family,ⁱ and true to the form, the pursuit of land that is passed on to Alma Garret after her husband’s murder proves to be the catalyst for the narrative arc of the series as a whole (“Reconnoitering the Rim” 1.3). Property and family are tightly bound in the show, as the search for gold on the outskirts of Deadwood, and the formation of business interests related to this valuable natural resource, come to rely on the familial structures that form in the camp. This kindred makeup catalyzes the people in Deadwood’s “domestic” community when an external, “foreign” menace arrives to imperil the interconnected branches of the local populace. George Hearst targets these non-traditional families for apocalyptic destruction in the third season of the series. However, while Hearst succeeds in empire-building, he fails in his strategy to crush the people of Deadwood “like Gomorrah,” as the camp unites against a man unwilling to acknowledge the importance of affective community when building his personal wealth (“Unauthorized Cinnamon” 3.7). Hearst, an outsider aligned with the capitalist public sphere, escapes Deadwood with more gold, but without destroying the bonds of the non-traditional families who remain.

This revision of family is key because, as Elliot West contends, “the most important institution in westward expansion [was] the family.”ⁱⁱ Historically, families in the developing west were composed of male authority figures and women confined to the private sphere as homemakers.ⁱⁱⁱ As Cathy Luchetti writes, “the average frontier woman spent her life bearing children,” and “while men flooded into the world of trade, business, and government, women could succeed in maternity.”^{iv} Here we find the origin of those conservative archetypes celebrated in cinematic Westerns that would define the west for generations. Such stories, Richard W. Slatta contends, have “a decidedly masculine flavor,” in which women assume “a few stereotypical roles: hapless heroine in need of saving, schoolmarm spreading civilization or prostitute.”^v In contrast, David Milch approaches his vision of America’s 19th-century development by expanding traditional definitions of both male and female characters in the Western, by deconstructing the meaning of archetypes like the male hero and prostitute, and by placing these characters in non-traditional familial structures, thereby creating an amalgamation of people striving to connect on very personal levels. Ultimately, *Deadwood*’s “flavor” is neither masculine nor feminine, but human.

Crucially, Milch’s series-long narrative arc highlights the parallel formation of these non-traditional families with the expansion of the nation and the capitalist Hearst’s effect on such proceedings, making the residents of the camp participants in a national journey. And as Amy Kaplan has argued, “the language of domesticity suffused the debates about national expansion,” for the “domestic has a double meaning that not only links the familial household to the nation but also imagines both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home. The earliest meaning of foreign... [is] ‘at a distance from home.’”^{vi} The actions taken by the non-traditional families in *Deadwood* are thus connected to the personal disruptions

(and horrors) engendered both by the financial invasion of George Hearst but also by the national invasion of the United States Government, as characters fashion unconventional unions in an effort to survive in a town with no civil law, unwittingly originating a true “home” from which to defend their intimate relations from powerful “foreign” assailants. The community actually strengthens with the arrival of the insensate and impersonal Hearst, whose business methods offend Deadwood’s leading capitalists who cannot compete with a nationally recognized gold baron. And while the end of Hearst’s self-appointed reign as the camp’s de-facto patriarch leaves the camp’s residents emotionally shattered by their attempt to slow the engine of his government-endorsed monopoly, they remain standing in non-traditional families that have become stronger than ever.

The show’s establishment of the non-traditional begins with its dismantling of the traditional. *Deadwood* critiques traditional marriage as a convenience birthed by business and/or societal interests, linking spousal coalitions to the potential annexation of the surrounding area to the rapidly growing United States, which the camp’s leaders fear will alleviate the civil freedoms they moved to Deadwood to cultivate. The nuclear families in the diegesis of the series are arrangements that have little bearing on the happiness of their participants/subjects, and when a shift in the role of chief patriarch in the camp from Al Swearengen to George Hearst looms, the former’s enemies become fierce allies. Furthermore, the creation and development of these relationships metaphorically mirror the consistent deal-making undertaken by local and federal officials regarding Deadwood’s future as a “free camp.” For Milch, a happy traditional family has no place in a community with or without “law.” In *Deadwood*, laws are formed by governments ruled by financial interests that seek to collapse the freedom of individuals within the non-traditional family unit. Traditional families, in turn, are seen to be ruled by the same freedom-limiting interests.

In what follows, I will trace the evolution of the camp’s families over the series’ three-season run, tying their growth to the building of wealth in the town, and reading their development as a microcosm of 19th-century American expansion and ‘progress’. Ultimately, *Deadwood* critiques Hearst’s indurate pursuit of wealth by showing how interrelated it is with the configuration of traditional families in the Western.

I. Annexation: Personal and Otherwise

“I bet your wife and son are overtook by that lovely home you built them.”
Charlie Utter in “A Lie Agreed Upon: Part II” (2.2)

Deadwood begins with the threat of impending death and a reminder of the significance of family, as Marshall Seth Bullock prepares to hang a man in Montana without trial to avoid the rush of a posse of drunks who demand personal retribution for the stealing of a horse. As he stands on the front porch of Bullock’s office under a noose, Clell Watson insists that “this isn’t right. My sister was comin’ in the morning.” When Clell realizes that he cannot escape the capital punishment before him, he says, “you tell my sister, if my boy turns up, raise him good... tell her to give him my boots... Tell him his daddy loved him” (“Deadwood” 1.1). Although Clell’s son is missing and will unknowingly become an orphan when his father dies, his sister will have the opportunity to take the boy in, and raise him as her own. The series’ “first family” is thus a broken one, but one that also presages the hastily constructed families of Deadwood, each assembled to survive a hard, uncaring world. In *Deadwood*, distinct non-traditional

families form and fortify due to the bonds they forge in the camp that grows around them, and the progress of each of these non-traditional families becomes increasingly interdependent as the series continues.

To David Milch, “marriage, like gold, is a lie agreed upon that serves a larger human purpose.”^{vii} While the wife was often seen to embody a “civilizing force” in the 19th century west, Alma Garrett-Ellsworth of Deadwood initially has no such effect on her surroundings.^{viii} Indeed, Alma’s arranged marriage to Brom Garrett sets in motion the plot that will eventually lead to the violence spearheaded by George Hearst in the third season of the series, making her a catalyst of a series of public events, even though she spends most of her first marriage in her private room, floating away her days in a laudanum haze. Brom’s death, in turn, prompts her to question the veracity of Dan Dority’s account of the “accident” (“Here Was a Man,” 1.4), an inquiry that eventually guides her to a more intimate relationship with Bullock. The loss of her first marriage thus leads her directly to what may become a second one.

But she and Bullock may never marry, because other prearranged considerations take precedence over their passion. Bullock is already married to his brother’s widow, who is on her way to Deadwood with her adolescent son. Since historically, a successful male was considered a “good citizen” if he built his own house and became a father, the arrival of Martha and her son places Bullock in the position to achieve that time-honored goal.^{ix} Furthermore, if, according to G. Christopher Williams, “a domestic situation” is necessary “for the taming of the gunslinger,” Martha Bullock’s arrival in Deadwood offers him the perfect opportunity to become domesticated.^x In this, she is largely successful. Bullock kills no one else after her arrival, and though he does suggest to Alma that they “leave the camp immediately,” he does so to avoid “[renewal of Martha’s] humiliation daily,” while also offering the alternative of severing their connection (2.2). That they pursue the latter course demonstrates the restraining influence Martha’s presence has on Bullock’s passions.

The complications of their lives continue, however, as Alma soon finds out she is pregnant with Bullock’s child. Choosing to marry the prospector Whitney Ellsworth to hide this fact, Alma is, in effect, creating a faux-nuclear family similar to the Bullocks. But the attraction to Bullock remains. At Alma and Ellsworth’s wedding celebration, for instance, Swearengen sees Bullock lock eyes with his former lover and orders him to go home, reminding the Sheriff “I believe it’s to your fucking right” (“Boy the Earth Talks To,” 2.12). Their passion persists despite their respective marriages of convenience.

The character arcs for both Alma and Bullock thus comment on the dichotomy of their private and public selves, and offer a critique of the disingenuousness of traditional marriage as well as the camp’s burgeoning “civilization.” Amy Kaplan contends that “domesticity draws strict boundaries between the home and the world of men.”^{xi} Alma begins *Deadwood* as a character who spends most of her time self-medicating, standing by the window in her room considering the public lives of men like Seth Bullock. Her love affair with the Sheriff as well as her pregnancy are both treated in the private sphere of her home, keeping the genuine feelings of both characters, and the consequences of those feelings, out of the public eye. As Alma and Bullock’s public selves rise in prominence, so does their unhappiness at their inability to be together; Alma returns to her addiction and Bullock sits inert in an obligatory marriage. In the third season of the series, after she accepts her non-traditional daughter Sofia, Alma opens the camp’s first financial institution, taking the traditional male reigns of the public sphere in her hands. This move outside the private sphere commits Alma to a loveless marriage, a consequence of her newfound public visibility. As Bullock watches Alma dance on stage at her

wedding, marriage is proven to be a guise that operates to appease the mores of 19th-century culture.

Deadwood also employs non-elective annexation as an analogical comment on traditional marriage. On the night of the Ellsworths' wedding, Bullock and Al Swearngen, having begun the season engaging in violent fisticuffs, ally so that they may brave the coming annexation together. The final sequence of the second season finale cuts from the wedding celebration to the establishment of the unlikely Bullock/Swearngen alliance, linking the Ellsworths' matrimonial union (a marriage of convenience) to concerns over Deadwood's potential national union (a marriage of force). The World Court Digest defines annexation as "the assumption of title over territory as a result of a negotiated settlement," wording that is particularly apt for a consideration of marriage contracts.^{xii} Virginia Wright Wexman contends that the Western genre includes scores of "affectionless" marital unions "held together by considerations of property and lineage."^{xiii} The Alma-Ellsworth pairing fits into such a category as precisely as her first marriage to Brom Garrett did. Ellsworth is virtually dumbstruck when Trixie asks him if he will "do the right thing" and marry Alma to save the expectant mother and the Bullocks from embarrassment ("Something Very Expensive," 2.6). But would the necessity of such a marriage stand if Alma was not the proprietor of the richest gold claim in Deadwood? Alma's avowal that, "I trust you, Ellsworth, as an honorable man. I take great pleasure in your company" is made before their engagement, which probably explains why her attitude regarding his company lacks such enthusiasm after they marry ("Jewel's Boot Is Made for Walking," 1.11). After Alma returns to the pleasures of laudanum and clumsily attempts to seduce Ellsworth, her husband moves out in discomfiture. When she eventually informs him that she plans to "forego" the drug "forever," Ellsworth tempers his pleasure by insisting that "not having me in this house is going to improve your odds" (3.7). While the couple maintains a mutual concern and respect for each other, the Ellsworths become victims of a marriage birthed by societal expectation, and Ellsworth himself will die as an innocent drawn into Hearst's ring of intimidation, his murder impelling Alma's sale of her gold claim to Hearst, the facilitator of monopolistic practice and government intrusion. The marriage of convenience between Alma and Ellsworth thus fails to prevent the larger coercive annexation that it mirrors. Given that the entire reason for the marriage also disappears when Alma miscarries, their marriage ultimately seems to have failed in both its public and private aims.

The Garretts, the Bullocks, and the Ellsworths all share a common attribute. Their marriages are products of coercion, pressure placed on each participant to engage in a union that lacks private affection and is only genuine as a public practicality. In contrast, the non-traditional unions in *Deadwood*, based on personal choice rather than the demands of societal mores, have an integrity that counteracts the pain expressed in the series' conventional marriages.

By the third season, one couple in the camp acts like long-tenured spouses though they never exchange vows. Sol Star, Bullock's partner in the hardware business, and Trixie, a prostitute at the Gem, develop what may even be described as the healthiest relationship in the series. The Star-Trixie connection emerges as innocently as a teenage crush, beginning in "Plague," when Trixie's "Hello, Mr. Star!" is gifted with an exuberant smile and answered by the beaming recipient (1.6), prompting Star to offer her a 100% discount on anything in the hardware store, his "special get acquainted with those we'd like to get acquainted with sale," as well as lessons in accounting ("Bullock Returns to Camp," 1.7). Crucially, Star refuses to allow Trixie's work for Swearngen to obstruct their potential coupling, even visiting her at the Gem.

When she tells him that it's embarrassing for her to see him there, Star requests that she "Come to our store, then" ("No Other Sons or Daughters," 1.9). Trixie prompts their first tryst with a proposal that's both defensive and sincere: "Anyways... would you want a free fuck?" (1.11). Although she initially hesitates when he tries to kiss her on the mouth, she relents upon his repeated request. Their bond deepens with time, too. At the opening of the second season, after Star is shot by Johnny during the brawl between Bullock and Swearengen, Trixie stays by Star's bed like a nurse-maid in love. She finds escape from her deeply imbedded inferiority complex difficult, however. Star's anger at Trixie's refusal to consider the serious potential of their relationship (after she aggressively suggests that if he teaches her accounts, she'll pay him in "cunt") propels her from the store ("New Money," 2.3). And yet Star eventually welcomes her back, displaying an acceptance of both her difficult circumstance and the emotional volatility it creates. Acceptance, not coercion, keeps this couple together.

At the same time, the potential roadblock to the couple's happiness, Al Swearengen – Trixie's "father"/pimp/lover – never truly leaves her life. In fact, he also demonstrates an acceptance of her new attachment that keeps her close. When Swearengen lies suffering from kidney stones, unable to speak, Trixie comforts him like an empathetic ex-wife, assuring him that "it's all right, honey," after telling his new lover Dolly to "get the fuck out of here" ("Requiem for a Gleet," 2.4). Later in the series, Swearengen symbolically (and publicly) "accepts" Trixie's choice to love Star while the couple walks arm in arm at Alma and Ellsworth's wedding celebration, tossing the letter and money he bribed out of Miss Isringhausen to Trixie as a wedding gift for the new bride. When Trixie looks to the balcony with a luminous smile in response, she seems to recognize that Swearengen has severed the tie he formerly held tight – a tie which, as I argue below, borders on the incestuous.^{xiv} By the third season, Swearengen arranges for Star to purchase a house to make it easier for the couple to be together. Doubts about their compatibility have thus been alleviated. The series' final sanction of the union occurs after Trixie voices anger and anxiousness over Alma's return to drug addiction and the impact it may have on Sofia. Star's suggestion that he and Trixie consider taking the child moves her and completes the circle of this symbolic marriage – they are receptive to becoming parents together.

One of the more affecting relationships in *Deadwood*, that of Joanie Stubbs and Jane Canary, never reaches the standing of a trusting "marriage," but it nonetheless boasts the potential to make both parties happier than they've ever been in a fashion similar to the relationship between Trixie and Star. Joanie, the head prostitute at the Bella Union and the former companion of Cy Tolliver, fails in her early attempts at love. Tolliver, a vitriolic and sadistic pimp, only expresses his affection for Joanie after his acts of violence. He insists that "my worry's you. And my concerns and feelings of fucking affection," directly following a threat to break her jaw (1.6). Subsequent to his beating of two grifters, Flora and her brother Miles, into disfigurement, Tolliver forces Joanie to "put that [thing] out of its misery," only to remind her that "your happiness is important to me... You bring warmth into my life. I can't bear to see you unhappy like this" ("Suffer the Little Children," 1.8). When Joanie extricates herself from Tolliver to open her own brothel, only to return to him for help after the Wolcott massacre, Tolliver acts like a betrayed spouse, cynically observing that "It's no picnic, is it honey, running pussy?" ("E.B. Was Left Out," 2.7).

Tolliver's jealousy – and continual violence – suggests a measure of domination noticeably absent from Joanie's relationship to Jane, which begins when both characters are at a particularly low point (though, to be sure, Jane drunkenly stumbles from low point to low point).

Joanie's depression, following the slaughter of the young women she brought to Deadwood, leaves her sitting alone in the dark in her newly deserted brothel, the Chez Amis. Jane appears outside on a drunken evening to exclaim that her visit was prompted by their "pain-in-the-balls mutual acquaintance, Charlie fucking Utter!" ("Childish Things," 2.8). This gives Joanie the impetus to allow the bibulous woman inside. Joanie takes naturally to her role as protector of damaged women (she had attempted to shield Flora from Tolliver's wrath even after the young woman's betrayal and quietly shoos off the surviving prostitutes under her employ on the night of the massacre with all of the money she can scrape together). This makes her sympathetic to Jane's obvious weaknesses, and her compassion will eventually have romantic potential as well.

For her part, Jane evinces a wish to befriend Joanie after she's found unconscious on the front porch of the Chez Amis with a gun in her hand, afraid to enter for fear that Wolcott may have returned to attack Joanie as well. And when Joanie insists she "favor me and stay," Jane jokes that she gets "top fucking dollar," the sexual innuendo flavoring the exchange ("Amalgamation and Capital," 2.9). In direct contrast to the control of a patriarch like Tolliver, Joanie ignores Jane's inability to remain sober and tenderly insists on Jane's company, cognizant that relationships mature over time. As Joanie attempts to sponge-bathe Jane, the latter protests, pointing out that she never had any sisters so she's never experienced such pampering. Joanie responds by admitting that she had romantic relations with both of her siblings, but that Jane was safe from her advances if she wanted to be. Jane's invitation to kiss is happily obliged. The contented couple draws the attention of the camp as they lead the children down the thoroughfare to the schoolhouse. And in the final episode of *Deadwood*, Joanie wraps Wild Bill Hicock's robe around Jane, explaining that she wants to be good to her, implying a future that the viewer will never see.

The Trixie-Sol coupling and the Joanie-Jane relationship epitomize the concept of the "happy marriage" in *Deadwood*, underlining the series' critical commentary on traditional marriage. Each of these characters chooses her mate based on her own free will, without concern for the potential consequences of each union. These choices are affirmed by the narrative arc of the series, which leaves both couples satisfied with their personal companions. In both cases, we find characters who leave controlling and violent patriarchs for relationships of their own choosing. In the analogy between marriage and nation-building, then, *Deadwood* clearly demonstrates a preference for elective affiliation that allows us to read the coercion involved in Joanie's relationship to Tolliver and Trixie's relationship to Swearingen as a figure for the coercion pressuring the camp to join the nation.

In much the same way that the show foregrounds non-sanctioned heterosexual unions and homosexual bonds, it also produces a number of surrogate, impromptu parent and sibling relationships. Both literal and figurative parents have children, and the series includes a plethora of non-traditional sibling relationships, prompted by the dearth of biological relations in the camp. In *Deadwood*, legitimate siblings usually affiliate around a death. The demise of Robert Bullock compels Seth Bullock to marry his sister-in-law. Wyatt and Morgan Earp make a passing appearance in the camp, but are persuaded to leave by Bullock after Morgan kills a man in the thoroughfare. And when Wolcott offers Mose Manuel \$200,000 for the gold claim he co-owns with his brother Charlie, Mose shoots his sibling dead to collect.

Like so many of the other non-traditional familial associations in *Deadwood*, symbolic sibling relationships prove more lasting than their official counterparts. Star and Bullock, for instance, arrive in the camp together and work together to build their trade, sharing a kinship of private thoughts like a pair of brothers. Star asks Bullock if he thinks Trixie is pretty, as though

requesting approval for the affair, while Bullock confides in his partner that he fears that his dead brother “sees me borrowing his life so I didn’t have to live my own” (“Mister Wu,” 1.10). Star stands with a gun, ready to protect Bullock from potential aggressors in both Montana and in Deadwood, while Bullock only admits his love for Alma to his surrogate “brother” who was shot trying to protect him (2.2). Their fraternal partnership far surpasses the hardware business. Similarly, the “sisterhood” of Alma and Trixie mirrors that of each woman’s lover. After Alma overcomes her addiction under Trixie’s guidance, they maintain a personal, if volatile symbiosis.^{xv} Alma turns to Trixie first when she believes she’s pregnant, and later Trixie playfully tells Alma that she’s learning to do accounts at the hardware store and is “fucking one of the owners as well” (“Complications,” 2.5). After admitting, “I’m delighted by that,” Alma requests a drag off of Trixie’s cigarette, a rare and sisterly move for a woman accustomed to the finer things (2.5). On a grander note, Trixie, concerned with the reputations of Alma, Bullock, and his newly arrived family, “arranges” the marriage between Ellsworth and Alma by pushing him to propose (2.6) and will furiously confront Alma’s supplier as well as Alma herself after her return to the drug, which leads to Trixie’s firing from the bank. Forgiveness reigns soon enough, however, and Trixie stays by her side after gunshots ring out near Alma on the thoroughfare. The alliance may have begun as a side-job organized by Trixie’s pimp, but the commitment from each woman to the other increases as their stakes in the camp do as well. Once again personal choice trumps coercive violence.

Along with its non-traditional lovers and siblings, the camp is also filled with surrogate sons and daughters, fathers and mothers. The “sons of Swearengen” form a motley group, led by Dan Dority. Silas Adams’ arrival in the Gem unleashes a sibling rivalry in Dan, who feels unjustly replaced by the newcomer. Dan’s concern that he’s “never seen Al warm up to anybody so quick” (1.11) is legitimate, and although his paranoia when he links Adams to the state of the nation may be misplaced, his insistence that “We’re joining America and it’s full of lying, thieving cocksuckers that you can’t trust at all” feels like a valid analogy (2.1). Even though Adams tells him “I ain’t your enemy,” Dan beats Adams’ partner upon his arrival in the Gem, until Swearengen threatens him with a shotgun blow to the head (2.1). Dan’s jealousy is that of a displaced child, and like a child, his tears are stemmed with Swearengen’s assurance that “whatever looks ahead of grievous abominations and disorder, you and me walk into it together” (2.2).

Perhaps the most affecting children in the series are the mostly nameless group of youngsters unofficially fostered by many characters in the series. Martha and Joanie negotiate with Jack Langrishe to assure the children a space for schooling, Jane, Mose, and Adams all participate in the guarding of the schoolhouse, and continued shots of the children parading down the thoroughfare on their way to school provide intense reminders of the children’s public significance, despite their anonymity. William Bullock notwithstanding, the exclusion of these children’s parents from the series’ narrative designates the youngsters “children of Deadwood,” and the camp a place where the safety of the young (the future) becomes an urgent concern for the adults in the process of formulating an affective community. The possibility of such a community – made up in part of symbolic, surrogate, and non-traditional couples – stands against the coercive bonds of marriage and the patriarchal family, which bear the structures of domination inherent in both nation and capital.

II. Patriarchs, Transgressive Women, and the Domestic Sphere

“Blood don’t always prove loyalty.”
Whitney Ellsworth in “No Other Sons or Daughters” (1.9)

If the formation of non-traditional families serves as the series’ organizing principle, with surrogate parents often leading each individual group, at the beginning of the series, these de-facto parental figures – Swearengen, Tolliver, and to a certain extent Bullock – tend to be fairly standard patriarchs. But as the series progresses, female characters begin to accept leading roles in what will become a community built on affective attachment. Indeed if, as David Milch has argued, the show primarily concerns “individuals improvising their way to some sort of primitive structure,” one of the most striking elements of this improvisation is the change we can observe in Swearengen, who is forced to give up his patriarchal control and transform into a more cooperative member of a camp that becomes something more than his personal fiefdom.^{xvi} *Deadwood* thus illustrates Heikko Patomaki and Colin Wight’s contention that “social systems are open systems, that is, susceptible to external influences and internal, qualitative change and emergence.”^{xvii} Indeed, the establishment of *Deadwood*’s affective community is in direct response to both the advancing federal government and George Hearst’s relentless search for gold. In this way, the series creates a dichotomy between the domestic sphere (*Deadwood* as “home”) and the foreign sphere (the U.S. government and Hearst as “foreign”). But as Kaplan argues, “domesticity not only monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates traces of the savage within itself.”^{xviii} The arrival of the “foreign” influence of the nation-state, then, forces a re-organization of the show’s initial patriarchal fathers. In line with its emphasis on non-traditional marriages, *Deadwood* also focuses on non-traditional father figures and the transformations they undergo throughout the series.

The introduction of Al Swearengen confirms exactly how difficult life will be for those settling in the camp. As the proprietor of the Gem Saloon and the brutal patriarch of the town in the first season, Swearengen treats his women as he does anyone with lesser power. Since prostitution was one of the few employment options for women on the frontier, Swearengen’s hold over his female employees is both economic and violent, evidenced when Swearengen informs Trixie that shooting a customer in self-defense is bad for business, just before he beats her (1.1).^{xix} Milch asserts, however, that Swearengen’s insistence on buying his whores from the orphanage where he was raised actually designates him the rescuer of said women, which places him in the dual role of pimp and adoptive father.^{xx}

Furthermore, Milch posits that “prostitution is the fundamental violation of the family unit. If we are the family of man, when we turn a woman into a whore, whether or not she’s literally our daughter, it’s a form of incest.”^{xxi} This is most clearly represented by Swearengen’s response to Trixie’s affair with Sol Star, a reaction which, as we have seen, eventually changes due to Swearengen’s feelings of parental responsibility. While the Trixie-Star connection begins with a moment of shared flirtation, the possibilities for true connection are evident from the beginning. In “Bullock Returns to Camp” (1.7), after Alma notes that Star has been very attentive to Trixie, Trixie looks through the window and sees Swearengen standing on his balcony, the *mise-en-scène* forcing her to consider her ‘father’s’ potential reaction to the pairing. The blurring of incest and prostitution in Swearengen’s treatment of Trixie is further exacerbated when Swearengen informs Star that he must pay \$5 after the couple’s first sexual escapade. When Star refuses, Swearengen dismisses a potential future for the couple by saying:

“Don’t think I don’t understand. I mean, what can any one of us ever really fucking hope for, huh? Except for a moment here and there with a person who doesn’t want to rob, steal, or murder us? You pay or she pays” (1.11). After Star throws the money on the bar, Swearngen instructs Trixie to “sleep among your own,” his hurt apparent in his glassy eyes (1.11). By the second season of the series, however, when Trixie returns to Swearngen claiming that she’s finished working at the hardware store because the owners care too much about decimal points, Swearngen speaks to her like a caring patriarch. “Do not fucking fault them, Trixie, for your own fucking fears of tumbling to something new” (2.7).^{xxii} As a father figure to Trixie, Swearngen recognizes that her tumble could lead to a different kind of love, a love she deserves. Abandoning his role as pimp, and transitioning from lover to father, Swearngen here becomes, at least in this scene, an image of a fatherhood that might allow a measure of freedom to its dependents. In a small, but nevertheless significant, way, the change in Swearngen demonstrates his assumption of a more positive fatherly role built on an acceptance of Trixie’s independence.

Importantly, Swearngen’s parental authority extends past Trixie in *Deadwood*, and onto a series of male figures who treat him like the father they never had. Dan Dority, Swearngen’s right hand; Johnny Burns, Al’s pupil in violence as well as the slower but earnest partner to Dan; and Silas Adams, the former bagman for Yankton: all of these men depend on Swearngen to teach them how to live. Dan is introduced as Swearngen’s mouthpiece, informing Bullock and Star that they must pay his boss \$20 a day for the rental on their hardware tent. Most of the time, however, Swearngen sends Dan to execute a more sinister kind of chore. When Doc Cochran confronts Dan after the latter arrives to kill the orphaned Sofia on Swearngen’s instructions, Dan shakes like a little boy at the prospect of betraying his father. Faced with a shotgun pointed at his head, Dan spouts, “You’re pittin’ me against Al!” (“Deep Water,” 1.2). Dan’s devotion is paid back regularly with fatherly praise and advice. After Dan throws Brom Garrett into a gulch in “Reconnoitering the Rim” (1.3), Swearngen tells Dan that he appreciated his “foresight and loyalty” when Dan informed him first about the gold he found on the Garrett land (1.4). In “The Trial of Jack McCall” (1.5) Swearngen infers that Dan will one day run his own bar and strongly suggests that his “son” learn how to express his affection without murdering someone after Dan attempts to defend the con artist Flora in “Suffer the Little Children” (1.8). Johnny, a character whose position in the “family” (and activity within it) increases in stature as the series progresses, epitomizes the abused child in the first season of the show. Swearngen punches a stunned Johnny in the jaw for allowing a drug-addicted snitch to spread the news about Sofia’s massacred family around the camp before bringing him to Swearngen’s office. Later, after Al offers Johnny a playful tap on the cheek (an apology of sorts), Johnny makes his unconditional love clear by offering, “It’s all right, Al. I know you got a lot on your mind” (1.1).

Silas Adams, the bagman for Magistrate Clagett, becomes Swearngen’s final surrogate child, but only after murdering a government official to prove his worth. Milch suggests that Swearngen is the father that Adams always wanted, and the men’s first few exchanges imply the patriarch’s recognition of Adams’ potential as a surrogate son.^{xxiii} In “Mister Wu,” Swearngen decides to kill his own dope informant instead of Cy Tolliver’s, in an effort to reduce the options open to his camp competition and to appease Mr. Wu. Adams impresses Swearngen by deducing how the choice of victim was made: “You give Tolliver’s dope-fiend to the boss Chink instead of your own guy, gives Tolliver the opening to make [Mr. Wu] look wrong in the eyes of the whites” (1.10). After introducing Adams to Dan, who will become his figurative brother, Swearngen instructs Adams to “get a fucking haircut” (1.10). The vernacular

utilized in this line suggests Swearengen's authority, though a non-traditional familial bond between the men cannot be truly recognized until after Adams acknowledges that he's willing to forgo his position as a mouthpiece of the foreign (the government) and earn a role as the surrogate son of Deadwood's domestic patriarch. When Adams slits the Magistrate's throat in front of Swearengen and Dan, he officially joins the "family."

During the second season, each of these "children" occupies an increasingly important role in both Swearengen's life and the happenings in the camp, demonstrating once again Swearengen's willing to grant at least some measure of independence to his "children." In "A Lie Agreed Upon: Part I," for instance, Adams advises Swearengen that Bullock should be spared because Yankton is concerned over the Sheriff's connection to Montana, and he reviews the counteroffer from Yankton before Swearengen signs it with the County Commissioner, which secures his place as Swearengen's cleverest "son." When Swearengen is too ill to speak, Dan sits at his bedside, literally translating his boss's twitches for Doc Cochran. For his part, Johnny confirms his devotion to his father-figure when he shoots both Star and Utter in an effort to protect his mentor during Swearengen's hand-to-hand combat with Bullock, and later pulls Wu away from a potentially lethal confrontation with Mr. Lee, as he knows Swearengen needs to keep the peace in Chinese alley. Each member of Swearengen's posse sacrifices himself as a dedicated family member would.

Swearengen, while undoubtedly the camp's initial patriarchal leader, is not the series' only surrogate parent, however, as women also take on non-traditional parental roles in the development of the camp's citizens. Sofia, the sole survivor of the family killed by road agents in the first season, is handed to no less than three maternal replacements, the passage of one to the next a recognition by each woman of her limitations as a potential mother. After the family is discovered massacred in a passage not far from town, Jane jumps wholeheartedly into the role of caretaker for the young survivor, at whom she had winked on the trail into Deadwood. After Jane retreats in fear when Swearengen enters Doc Cochran's shack to discover that Sofia is alive, Jane crumbles in shame, telling the Doc, "I couldn't look out for the little one" (1.2).

When Bill Hickock dies, Jane withdraws from the camp in a drunken stupor, and Sofia is left in Alma's room. Although no longer able to tackle maternal duties, Jane continues to hold affection for the child, even stammering to herself, "I carried that fucking child! No not in my belly, but none of that fucking blood in me!" (1.6).^{xxiv} Alma, stunned to be left with a little girl she never wanted, claims "I cannot see to this child" (1.5). Trixie slides naturally into the loving position of new mother to both the orphaned child and to Alma herself. Even though Swearengen originally sends Trixie to the widow's room to help feed Alma's laudanum addiction, Trixie instead encourages Alma through the withdrawal period.^{xxv} Trixie recognizes, however, that the "little one needs someone to care for her and maybe get her the fuck outta here. And I knew it wasn't gonna be me" (1.7). When Alma offers Trixie the opportunity to take Sofia out of Deadwood and to New York City, Trixie calls Alma a "rich cunt," insists that she consider selling her gold claim, and attempts suicide, defensive moves that pass the maternal baton back to Alma.

Although Alma underestimates herself when she divulges to Bullock that Sofia is "safer under my care than traveling in a covered wagon with strangers," Trixie's departure from the scene catalyzes her maternal instinct (1.7).^{xxvi} Alma demands that her poisonous father Otis Russell "get away" from Sofia as though his falsity might infect her new daughter (1.12). She informs Miss Isringhausen that Sofia has "been with me for seven months. She's a part of my life as I am of hers" (2.2), and then reviews vocabulary words with her "daughter" after

dismissing her tutor (2.4). Eventually, Alma requests that Sofia “Trust me with your sadness, and I will trust you with mine, so that even when we are sad, we will be grateful for how much we love each other” (“The Whores Can Come,” 2.11). By the end of the second season, this non-traditional mother-daughter bond stands unbreakable.^{xxvii}

Against these surrogate parents, active biological (traditional) parents are small in number, and are mostly proven ineffectual, unreliable, or dangerous to their offspring, buttressing Milch’s postmodern criticism of the traditional family unit. Martha Bullock laments that William would never have been trampled had they remained in Michigan and Aunt Lou acknowledges that her association with Hearst will lead to Odell’s death even before it happens. Both women lose their sons due to their decisions to relocate to the camp. Biological mothers, then, fare less well than do their non-traditional counterparts. As with marriage, Milch seems to stack the deck in favor of elective affiliation.

If biological mothers unwittingly bring about tragedy for their children, the show’s only ‘legitimate’ fathers commit shockingly callous and devious acts that damage their offspring, providing a furious critique of biological patriarchs. Otis Russell’s unannounced arrival in *Deadwood* creates new competition for Alma’s newly discovered gold claim. As Milch explains, “Alma is a high-class whore whose father pimped her out so that he could pay off his creditors.”^{xxviii} After her husband Brom Garrett’s death, Alma inadvertently escapes her father’s original sin, but Otis’ return proves him a repeat offender. His threat to report to the Garrett family that Alma admitted she’d had Brom murdered, coupled with his insistence that “you’ll help me” relieve repeated debts, forces his daughter’s hand (1.12). She silently watches as Bullock beats her father on the Bella Union floor, the battering a severe punishment for a “natural” parent. When Joanie Stubbs produces Otis’ teeth for Alma, she reveals that her own father was an iniquitous man and wishes him the pounding that Otis received. When she was a young girl, Joanie’s father convinced her and her sisters that their mother, who had passed away, desired that they sexually service both her father and his friends. Joanie’s father would eventually sell her to Cy Tolliver. This story echoes the pain expressed by Swearingen, whose biological mother handed him over, leaving him alone and destitute, to “Mrs. fat-ass fucking Anderson,” the head of the orphanage where he purchases his prostitutes (1.11). By relentlessly undermining biology as the basis for affection, Milch clears the way for his own non-traditional families to emerge. Doing so within the context of a story about national annexation further undermines the nation’s pretension to represent an organic community. Biology is just as coercive as the forced annexations of the Bullock, Garrett and Ellsworth marriages *and* the development of the nation-state.

III. Affective Community and the Hearst Empire. Bitter Fucking Enemies.

“The World is Less Than Perfect.”
Jack Langrishe in “The Catbird Seat” (3.11)

The non-traditional families that emerge in *Deadwood* unite against a common enemy, George Hearst, in the third season of the series. Unlike the other major characters in *Deadwood*, Hearst is openly antagonistic to all form of familial association; as he says himself, “My only passion is the color” (3.1). Indeed, Hearst’s obsession with gold and the land that contains it demonstrates Virginia Wright Wexman’s point that “What is most conspicuously at issue in Westerns is... the right to possess land.”^{xxix} The thrust of the narrative construct of season three

of *Deadwood* revolves around the gold-enriched land held by Alma Ellsworth, the community's attempts to protect her as one their own, and Hearst's attempt to destroy them.

Although Hearst does relate to two men who worship him like an unattainable father, as well as one "Aunt Lou," none of these characters is permitted to rise above the level of disposable employee. Francis Wolcott, Hearst's Chief Scout, spends most of his time collecting mines for his boss to control, reporting back to Hearst that "we will control, save one – the Garrett property – every considerable deposit now discovered," bragging that he looks forward to introducing his boss to "the largest and most forward-looking gold operation in the world" (2.8). Milch allows that Wolcott is the "son" of a "father [who] refuses to raise him," which is made evident upon Hearst's discovery that Wolcott murdered three women at the Chez Amie.^{xxx} Even though Wolcott's assertion that "there is no sin" reeks of Hearst's business acumen, he hangs himself after his potential 'father's' final admonishment and rejection (2.12).

Similarly, Hearst demonstrates that his feelings for Captain Turner and Aunt Lou, the only characters to whom he verbally claims closeness, are ephemeral if not disingenuous. Hearst encourages Turner, another potential 'son' and his personal body guard to make his brutal street fight with Dan last as long as possible, which inadvertently leads Turner to lose his early advantage when Dan gouges his eye out and clubs him to death. Aunt Lou, a woman whose history as Hearst's cook makes him giddy at her arrival in Deadwood, actually holds no maternal influence over him, instead occupying the lesser station in a master/slave relationship. Hearst, already suspecting that Aunt Lou's son Odell is attempting to fleec him, allows Odell to continue the ruse, later heartlessly delivering the news of Odell's death, a death he has surely caused, to his stricken cook.

Hearst simply cannot relate to the importance of family, actually shedding tears in admitting to Odell that "I hate these places... because the truth that I know, the promise that I bring, the necessities I'm prepared to accept make me outcast" (3.7). His self-imposed solitude, however, is mostly spent instructing his minions on how to encourage Alma Ellsworth to sell her claim, his cardinal strategy the disruption of the Deadwood family. And though his attack on Alma is successful, as he is able finally to purchase her claim, it only solidifies the budding community in Deadwood, even managing to unite Alma with the man who had killed her first husband: Al Swearengen.

Although Alma begins the series as an unhappy traditional spouse in an arranged marriage, her evolution into a maternal figure in a non-traditional family feeds her adversarial relationship with Hearst, the man who wants her gold-rich land and disregards her 'kin.' Furthermore, after Alma warms to her position as Sofia's surrogate mother and agrees to marry Ellsworth, she breaks out of the home in an overt demonstration of her financial power, by opening and leading the first Bank of Deadwood. If it is "transgressive" in a Western, "for a female character to assume primary agency," then Alma's initial refusal to adhere to the will of George Hearst while rising to become one of Deadwood's most respected public faces makes her a heroic figure, albeit temporarily.^{xxxii} Her attempt to forgo Hearst's relentless pressure by deepening her roots to a community that accepts her butts against society's definitions of appropriate gender roles. That this move results in Ellsworth's death suggests that the positive force of this choice is limited. Ultimately, *Deadwood* qualifies what seems liberatory in Alma's move out of the home – her lifting of what Amy Kaplan has called the "anchor" of domesticity, which provides a "counterforce to the male activity of territorial conquest" – as this is seemingly the cause of her great losses to come, all at the behest of George Hearst's personal Manifest Destiny.^{xxxii}

Richard Slotkin notes that frontier mythology typically relies on “the sanctifying burst of violence that resolved all issues.”^{xxxiii} Hearst adheres to this philosophy by directing a series of violent acts meant to establish his prominence in the camp, though the affective community that has formed in response to his threat is left mostly intact. The third season of *Deadwood* begins as Swearingen overlooks the camp from his perch above the Gem. Dan’s warning to his spiritual father that they are “fixin’ towards a bloody outcome” soon proves legitimate, as a Cornishman is killed by an aggressive pistolero sent by Hearst to disrupt the peace (3.1). After Hearst concludes that Swearingen is “dangerous to my interests,” he generates more violence, first by sending his men back to the Gem (a throat is slit by Swearingen before Hearst’s men are given the opportunity to kill anyone), and then by severing Swearingen’s finger, the symbolic castration a vicious attempt to claim the camp’s patriarchal role as his own (3.2).

But Hearst does not wholly succeed. The non-traditional families of Deadwood have learned to survive. Swearingen’s belief that Hearst’s insistence on dominance is “out of proportion... [a] warped unnatural impulse” and his request that Bullock “stay within hailing distance” edifies a new cooperation between former enemies, and strengthens Swearingen’s status as the camp’s de facto leader (3.1). In response, Bullock restrains himself from immediately arresting Hearst, instead offering a shoulder to assist the physically shaken Swearingen on his walk back to the Gem. Alma’s initial refusal to sell her claim to Hearst spurs him to create still further violence, having a Cornish union organizer killed and deposited on the street with a knife through his chest. Newly allied “brothers” Dan and Adams convince Bullock to consider Swearingen’s logic and delay an arrest of Hearst for the time being. But the Sheriff’s patience dissipates as quickly as the camp’s options. The morning after Bullock drags Hearst through the camp and into a cell next to the murdered Cornishman, Swearingen visits Bullock’s house, as the personal nature of the camp’s predicament makes the family home the perfect place to meet. Swearingen’s plea to “stay close and confide” affects his intended audience (3.6). The third season’s solidification of Deadwood’s affective community is expressed repeatedly through such meetings between members of the camp’s non-traditional families in response to Hearst’s increasingly violent initiatives, as social activity indicates the town’s plans to protect its own. Swearingen’s suggestion that they “collect the camp elders, be baffled among friends” serves as a call-to-arms of sorts, as the longest-tenured leaders of the town meet to discuss their options (3.6).

Amy Kaplan writes that “when we contrast the domestic sphere with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain, but when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien.”^{xxxiv} This applies to the clash between the domestic community of Deadwood and the outsider-foreigner, Hearst, whose means of attempted control only draws the camp closer together. The true cooperation and familial care filtering through Deadwood’s affective community transform into visible public support when gunshots smash into buildings near Alma’s head as she strolls down the thoroughfare. Immediately, Swearingen and Utter dart to her side, and moments later, Swearingen sends Adams to the courthouse to guard the town’s children (and Martha Bullock), dispatches Utter to wire Bullock to hasten his return, directs Trixie to comfort Alma, who is in shock, and orders Dan to inform Ellsworth of Hearst’s latest perpetration. The potency of the townspeople’s support is felt by Alma, who agrees to continue her walk to the bank alone, while Hearst watches from above.

Hearst’s final act, however, strikes the very soul of the Deadwood family. The assassination of Ellsworth affirms two separate truths: that George Hearst will do anything to

secure Alma's gold claim, and that he believes the murder of a family member will force her to sell. The visual strategy employed to mark the arrival of Ellsworth's dead body into the camp by cart places the viewer's sight in line with what Ellsworth would have seen if he was alive. As the cart lumbers on, Alma looks directly at the viewer in horror, placing the weight of this loss above all other concerns in the camp. Alma's figurative sister responds; Hearst gets his gold, but not before being shot by Trixie (3.11).

Alma realizes that she has two choices – to leave Deadwood and hire men to guard her claim day and night, or stay with her camp “family,” the affective community which took her in. She decides to sell. Alma's narrative thus continues to demonstrate the connection the show develops between the public and private realms. On the one hand, she has symbolically been punished for her fatal step into the public sphere: it has cost her her second husband. On the other hand, she has chosen to remain in Deadwood, a move that is simultaneously public – she will be part of a community – and private, based on a range of personal affections. With Alma, then, *Deadwood* illustrates an intertwining of public and private that refuses to read the private as the world that helps uphold a coercive and patriarchal public. Here the two realms are seen to be constitutive of each other.

While Hearst's bloodlust is not satiated by the signing of the gold lease (he orders the death of Trixie as penance for her impertinent shooting of him), his demand gives Swearingen the ‘father’ one final opportunity to prove to Trixie how much he cares. Swearingen's cold and dispiriting decision chooses the life of Trixie, one of his former prostitutes (the one he loves), over one he hardly knows, marking an emotional choice that spares the life of one member of Deadwood's affective community at the expense of another. When he slices Jen's throat against Johnny's objection so that he may fool Hearst into thinking that she's the woman who shot him, he takes away his “son's” lover so that he may save someone of “higher rank” in the Deadwood family, a move that is paradoxically a sadness and a relief.

Charlie Utter's declaration that the trials of Hearst's final days in the camp were “in aid of a higher purpose” may be difficult to accept, considering that Alma has lost her gold, corrupt politicians have rigged the local elections, and an innocent prostitute lay murdered (3.12). But as Frank Kermode argues, “Apocalypse, even in its less lurid modern forms, still carries with it the notions of a decadence and possible renovation, still represents a mood finally inseparable from the condition of life, the contemplation of its necessary ending, the ineradicable desire to make some sense of it.”^{xxxv} While Hearst departs Deadwood a most successful capitalist in the public sphere, he does not negate the personal progress of the camp's domestic community. Trixie and Sol will survive, as will Alma and Sofia, Joanie and Jane, Bullock and Martha, Swearingen and Dolly, Dan, Johnny, and Adams. The calamity of the Hearst reign costs the camp essential civil freedoms, but he leaves the camp alone, while the close-knit non-traditional families of *Deadwood* endure.

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ⁱ Janet Walker, "Captive Images in the Traumatic Western: *The Searchers, Pursued, Once Upon a Time in the West, and Lone Star*." *Westerns: Films Through History*, ed. Janet Walker (New York: Routledge, 2001), 228.

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- ⁱⁱ Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42, no. 12 (1992): 33, accessed June 16, 2011, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9212211858&site=ehost-live>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ^{iv} Cathy Luchetti, *Children of the West: Family Life on the Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 33 and 16.
- ^v Richard W. Slatta, "Making and Unmaking Myths of the American Frontier," *European Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 2 (2010): 88.
- ^{vi} Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 585, 581.
- ^{vii} David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2006), 97.
- ^{viii} Kim Akass, "You Motherfucker: Al Swearengen's Oedipal Dilemma," in *Reading Deadwood*, ed. David Lavery (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27.
- ^{ix} Cathy Luchetti, *Children of the West*, 77.
- ^x G. Christopher Williams, "Pimp and Whore: The Necessity of Perverse Domestication in the Development of the West," in *Reading Deadwood*, ed. David Lavery (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 146.
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- ^{xiii} qtd. in Janet Walker, "Captive Images in the Traumatic Western," 229.
- ^{xiv} After Trixie leaves him for Star, Swearengen replaces her with the prostitute Dolly, another daughter/wife substitute, though a much less clever one. His unambiguous trust in Trixie, palpable whenever he imparts personal information to her (including the reasoning behind the murder warrant held on him in Chicago) passes on to Dolly, who he offers the entire narrative of his mother's abandonment on their first night together (1.11) and later, the story of the beating he took at the hands of his father on the day of his brother's funeral (2.11).
- ^{xv} And as one of Al Swearengen's "children," Trixie treats his other kin like a big sister might, commanding Swearengen's eldest "son" Dan to kick the door down at a certain time if Swearengen remains suffering in his room in pain (2.3), and challenging him to burn down the Gem before allowing Cy Tolliver to take over if Swearengen dies (2.4).

^{xvi} Mark Singer, “The Misfit: How David Milch got from *NYPD Blue* to *Deadwood* by Way of an Epistle of St. Paul,” *The New Yorker*, February 14 2005, Web.

^{xvii} Heikki Patomäki and Colin Wight, “After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism,” *International Studies Quarterly* 44, (2000): 232.

^{xviii} Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 582.

^{xix} The shooting scene and Milch’s conception of Trixie were probably based on an incident involving a prostitute who worked for the actual Al Swearingen. In *Pioneer Days in the Black Hills*, John S. McClintock writes about entering the Gem Theatre to find “a man lying on the floor with a bullet hole clear through his head back of his eyes. The woman ‘Tricksie’ had grabbed a pistol while he was beating her and turned the tables on him.” See John S. McClintock, *Pioneer Days in the Black Hills: Accurate History and Facts Related by One of the Early Day Pioneers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 69.

^{xx} Kim Akass, “You Motherfucker: Al Swearingen’s Oedipal Dilemma,” 28.

^{xxi} David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, 91.

^{xxii} Swearingen also dismisses Trixie’s request to return to the Gem after Alma fires her at the bank, admonishing his former companion for not recognizing how much her situation has improved (“A Rich Find” 3.6).

^{xxiii} David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, 143.

^{xxiv} While she leaves Sofia to the custody of others, Jane will take a lead role as caretaker for Andy Cramed (1.5) and eventually for many of the camp’s smallpox victims (1.6). Watson Parker wrote that in reality, the “women of Deadwood organized a committee to care for the destitute sick” during the plague outbreak. In Milch’s version of events, Jane replaces this group of women by making such a committee unnecessary, making her an uber-mother to the suffering. The Parker quotation is in T.D. Griffith, “Preface: The Original Sin City,” *Deadwood: The Best Writings on the Most Notorious Town in the West*, ed. T.D. Griffith. (Guilford: Morris Book Publishing, 2010), 11.

^{xxv} Trixie’s refusal to obey Swearingen’s orders is an affront to his patriarchal authority, foreshadowing her decision to engage in a non-traditional “marriage” to Star.

^{xxvi} The children’s song “Row, Row, Row, Your Boat” becomes an auditory signifier that a new person has taken on Sofia’s parental role. Jane sings the song to Sofia (with Utter) when protecting her in the covered wagon in “Deep Water” (1.2), Sofia sings the song to Trixie in “Plague” (1.6), and Alma sings the song to Sofia in “Suffer the Little Children” (1.8).

^{xxvii} Other surrogate parents have less screen time but maintain utility in the series. E.B. Farnum uses his limited role to verbally belittle his loyal assistant Richardson, whom he refers to as a “half-witted child, nonetheless adored” (2.5). Farnum’s abuse only makes the overt affection Aunt Lou tenders Richardson in “Amateur Night” more powerful (3.9). The “Nigger General

Fields” takes it upon himself to nurse the vociferous racist “Steve the Drunk” after Steve is kicked in the head by a horse, even reprimanding Tom Nuttall that if he doesn’t “want to look after [Steve], just say so” (3.12). Joanie Stubbs takes an immediate liking to new arrival Flora, dressing her and teaching her how to work for Cy. Moments before Cy forces Joanie to kill her, Flora remarks: “Who am I? Your little baby? Your little sister? You?” (1.8). Finally, when William Bullock arrives with his mother Martha to meet Bullock so that they may settle in their new home, the boy recognizes that “now he’s my Pa and my Uncle” (2.3). William’s untimely death actually draws his “parents” closer together (2.11).

^{xxviii} David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, 67.

^{xxix} qtd. in Janet Walker, “Captive Images in the Traumatic Western,” 228.

^{xxx} David Milch, *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*, 169.

^{xxxi} A. Susan Owen, Sarah R. Stein, Leah R. Vande Berg, *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 44.

^{xxxii} Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 583

^{xxxiii} qtd. in Richard W. Slatta, “Making and Unmaking Myths,” 85.

^{xxxiv} Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 582.

^{xxxv} Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.