

A LIFE LESS GOTHIC:  
GOTHIC LITERATURE, DARK REFORM, AND  
THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN PERIODICAL PRESS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Gothic as a genre is particularly concerned with identifying and exposing anachronisms in social law and behavior. Though most scholars, both Gothic and otherwise, view this as a reactionary position, my study exposes how, especially in the hands of American dark reform writers, Gothic became an active genre, illuminating for readers not what they do fear, but what they should fear. Though many nineteenth-century reformers wrote tracts and sentimental novels in the service of social reform, Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and George Lippard recognized that by paralleling nineteenth-century legal and social issues with Gothic literary elements—coverture with captivity, loss of female “purity” with live burial, and insane asylums and civil commitment with the veil—in short stories and serials published in popular periodicals, their calls for social reform would reach a much more vast and varied national audience.

My project examines literature primarily published in nineteenth-century American periodicals to expose the extent to which authors such as Davis, Alcott, Southworth, and Lippard employed Gothic as the mode best suited to inspiring social reform. Beginning with the stock Gothic elements of captivity, live burial, and veil motifs, I circle back to discover similar Gothic impulses in early American literature, which, once exposed to and influenced by European Gothic, created a unique American Gothic strain recognizable in the writing of such authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. Examining appearances of captivity, live burial, and the veil found in some early American literature reveals the nuances present in the American Gothic deployments of these tropes that later dark reform

writers used literally to scare their readers into social action aimed at revising or revoking the laws and social mores that allow such systems to persist.

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INTRODUCTION:  
GOTHIC LITERATURE, DARK REFORM, AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
AMERICAN PERIODICAL PRESS

In the opening pages of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Manfred, whom readers will come to recognize as a definitive Gothic villain, sends a servant to fetch his son, Prince Conrad, who is to marry the Lady Isabella; however, the servant discovers Conrad crushed to death beneath an impossibly large, black-plumed helmet. Manfred, having only this one heir and a wife incapable of bearing additional children, immediately sets upon Isabella with the aim of taking her as his own wife. In the words of Robert Spector, the ensuing events, "provided all the machinery of the [Gothic] genre; its setting, theme, and subversive subject matter remained the stock material of the Gothic whatever changes it underwent" (9). Within the first chapter, readers encounter a prophecy, the supernatural, a beautiful virgin, a dutiful, abandoned wife, a persecuted maiden, ridiculous servants, a handsome peasant, and a ghost, all set within the labyrinthine corridors of the eponymous castle. Carol Margaret Davison builds on Spector's theory, pointing out how "as the vast majority of Gothic works illustrate, the component parts of this untidy and undying monster have been variously, regularly and successfully reconfigured to promote vastly different political and aesthetic ends and to speak to a broad cross-section of audiences and eras" (57). For the next several decades, authors as varied as Ann Radcliffe, Sir Walter Scott, and Jane Austen would utilize various aspects of the genre to different ends, each manipulating Gothic's stock elements to fit his or her unique aim. With each passing year and each

additional publication, the reading public became more familiar with these elements and their purposes. Thus, after a century of use, reformers in the mid to late nineteenth century came to see the possibilities for deploying Gothic machinery toward their own ends.

My project examines literature primarily published in nineteenth-century American periodicals to interrogate the extent to which authors such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and George Lippard purposely employed Gothic as the genre best suited to inspiring social reform. Furthermore, while the periodical press was certainly a more lucrative publishing venue than the novel in nineteenth-century America, my study seeks to explore the possibility that rather than producing hack work and potboilers solely for the financial gain to be achieved from publishing in popular periodicals like *Peterson's Ladies' Magazine* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, these authors recognized the opportunity that these magazines presented for reaching a wider audience than the more prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* and other such periodicals. To be sure, scholarship on nineteenth-century periodical publication has increased exponentially in the past few decades; however, we have only begun to recognize the implications for nineteenth-century literary studies of the fact that a large percentage of publications we study as “novels” first appeared as serial publications. Indeed, even the most often discussed reform text of the period, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, originally appeared as a serial in 1851 in *The National Era* before being collected as a novel in 1852.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more in-depth discussions of nineteenth-century periodicals and periodical publication see for example Patricia Okker's *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith's *Periodical*



Admittedly, the authors I discuss in this project tend to be neither examined in terms of Gothic discourse (with the exception of Lippard) nor often placed in conversation with one another. Furthermore, while I examine these authors and their work alongside one another, it is not this project's aim to suggest that these authors in any way worked together toward a common goal. This is certainly not to say they may not have influenced one another but is rather to point out that such discussions are outside the scope of my present study. Rather, my project examines how each of these authors not only recognized Gothic fiction's power to raise awareness about given issues but also adeptly deployed Gothic tropes in their reform writings while creating the balance between horror and terror, revulsion and attraction, necessary to achieve the Gothic's full emotional potential—a feat which many of their contemporaries failed to accomplish.

### **Gothic Roots**

No study involving Gothic literature can proceed without discussing the vexed nature of the very term “Gothic” and its use in association with fiction. As this study is more concerned with the American than the European Gothic, I will keep my discussion of the latter somewhat brief. The European Gothic arose at the end of the eighteenth century during a time of social, political, and economic unrest. It was and continues to be described as a

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*Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. For more general studies of the history of American periodical publication see, for example, Meredith L. McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, and, of course, Frank L. Mott's *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930*.

reactionary genre devoted to returning repressed societal fears to our attention so we might expel them. The period typically associated with European Gothic fiction begins with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* published in 1764 and ends with Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* published in 1820.<sup>2</sup> Though this time span is still used to describe the rise and "fall" of European Gothic, the genre experienced in the 1790s a period of such vogue that it is now referred to as "the effulgence of Gothic" after Robert Miles's study of the same name.<sup>3</sup> It was during this period that the most well-known European Gothic authors, including Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis, published most of their fiction and inspired a deluge of imitations which became known to Gothic scholars as "The Radcliffe School" of terror or the "Lewisite" horror story. While most early studies of Gothic fiction for the most part restricted their research to the aforementioned timespan, recent scholarship in the field has advanced to consider the Gothic, both as a genre and as an influence, up to and through the present day. Unfortunately, though scholars now recognize Gothic fiction's

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<sup>2</sup> As my study deals with differing Gothic "strains," it makes sense to delineate the terms I will employ throughout for each one. I will use the terms "European Gothic" and "American Gothic" when differentiating between fictions written on either side of the Atlantic. When discussing how reform writers employed Gothic tropes in their fiction, I will use Reynold's term, "dark reform." Finally, when discussing the various tropes and elements of Gothic fiction as a body of work or a subject of study, I will use the terms "Gothic" and "Gothic Studies."

<sup>3</sup> Miles's study, "The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic," appears in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*.

continued influence on our literature and culture, few have discussed how the formulaic and stock elements discussed below have been deployed to new purpose in the decades following this initial “effulgence.” These shifts and changes in the application of old Gothic tropes form part of my study’s foundation.

Though Gothic fiction is most easily recognized via the formulaic plot devices and stock characters briefly mentioned above, one of its most important and often overlooked characteristics is its reliance on anachronisms to highlight the clash between “modernity” and “antiquity.” In “Gothic Criticism,” Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall explain that the purpose of anachronism in Gothic fiction is to allow the “birth of modernity” through the anachronism’s defeat and removal (278). The earliest Gothic narratives established a formula that remained largely unchanged both in England and America throughout what American Gothic scholar Donald A. Ringe refers to as the genre’s “major phase,” which roughly coincided with Miles’s “effulgence” of Gothic in England, though he marks its conclusion with the publication of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* in 1860 (176). Indeed, the formula became so pervasive that Eve Sedgwick produced a book length study dedicated to examining *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. In this cornerstone critical text, Sedgwick identifies many of Gothic literature’s important features: “an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know about the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover. You know about the tyrannical older man with the piercing glance who is going to imprison and try to rape or murder them” (9). Having established our knowledge of these key points, Sedgwick identifies what Gothic scholars

would eventually refer to as the “laundry list” of stock elements, at least a handful of which readers are likely to encounter in a Gothic tale:

These include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust- and Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires; the charnel house and the madhouse. (9-10)<sup>4</sup>

Several of the items in Sedgwick’s list have already been identified just in the first chapter of Walpole’s *Otranto*, and the texts I will examine in my project cover a number of these conventions as well, albeit through a decidedly less psychological lens than that adopted by Sedgwick.

### **American Gothic**

Though Gothic, both in production and in criticism, has enjoyed many new additions of late, Gothic Studies—especially American Gothic studies—still remains a somewhat obscure field. In fact, until recently it had long been the practice of Gothic scholars simply to label American Gothic texts as “echoes” or “imitations” of European Gothic writers across the Atlantic. American Gothic authors were—and sometimes still are—viewed only in

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, many of these characters and formulaic elements have received a recent revivification in the form of the television series *Penny Dreadful* and *Taboo*.

comparison to those “originals” which they must be imitating. For example, in one of the earliest studies to mention America’s contribution to the Gothic canon, Edith Birkhead notes that “notwithstanding his lofty scorn for ‘Gothic castles and chimeras,’” Charles Brockden Brown “like Mrs. [Ann] Radcliffe . . . is at the mercy of a conscience which forbids him to thrust upon his readers spectres in which he himself does not believe” (198). Furthermore, Birkhead tells us that Nathaniel Hawthorne “fashions his tales of terror delicately and reluctantly, not riotously and shamelessly like Lewis and Maturin,” (203); in contrast, Edgar Allan Poe was familiar with the writings of Maturin, Lewis, and Radcliffe and “refers more than once to the halls of *Vathek*” (218).<sup>5</sup> To her credit, Birkhead seems uninterested in demeaning these American authors’ work; rather, hers is an early example of a long history of comparative analyses that have neglected to consider American Gothic literature as its own beast.

American Gothic scholar Charles Crow begins his recent study, *American Gothic*, by suggesting that “to understand American literature, and indeed America, one must understand the Gothic” (1). He later expands on this statement, adding in his preface to *A Companion to American Gothic* that “only by studying American Gothic, a literature often of hysterical extremes, violence, obscurity, and the surreal, can one reach a balanced and rational understanding of American culture from colonial times to our present postmodern age” (xix). These assertions reestablish a truism first uttered by Leslie Fiedler in his landmark, though somewhat dated, *Love and Death in the American Novel*. However, while

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<sup>5</sup> *Vathek, and Arabian Tale; or, The History of the Caliph, Vathek* (1782) was a European Gothic novel written by William Beckford.

Crow celebrates American literature's Gothic roots, Fiedler is ashamed of them. American fiction, Fiedler laments, is "bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (29).<sup>6</sup> This statement and Fiedler's study bred a body of criticism laden with what could most accurately be described as "Gothic Guilt" in which critics rewrite American literary production as the symptom of the nation's dis-eased history. But this practice did not begin with American Gothic scholarship, nor did it even begin with Gothic Studies in general. Even during the period of its greatest popularity, Gothic fiction was vilified as vulgar, immoral, and morbid, and like every pop culture phenomenon since, Gothic fiction was considered a guilty pleasure that required apologies from both its consumers and producers. To be sure, Gothic scholars on both sides of the Atlantic still struggle to break free of Carol Margaret Davison's aptly named "Castle Freud," a veritable Gothic pile in and of itself built of the seemingly endless psychological analyses of Gothic fiction from which even Davison herself is unable fully to escape in *Gothic Literature, 1764-1824*. Beginning with David Punter's landmark study, *The Literature of Terror*, though, the past two decades have witnessed a dramatic shift away from Gothic Guilt and toward an acceptance of Gothic texts as rich cultural productions.

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<sup>6</sup> I adopt in this study most Gothic scholars' standard practice of capitalizing "Gothic." Other scholars sometimes choose not to capitalize the term, as is the case with Fiedler. In all cases in which I directly quote an author, that quote will reflect the author's individual preference for or against capitalization.

This is not to say that I disagree with or dismiss Crow's, Fiedler's, or any of the many other Gothic scholars' contributions to the field. Rather, my goal is to examine the extent to which the American Gothic could and did function as an active genre, projecting rather than simply reflecting issues central to America's budding national psyche. In *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, Teresa Goddu comes close to producing such a study, aligning American Gothic with slavery and the American South, which, she suggests, function as "the nation's 'other,' becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself" (3-4). American Gothic literature, then, "tells of the historical horrors that make national identity possible yet must be repressed in order to sustain it" (Goddu 10). While I certainly agree with Goddu that many American Gothic texts reflect the latent and repressed fears of a nation built on a history of slavery and persecution of indigenous peoples, I propose that others actively expose not what readers *do* fear, but what we *should* fear. My project joins the conversation begun by such scholars as Siân Silyn Roberts's in *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790-1861* that views Gothic as a projective rather than reflective genre, a mode of writing integral to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epistemological development rather than antagonistic to it.<sup>7</sup> Roberts explodes the framework of current Gothic scholarship by reading the American Gothic novel not as a "symptomatic expression of, or reaction against,

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<sup>7</sup> See also Ellen Malenas Ledoux's *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834* which studies Transatlantic Gothic texts from a reader response perspective to measure the degree to which Gothic "activism" was reliant upon its readers' responses.

Enlightenment categories of thought” but rather as “continuous with . . . eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epistemological speculation” (17). As the title suggests, Roberts’s study examines the process by which citizens of the fledgling United States attempted to reconcile Enlightenment conceptions of individuality and personhood with the challenges of building a new nation with a new model of citizenship. Cathy N. Davidson establishes the process by which “the traditional Gothic constellation of grotesque images and symbols and the hyperbolic language of emotional torture or mental anguish are, in the American novels, appropriated to expose the weakness and potential for evil within the new Republic” (314). Providing as examples the “Old World aristocratic values” brought to the New Republic in Isaac Mitchell’s *The Asylum* (1811) and the contagious “spirit of materialism” plaguing the nation’s capital in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800), Davidson argues, “the Gothic created its own symbolic space where the hierarchies of a traditional society and the excesses of individualism could both be called into question” (314). Roberts argues, like Cathy N. Davidson before her, that American Gothic “exposes ‘the limits of individualism’” in the new nation (24). American Gothic literature exposes the British model of the citizen subject and society as inferior to the exigencies of nation formation and expansion, while simultaneously vilifying the new American individualism that often ignored the “contagious” nature of cultural sentiment and feeling.

While Roberts’s study helps establish a foundation for my dissertation, it also illuminates one aspect of the space my study seeks to fill. Though American Gothic literature created a space in which to imagine and critique the new American individual, the space was only large enough for men. Numerous treatises and tracts were written expressing the



importance of individual achievement and prowess in men, but women were expected to live and function in much the same fashion as they did in Europe. Though they were expected to live and raise children in the same new environment as their male counterparts, women were not afforded adequate space either in life or in fiction to imagine the new American woman who could function comfortably alongside the new American man. As Nina Baym notes in *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, “The ‘best’ women characters” in nineteenth-century fiction “are not individuals, are not mixed, and certainly have no secrets to be laid bare. They are ‘Woman’” (98). Woman is a role to be filled, a set of duties to perform, a cipher. By definition, a cipher must remain a zero sum; therefore, the moment a woman begins displaying traits that in any way differ from those assigned her role, she is no longer Woman. Baym explains that nineteenth-century critics judged women characters in fiction by how well they fit the recommended “pattern” for Woman, while men in fiction were applauded for their depth and complexity, their individuality. Paradoxically, Baym notes that women were held accountable for maintaining the social structure that men’s individuality was threatening (99-100). Thus, Woman is not only expected to remain a cipher, but she is also expected to function within a role that has itself become anachronistic. Both in literature and in life, nineteenth-century Woman equals Gothic. My study illuminates the extent to which a handful of authors—including Davis, Alcott, Southworth, and Lippard—employed the nineteenth-century periodical press to advance social reforms that might help to render this equation invalid.

### **Women and American Gothic; or, American Gothic Women**

On July 19-20, 1848, approximately three hundred women and men attended the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton read what would become known as "The Declaration of Sentiments." Modeled on the U.S. "Declaration of Independence," "The Declaration of Sentiments" included a list of grievances women suffered at the hands of men that would become, according to women's rights historian Judith Wellman, "the single most important factor in spreading news of the women's rights movement around the country" (192). As Wellman's statement indicates, the women's rights movement was already in full swing and already had accomplished goals in several states in the form of married women's property acts when the convention took place. By the mid-century, some states allowed separate estates for married women; however, even in these states, women often were not allowed to manage or dispose of their own property, and, if they were, it was only in the case of their husbands' incapacitation or death, and then often only by a court's decree. In other words, even when granted the right to own property and, to an extent, manage their own earnings, women still had to depend on others to do so. As Melissa Homestead notes in *American Women Authors and Literary Property, 1822-1869*, "even when statutes granted women the ability to *hold* separate property, courts were reluctant to allow married women full rights to *dispose* of that property as they pleased" (32 *author's emphasis*). Property acts notwithstanding, the laws of coverture rendered married women "in the eye of the law, civilly dead" (Stanton, *Sentiments*). Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* provides a definition of the legal relationship that formed the foundation of American family law:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a *feme-covert* . . . under the protection and influence of her husband, her *baron*, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture* . . .

For this reason, a man cannot grant anything to his wife, or enter into covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her, would only to be to covenant with himself . . .

But though our law in general considers man and wife as one person, yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion. And therefore all deeds executed, and acts done, by her, during her *coverture*, are void . . . She cannot by will devise lands to her husband, unless under special circumstances; for at the time of making it she is supposed to be under his coercion . . .

Once wed, women's identities were subsumed under the "cover" of their husbands' identities, and, therefore, any work she performed, unless it was performed completely outside of the home, was considered "household labor." Thus, in the eyes of both the husband and the court, any proceeds from that labor were usually considered the husband's property. Those women who remained single enjoyed a good deal more autonomy but often struggled to find and keep "respectable" employment. Most professions were closed to women, married or not, and those that remained open—sewing, cleaning, teaching, and

writing to name a few—often barely paid a livable wage. Single women, bereft of opportunities for gaining a living, sometimes turned to prostitution to ensure their survival.

Women's situation in the nineteenth century gave rise to myriad women's social movements and organizations, many of which aimed at expanding the opportunities open to both married and single women. Temperance and antislavery movements, as well as evangelical missions, for example, provided women with more purpose, if not power, outside of their homes, while moral reform societies, suffrage leagues, and dress reform organizations sought specifically to improve women's quality of life. My study is concerned not only with certain social reform movements and organizations but also and especially with the methods many popular nineteenth-century authors chose to depict those affected by them. In their fiction, authors such as Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, E.D.E.N Southworth, and George Lippard, to name a few, examine a variety of reforms not only concerning women but also the generally less fortunate, such as the poor or mentally ill—in short those with whom women tended to come into contact in their own attempts at reform. My dissertation examines how these authors, recognizing that fear is often our most powerful motivator, began strategically deploying Gothic tropes in their fiction to critique the antiquated laws and social practices governing both women and the institutions with which they often came into contact.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Kevin Pelletier's *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism* in which he outlines how reform writers and activists employed "the fear of God's wrath . . . to bolster compassionate feelings" (2).

### **Gothic and Dark Reform**

Scholarly handling of nineteenth-century reformist texts is by no means a new endeavor, and when dealing with a period often referred to as the Age of Reform, researchers find no shortage of material to examine. However, even with the volume and variety of reform writing available for study, critics tend still to focus on a relatively narrow selection of canonical authors and movements. David Reynolds's foundational *Beneath the American Renaissance* is one of the earliest studies to include such marginalized authors as Mason Locke Weems and George Lippard alongside literary heavyweights like Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe. Devoting an entire chapter to reform literature, which he subdivides into either moral or immoral reform writing, Reynolds notes a tendency on the part of moral, or dark reformers to linger a bit too long on their descriptions of vice and not nearly long enough on suggestions for becoming virtuous. This latter tendency, he ascribed specifically to moral reformers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe or Henry David Thoreau. In fact, Reynolds holds dark reformers, among whose numbers he counts both Lippard and Foster, "largely responsible for transforming" America's "culture of morality into a culture of ambiguity" (59). In essence, dark reform literature creates for Reynolds a self-sustaining system in which the literature meant to drive reform impulses creates a need for more literature aimed at quelling the vices that spring from the reading of said reform literature. In other words, Reynolds suggests the popularity of many dark reformers' writing gave rise to more of the vices these stories were supposedly written to quell.

Though this is an interesting argument on Reynolds's part, my study aims to suggest a different reason for these texts' reliance on "probing the grisly, sometimes perverse results

of vice” (59). Put simply, the so-called “solutions” to nineteenth-century vices were not working, and the authors I discuss here recognized that. Sentimental, moral, or “conventional” reform texts, as Jane Tompkins notes in *Sensational Designs*, employed the same types of stereotyped characters and sensationalized plots as Gothic fiction in an effort to propose “solutions for social and political predicaments” (xvii). These solutions essentially boiled down to an appeal to readers to love all of humanity, with select biblical verses inserted as support. In short, sentimental writers often relied on the Doctrine of Disinterested Benevolence—the idea that as God is not “good” so as to receive rewards, neither should His elect do good deeds only in service of their own interests—as the driving force behind their pleas for reform. But as Kevin Pelletier establishes in *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism*, even sentimental writers like Stowe “expressed profound misgivings about the capacity of love to establish the kinds of sympathetic bonds” required to inspire action:

When sentimental writers like Stowe could not depend on love to produce a sympathetic response in readers, fear often served as an incentive to love, energizing love’s power and underwriting its potential to convert Americans from fallible sinners into moral beings. Fear exists at the center of nineteenth-century sentimental strategies for effecting social change and cohering disparate communities, often bolstering love when love falters and operating as a principal mechanism for establishing sympathetic connections across lines of difference. (3)

Pelletier goes on to explore the “Apocalyptic terror” often found in abolitionists’ writings, but his premise nonetheless supports my own. Just as abolitionist writers recognized the power of an angry God to inspire sinning readers to change their behavior, so did dark reform

writers urging civil commitment, labor, and women's reforms recognize the power of fear, the particular province of Gothic literature, to inspire action.

### **Dark Reform and the Periodical Press**

Just as dark reformers recognized the power of fear to inspire action, so too did they recognize the periodical press's importance in spreading knowledge of what reforms needed to take place. In 1846, Margaret Fuller wrote, "the most important part of our literature . . . lies in the journals, which monthly, weekly, daily, send their messages to every corner of this great land, and form, at present, the only efficient instrument for the general education of the people" ("American Literature"). Though much of the work I discuss in this project was published at least a decade after Fuller made this observation, the truthfulness of her claim would hold well into the twentieth century. Though authors and critics of the period as well as scholars of today argue over what constitutes "good" or "meritorious" reading material, whether in books or periodicals, reading was an integral part of the nineteenth-century American's daily life, and great deal of the reading material came from the periodical press.

Interestingly, while many continue to argue over the merits of books versus periodicals, nineteenth-century book scholars find that the two were deeply dependent upon one another. In fact, John Nerone points out in *A History of the Book in America*, that rather than valuing one above the other, "both newspapers and books were considered key to the successful functioning of a public sphere that would produce a national culture, both political and literary" (231). Increasing print output whether in book or periodical form was viewed as a measure of the people's literacy. Furthermore, Eric Lupfer points out later in the same

study that

after 1840 the production of magazines became ever more bound up with the production and promotion of books, newspapers, and other printed materials . . . Readers regularly had entire volumes of their favorite magazines bound in book form—a practice that publishers encouraged by selling covers for binding. The public could also purchase volumes bound by the publisher, complete with title pages, indexes, and tables of contents. (250)

In effect, this practice made periodicals into books, thus, “books and periodicals . . . represented not discrete domains but mutually supporting and constitutive ones” (Lupfer 250). In short, many of the differences we see between nineteenth-century book and magazine culture are artificially established and enforced by later literary critics.

The prevalence of periodical readership in nineteenth-century homes was not lost on reformers, dark or otherwise, and magazines become an integral part of most major reform efforts. The relationship between magazines and social reform was, in fact, reciprocal. Heather A. Haveman establishes in her recent study, *Magazines and the Making of America*, that periodical publishers were as much aware of the marketing potential in reform efforts as reformers were in magazine’s and newspaper’s ability to spread their message. Publishers recognized how reform movements’ engaged audiences and increased sales by providing “provocative images and engrossing and entertaining reading material for the pages of magazines: reports of local protest events and reform efforts, lurid tales of deprivation and degradation, moving poetry, and passionate essays” (Haveman 212). Readers enjoyed reading about the events surrounding the various nineteenth-century reform efforts, and



periodical publishers' attempts to capitalize on their audience's desire to consume such material helped to spread word and even gain support for various reform efforts.

Magazines' mass readership and quick production compared with books ensured reformers their message would reach a broad audience. While it was certainly important for reformers that magazines generally see wider circulation than books, Haveman explains the relationship between readers and editors also helped establish the importance of magazines to reform:

mass-circulation magazines provided antidotes to far-flung reformers' geographic isolation and disseminated information widely. Moreover, magazines are serial publications, which allows them to develop rich reciprocal interactions between editors and their readers, something that books and pamphlets cannot . . .

Many reform efforts in this era hinged on magazines, which allowed social reform movements to become in and of themselves modern—to transmit news about social wrongs and protest efforts over great distances and to spur and coordinate protests in many locations; in doing so magazines knit together communities of reformers that spanned the nation. (205 and 221)

Periodicals' geographically expansive and timely readership couple with the intrinsically social aspect of readers' interaction with writers and editors created a conversational reading experience not possible in book culture.

The social experience of periodical reading as compared to the solitary experience novel reading has become a subject of much recent scholarship. Jeffrey D. Groves, for example, describes the difference, explaining how “book culture emphasized . . . cultivation

of the reader's interiority" while periodical culture emphasized "the collision of the reader's mind with the exterior world" (230-31). The very nature of periodicals made even a solitary reading experience a social encounter by placing the text within the context of a larger cultural conversation. Readers were often made privy to the editors' thoughts on the social issues handled in the literature they printed. Indeed, Heather A. Haveman points out that nineteenth-century magazines act as "the social glue that brings together people who would otherwise never meet face-to-face, allowing readers to receive and react to the same cultural messages at the same time and, in many cases, encouraging readers to contribute to shared cultural projects" (5). Readers not only read and discussed periodical literature in reading clubs but also read other readers' responses to published literature in the periodicals themselves. In short, nineteenth-century periodicals formed the site for some of the earliest virtual communities by establishing a location in which readers could communicate across great distances without ever actually meeting face-to-face.<sup>9</sup> More concretely though, the act of reading in the nineteenth century, unlike what we tend to experience today, was more often than not a social one. Barbara Sicherman describes how in the nineteenth-century

literary activities often permeated middle-class family life, serving as entertainment as well as instruction. Families read aloud during long evenings at home . . . engaged in parlor literary games, dramatized favorite stories, and produced home newspapers,

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<sup>9</sup> For a general overview of nineteenth-century periodicals as virtual networks with references to more detailed studies, see Fagg, John, Matthew Pethers, and Robin Vandome. "Introduction: Networks and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical." *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2013, pp 93-104.

an activity that peaked in the 1870s and 1880s. The culture of reading was participatory and performative, stimulating writing as well as reading, especially among the daughters of the comfortable classes. (295)

Fittingly, and for lack of a better analogy, literary activities filled the space now occupied by family movie or game nights. Furthermore, the communal aspect of this type of reading allowed for discussion of the material at hand and reflection upon its implications for social action. Through conversations, letters to the editors, and other such interactions, these virtual and family communities of readers became the voice for many social projects, like asylum reform, that had not established formal committees or groups like those for labor reform and abolition. My study brings together the discussions of dark reform and the periodical press to illustrate how authors often turned to popular periodicals and the clichéd, though still much enjoyed, Gothic mode to spread their messages farther than was possible in novels.

### **Chapter Focuses**

From its very inception, one of the most recognizable aspects of a Gothic tale has been the persecuted maiden. Deprived of the basic rights enjoyed by most men in this period, women could easily find themselves at the mercy of cruel, self-interested men. My study begins by examining the effects women's general lack of rights had on both men and women in the period as well as how the tenets of True Womanhood combined with society's embrace of separate spheres created for women a domestic prison from which there was little to no hope of escape due to their economic dependence upon men. While this domestic captivity was a feature of women's lives in both Europe and America, my first chapter also

examines how the Indian captivity narrative affected the development of representations of captivity in American fiction ultimately creating a domestic prison that, while it was seated in the home, followed women no matter where they traveled.

To illustrate and examine the unique combination of captivity narratives with the Gothic trope of captivity in American dark reform writings, my first chapter follows the development of captivity as a literary trope in America from its beginnings in famous captivity narratives, such as Hannah Dustan's tale published in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, and "The Panther Captivity," through its blending with European Gothic representations of captivity found Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the results of which appeared in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "The Duston Family," and Rebecca Harding Davis's "In the Market," and Louisa May Alcott's *Work: A Story of Experience*. Its development complete, writers such as E.D.E.N. Southworth and Davis put Gothic captivity to work as a tool for women's rights reform in their respective serial novels, *The Hidden Hand*, published in *New York Ledger* and *The Second Life*, published in *Peterson's Women's Magazine*.

Though nearly all women found themselves in some species of domestic captivity, those who broke the boundaries and, thereby, the rules of True Womanhood could find themselves subjected to the most feared of Gothic devices: live burial. Though Gothic live burial shares much in common with the imprisonment discussed in the previous chapter, burial was a punishment usually reserved for "fallen" women, while imprisonment was reserved for marriageable and married young women. My second chapter, therefore, offers an examination of the metaphorical live burial experienced during the liminal phase of a

fallen woman's rite of passage as she "dies" from her life in polite society. A key difference between imprisonment and live burial is the extent to which the character retains contact with society. Occupying the liminal space between the accepted social roles for nineteenth-century women and the grave, the fallen woman, though she does maintain contact with society, only maintains contact with a particular subset of that society, usually men and prostitutes. Rather than suggesting the fallen woman is "born again," however, I examine in this chapter how she remains in the liminal space, enacting a kind of "death in life" until she experiences physical death.

Matthew Gregory Lewis offers one of the earliest scenes of live burial in *The Monk*; however, while his novel helped to establish the trope as a recognizable piece of Gothic machinery, his method of burial was somewhat more literal than is often the case. Examining Lewis's novel alongside Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*, illuminates the metaphorical nature of most live burials, which feature language that indicates a character's living death rather than physical entombment. When considered as a metaphorical punishment, the trope of live burial has changed little if at all through Gothic fiction's history; indeed, there really is no need for transformation of this motif, since it would be difficult to render it more terrifying than it already is. Therefore, rather than transforming the trope, nineteenth-century writers inflicted it upon much less likely victims: their own readers.<sup>10</sup> Rather than relegating the "living dead" to the background, Davis confronts readers

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<sup>10</sup> Though Edgar Allan Poe is arguably the most prolific creator of fictional live burial scenes during this period, it is debatable to what extent he intended his fictions to produce anything beyond a given "single effect" in his readers. Granted, his most recognizable tale of

with a deathly ill prostitute, Lot, in “The Promise of the Dawn,” while Lippard features several fallen women as key characters in *New York: It’s Upper Ten and Lower Millions*. By foregrounding fallen women in their narratives and also illustrating the paradoxical treatment of such women by society as well as the men who orchestrate their fall, these authors offer readers a chance to identify with the fallen, thus inspiring reformative actions.

My final chapter examines the veil as a Gothic device and its importance in nineteenth-century American Gothic writing and also briefly chronicles the shift away from actual, physical veils such as those characters often wore in European Gothic texts and toward the often metaphorical veils employed in American Gothic fiction. Probably the most often discussed veil in Gothic Studies is the black veil in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) that obscures what the main character, Emily St. Aubert, believes to be a worm-eaten corpse. We learn, albeit not until four hundred pages later, that what Emily witnesses is actually a waxwork. This scene points to both the problem and the power of the veil in Gothic fiction: it obscures not only the object it conceals but also the nature of what it conceals. We see a rather pointed example of this type of veil in Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), but, especially in American Gothic fiction, readers are more often presented with veiled language than actual fabric. Reform texts, dark reform especially, were concerned with “tearing away” and “lifting” veils to reveal the reality of situations Americans were otherwise unable to see; however, authors had to be careful when revealing

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live burial, “The Cask of Amontillado,” has been read by several scholars, including David Reynolds, as a dark temperance piece; however, whether he intended the story as such or if his readers recognized it as such is open to question.

the truths these veils concealed. To ensure the possibility of a slow reveal that would allow readers gradually to experience and accept new truths, authors such as Davis expertly employed the periodical press in order to allow her readers the aesthetic distance necessary to experience and then reflect on her work. This chapter will establish that by making the veil a commonplace even in otherwise realist fiction Gothic Reform writers encouraged their readers to question even, and perhaps especially, the most reputable and respected of institutions.

This dissertation is not an exhaustive study of nineteenth-century dark reform literature, and much more work is and will be required to understand more fully how authors used various Gothic devices to further their aims. In addition to pulling together my findings from the previous three chapters, my conclusion will postulate how viewing American Gothic as a proactive genre can change our readings of many otherwise underappreciated texts. As an early entry in this new aspect of Gothic Studies, my project will likely raise as many questions as it answers, so the goal of my final chapter is not only to catalog these questions but also to suggest how searching for their answers can and will “exhume” many more of the authors who have themselves been buried alive by decades of New Critical thought. Indeed, the works I examine here are little-known at best, mostly because critics and scholars typically label them as “popular” rather than “canonical.” Viewing these texts as money-makers rather than purposeful literature has rendered them all but forgotten. When we recognize that these stories were written with a purposeful aim, and published in popular periodicals not only because they paid more money but also because they had more readers,

we open up the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the social context from which they grew.



CHAPTER ONE: "I TRUST MYSELF TO YOUR PROTECTION":  
COVERTURE, ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, AND DOMESTIC CAPTIVITY

In the second half of the nineteenth-century, few issues were of more pressing importance to women than how and to what extent they could participate in the United States' increasingly industrialized and commercialized society. Women's rights were and would remain a topic of heated discussion, and though women in most states gained the right to own property in the mid-nineteenth century, many aspects of the common law of coverture survived well into the twentieth century. As a result, societal expectations in regard to the extent of a woman's sphere of activity and influence did not extend much beyond her own front door. Once married, the True Woman's task was to remain at home, creating a safe haven for her husband and children from the evils of capitalist society.<sup>1</sup> However, this paradigm did not always prove ideal.

Best known for her critique of industrial capitalism in *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), Rebecca Harding Davis creates an equally eloquent commentary on nineteenth-century

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the True Woman derives from Barbara Welter's 1966 *American Quarterly* article, "The Cult of True Womanhood" in which she describes nineteenth-century women's preoccupation with and men's expectation of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity as a cult. The paradigm Welter describes has since been complicated by studies such as You-me Park and Gayle Wald's "Native Daughters in the Promised Land: Gender, Race, and the Question of Separate Spheres" that consider how class and race make True Womanhood an ideal only attainable for upper and middle-class white women.

domestic ideology in her short story, “In the Market.” Published in *Peterson’s Ladies Magazine* in 1868, “In the Market” follows Margaret Porter as she makes a life for herself and her family growing and selling medicinal herbs. However, prior to pursuing a life in the capitalist market, Margaret and her sister, Clara, find themselves in a place well-known by young middle class women in the nineteenth century: the marriage market. Margaret and Clara are daughters of a middle class family pushed to the brink of poverty in their attempts to appear solvent. Sharon Harris identifies Margaret and Clara as two of the countless young women “educated to market themselves for marriage to a socially prominent man” (119). Clara complains to her mother that there must be something she can do while she waits for a husband that might ease her family’s financial situation:

‘God . . . never meant that marriage should be the only means by which a woman should gain her food and clothes, and provide for her old age. See how it ends; or, failing in that, swindle down into the withered paracite [sic] lives which Jane and Sarah endure in legal prostitution. You blush at the words on my lips, mother. But we are in the market—in the market.’ (295)

Davis enumerates the few options open to Clara and other nineteenth-century women for gaining their own food, clothing, and retirement: teaching (but only if well-educated), clerical work or type-setting (but only in a few eastern cities), sewing, factory work, service, and (of course) prostitution (295-96). Each of these comes with its own troubles (prostitution most obviously); however, as the girls’ mother points out, even the most respectable of jobs could prove detrimental to a woman’s prospects for marriage:

‘a woman is looked upon with suspicion who takes up a profession or an unusual occupation. She unsexes herself, you see, my dear. A woman’s mission is to marry and bear children . . .

It is not modest nor womanly to engage in trade or barter, just like a man, my dear. Any woman loses caste who does it.’ (296)

In this exchange, Clara and her mother raise two subjects considered taboo for nineteenth-century women—sex and money. Indeed, the topics were considered so inappropriate for women’s conversation that they were eventually conflated with one another. As Joyce Warren explains in *Women, Money, and the Law*, “the concept of woman’s economic independence was associated with sexual promiscuity; the independent woman was thought to be an immoral woman” (70). Thus, the only way a woman could be certain to maintain her perceived virtue was to remain dependent on men. The cultural conception created by nineteenth-century domestic ideologies like True Womanhood left women like Margaret and Clara trapped in a domestic prison with very few avenues of escape. Single women like Margaret found their options for employment, and thereby survival, extremely limited even though shifting gender roles and westward expansion meant more women had to support themselves every day. Many, Clara included, viewed marriage as the one door through which to escape. That door, however, led not to freedom but to the Gothic situation of domestic captivity created by coverture.

### **Nineteenth-Century Common Law and the True Woman's Domestic Prison**

Describing the various reform activities in which women involved themselves during this time period, Barbara Bardes and Suzanne Gossett provide a blueprint for nineteenth-century women's domestic prison:

The various types of reform activities that engaged the efforts of women we can envision as a set of concentric circles with the home at the center. Even though all of these reform movements were intended to improve public life, women's participation in those movements—such as temperance or Bible societies—that were most closely related to their domestic or religious duties excited little controversy, while activism on behalf of those movements that were the farthest from the traditional domestic sphere generated the strongest opposition. In addition, those reform efforts that could be accomplished through persuasion within the home tended to be less controversial. Those that required public activity, particularly writing or speaking, to seek changes in national policy, were considered unsuitable for women. (39)

In short, the further a woman's activities took her from home, even when performed in the interest of bettering society, the closer she came to censure. The captive space created for women by the separate spheres mentality, though metaphorical, was just as real as any prison and was patrolled by judicial figures more interested in protecting women from than helping them exercise their rights.

As outlined above, women's virtue and purity was often predicated upon their dependence. In everything from religious to medical to economic discourse, women were viewed as inferior to and, therefore, vulnerable to and dependent upon men. This was not a

position men simply wished to place women in, however. Warren points out “not only did men view women as dependent, but women themselves accepted this definition” (8). Discussing views of labor organizer Mary Kenney, Warren identifies a root cause of nineteenth-century women’s subjugation. Kenney argues that since young women are never taught “that it is our duty to wholly depend upon ourselves . . . the only protection [women] expect is the protection given them by men, not realizing that it is their duty to protect themselves” (qtd. in Warren 8). What Kenney suggests sits directly at odds with the nineteenth century’s views of what a True Woman should be, and though the separate spheres ideology reflects the ideal rather than the reality of nineteenth-century women’s lives, it was the “prescriptive model defining acceptable behavior for women by and within their contemporary society” (Warren 2). As such, women were taught from a young age to be submissive and domestic rather than independent and self-reliant, and as societal and legal reactions to women’s rights reforms and married women’s property acts make clear, submission and domesticity were not viewed as traits compatible with economic independence. While the tenets of True Womanhood severely limited single-women’s ability to subsist on their own, married women would find their routes toward self-reliance even more heavily guarded.

Together with abolition and labor reform, women’s rights reforms are one of the most heavily researched and discussed topics of the nineteenth century. From 1848 on, as more and more states passed married women’s property acts, woman suffragists optimistically

believed the oppressive days of coverture were over.<sup>2</sup> However, the courts soon disabused them of this notion as antiquated aspects of common-law were repeatedly called up to deny women the rights these acts were meant to extend. As Kathleen S. Sullivan explains, “coverture survived the passage of the married women’s property acts, and it even found a place for itself in the new regime of married women’s reformed status”:

Equitable procedures, which required protective procedures and presumptions of husbands’ coercion and wives’ vulnerability, were the means of recognizing married women’s property ownership within coverture. The status of married women after the reform statutes was not much altered . . . Married women were given enumerated rights, but these did not confer full legal autonomy. They continued to hold the status of wives who were able to exercise a few limited rights, with courts serving as guardians of these rights. (128, 104-105).

Thus, wives’ reformed status after implementation of married women’s property acts, rather than ensuring their freedom, essentially added another male head from whom she had to gain permission to exercise her newly obtained rights.

Judges routinely turned to women’s traditionally “covered” role in marriage as a means of undermining property acts. For example, citing several cases in Pennsylvania alone (where both George Lippard and Rebecca Harding Davis spent much of their lives), Warren

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<sup>2</sup> New York’s “Act for the Effectual Protection of the Property of Married Women,” passed 7 April 1848, is often mistakenly considered the first of the United States’ married women’s property acts, but Southern states such as Arkansas and Mississippi passed laws allowing women to own property in marriage in 1835 and 1839 respectively.

establishes that “because of the conservative interpretation of the property acts by the judiciary, the laws did not change a great deal in the lives of most women” (50-51). In Pennsylvania Supreme Court cases *Ritter v. Ritter* (1858) and *Bear’s Administrator v. Bear* (1859) Judge Woodward’s and Judge Strong’s respective rulings prove that even a decade after Pennsylvania passed its own married women’s property act, the “Married Woman’s Act of Assembly of 11<sup>th</sup> April 1848,” women were still unable to manage or use their property independent of their husbands. In *Ritter v. Ritter*, after her husband, Jacob, deserted her, Catherine Ritter brought suit against him for repayment on a witnessed contract. Though the Common Pleas court found in Catherine’s favor, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned the ruling on the grounds that coverture makes man and wife one person (i.e., the husband), and, therefore, their property cannot be separated. Judge Woodward, who wrote the court’s opinion for the case, argued that the purpose of married women’s property acts is not to allow a woman the rights to manage her property as a *feme sole* but to protect her property from her husband’s creditors. In fact, he describes the act, as a whole, as the product of “prurient philanthropy that begins its work where the wise and good leave off, and demolishes what they build up” only to lead a

too susceptible legislature into declaring not only that the wife’s property should be exempt from seizure by the husband’s creditors, but that it should continue to be her property ‘as fully after her marriage as before,’ and should be ‘owned, used, and enjoyed by such married woman as her own separate property.’ (Casey 399)

Viewing the entire Act as a mistake or, worse, a product of coercion, Judge Woodward not only handed down several opinions against women’s property rights but also influenced the

great majority of those handed down by other officials during his term on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.<sup>3</sup>

Judge William Strong, for example, echoes Woodward's sentiments in his opinion on *Bear's Administrator v. Bear* (1859). In this case, William Bear sued Elizabeth Bear for the money her husband, Andrew Bear, spent to help her build houses on her separate estate before he died. As Elizabeth had contracted to build the homes and Andrew had later assisted her with payments, William claimed the money Andrew advanced should be paid back to his estate. The Common Pleas court found in Elizabeth's favor, and Judge Strong upheld the ruling in an opinion similar to those expressed by Judge Woodward:

It is strenuously urged, that the Act of April 11<sup>th</sup> 1848 has . . . dissolved this intimate union between the husband and wife. It is said they are no longer one; that, so far as her property is concerned, they are as strangers to each other, and that the wife may contract with strangers, and even with her husband; may sue and be sued, precisely as if she were a *feme sole*. Such is not, however, our understanding of the Act of 1848, and such is not the construction which we have heretofore repeatedly given to it. We shall be slow to believe that the legislature intended such a revolution in this the most important domestic relation; that they designed to expose the wife's property to the

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<sup>3</sup> In an address delivered at the 1914 Woman's Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Charles W. Dahlinger noted that though Judge Woodward "did not write all the opinions on the law of 1848 handed down by the Supreme Court during his term of office . . . in the reasoning of almost all the opinions, where the names of other judges appear, there is a distinct resemblance to the reasoning of the opinions credited to Judge Woodward" (80).



hazards which must be inseparable from a power in her to contract independent of her husband; much less that their purpose was to destroy the relation of confidence between them, which previously existed. . . All agree that its general intent was to prevent a wife's property from being swept away by a husband's creditors. (Casey 527)

While the Supreme Court's creative interpretation of Pennsylvania's married women's property act in this case worked out in Elizabeth Bear's favor, the opposite was too often the case.

Women's property laws did not receive any more liberal treatment in New York than they did in Pennsylvania. In the 1878 case of *Birkbeck v Ackroyd* presented before the New York Court of Appeals, a husband sued a woolen mill for the wages his wife had earned while employed there. Judge Charles Andrews ruled that as the wife had not explicitly conveyed her intention to keep her wages the husband could legally claim them despite New York's Earnings Act of 1860, which allowed women to maintain control of the money they earned from labor. According to Judge Andrews:

The bare fact that she performs labor for third persons, for which compensation is due, does not necessarily establish that she performed it, under the act of 1860, upon her separate account . . .

Where the husband and wife are living together, and mutually engaged in providing for the support of themselves and their family,—each contributing by his or her labor to the promotion of the common purpose—and there is nothing to indicate an intention on the part of the wife to separate her earnings from those of her

husband, her earnings in that case, belong, we think, as at common law, to the husband, and he may maintain an action in his own right to recover them. (*Birkbeck v. Ackroyd*)

Nearly two decades after the Act of 1860 gave women the right to their own wages, judges still returned to common law and the feudal system of coverture to ensure they remained dependent, especially economically, on men.

As exemplified in the cases above, courts tended toward a conservative reading of married women's property rights that relied on common-law principles to fill in any interpretive gaps left in the acts' original language. Warren finds that this is especially the case when it comes to a woman's earnings as she could lay claim to them

*only* when she was abandoned by her husband or he was proven to have misspent the family's earnings or to be unable to support the family (e.g., he was a drunkard or mentally incompetent). . . . Under common law, the wife's labor and the fruits of her labor were the property of the husband as head of the household. . . . If she wished to claim her 'money for her 'separate use,' the courts demanded that she have written consent, or 'express approval,' from her husband. . . . Thus, even after many states had awarded women control of some of their property, legal discourse continued to regard the married woman as a dependent domestic woman. (52, author's emphasis)

Nineteenth-century women's domestic and dependent status is clearly what many judges were attempting to maintain through their conservative interpretations of married women's property acts. Notably, and especially in Judge Woodward's and Judge's Strong's Supreme

Court decisions, they often employed sentimental and romantic language foregrounding women's need of protection to that end.<sup>4</sup>

At the intersection of sentimental discourse—which taught women submission, domesticity, piety, and purity—and legal discourse—which taught women that men were simultaneously their protectors and their persecutors—nineteenth-century women discovered their ever-increasing need for self-sufficiency. However, as “their culture associated women's independence, particularly economic independence, with sexual promiscuity and immorality,” and the courts repeatedly upheld women's legal disabilities under coverture over the legal rights they obtained through married women's property acts, it became clear that for women's rights reforms truly to advance what was needed was cultural rather than legal reform (Warren 70). As long as the True Woman and her tenets of submission and domesticity held sway, women, whether married or single, could never truly free themselves from domestic captivity.

### **Captivity and the Female Gothic**

Though the trope of captivity developed differently in American Gothic fiction due to the Indian captivity narrative's influence, it is important to note that captivity was still a most important feature of European Gothic. To understand how captivity is represented throughout

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion regarding court appropriations of sentimental language in proceedings and decisions, see Laura Hanft Korobkin's *Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery*.

Gothic literature, we must recognize the bifurcated nature of the genre both in Europe and America. As mentioned in the Introduction, Gothic Scholars tend to break the genre into two “strains,” the Radcliffean, so named for its reliance on themes and plots as presented by Ann Radcliffe, and the Lewisite, named for Matthew Gregory Lewis. As I will explain in greater detail in later chapters, each also came to be associated with either terror (Radcliffean) or horror (Lewisite). However, each was also associated with the gender of its author, thus the Radcliffean Gothic is also Female Gothic, while the Lewisite Gothic is also Male Gothic.

Radcliffe’s and Lewis’s respective novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Monk* (1796) are most often used to delineate the differences between the two Gothic strains. Ellen Moers, coined the term “female gothic” in her cornerstone study, *Literary Women*, to describe works of Gothic fiction written by women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; however, scholars have noted in recent years that the Female Gothic’s content has less to do with its writer’s gender than with the characteristics of the narrative. Perhaps the first to note this was Julian Fleenor in her study, *Female Gothic*, which prompted many Gothic scholars to look past concerns of physical gender in favor of a content-centric approach.<sup>5</sup> In the years following Moers’s and Fleenor’s work, scholars continued to expand

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<sup>5</sup> Offering an unusual parallel reading of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Fleenor notes that Austen’s work seems more preoccupied with terror while Shelley’s is bound up in horror (7). Though Fleenor inspired many non-traditional studies of the “gendered” Gothic, her study relies heavily on several outdated assumptions about the genre. For example, Fleenor asserts that “the Female Gothic is conservative not revolutionary, acting always in reaction, tension and dichotomy. It is not

and remodel theories regarding what constitutes a Female Gothic tale. The Gothic heroine's flight from and attempts to subvert patriarchal authority are common themes that Robert Miles discusses in *Gothic Writing* and Anne Mellor highlights in *Romanticism and Gender*. More radically, Diane Long Hoeveler and Carol Margaret Davison suggest the formulaic plots and stereotypical characters in Female Gothic texts afford women a means of secret communication by which they can discover the means of remodeling rather than rejecting patriarchal ideologies in order to create a domestic situation that was, in itself, less Gothic. After all, the private sphere illustrated at a Female Gothic novel's conclusion is one in which women *control* the home, rather than being imprisoned in it.

Essential to an understanding of these narratives and their conclusions is that the Gothic heroine is a feature almost exclusive to the Female Gothic text alone, since Male Gothic texts focus on female suffering rather than reason or resilience (Williams 104). Anne Williams establishes in *Art of Darkness* that a Female Gothic tale is “the heroine's story from her own point of view” (101). Female Gothic texts privilege the heroine's capacity for reason, illustrated through sublime speeches and logical explanations for what seem to be supernatural events. They foreground her strength through depictions of trials and sorrows that she must face alone—the villain having somehow managed temporarily to dispose of the heroine's hero. And though she may often cry or faint, she always manages to overcome the

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transcendent” (24). On the strength of much evidence to the contrary, most Gothicists, myself included, have abandoned Fleenor's notions in regard to the Female Gothic and begun moving away from the theory of Gothic genders as well.

obstacles she encounters. Through it all, she refuses to give in to the villain's demands, reaching the novel's conclusion with virtue, fortune, and agency intact.

Kate Ferguson Ellis defines the Male Gothic as, essentially, the antithesis of the Female Gothic since the Male Gothic's story focuses on a male anti-hero in "exile from the refuge of home, now the special province of women" (xiii). Because of this exile, Williams argues, "whatever is culturally feminine, including women" themselves, may become the anti-hero's object of revenge, "to be controlled, violated, desecrated" (107). Put simply, if she appears at all in a Male Gothic text, the Gothic heroine will necessarily become a victim and a prisoner as a result of the very characteristics that ensure her survival in a Female Gothic text.

The space that either imprisons or rejects a Gothic protagonist is another of the Female Gothic's key concerns. Noting examples from authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar recognize how "imagery of enclosure reflects the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places" (83). Essentially, the closed spaces within Female Gothic novels can be read as analogues for the patriarchal constructs against which the heroine, and the author herself, must prevail. Indeed, Kate Ferguson Ellis suggests that rather than countering the Radcliffean/Female Gothic, Lewisite/Male Gothic extends it so that "the paranoid apprehensions of the Radcliffean heroine become the real crimes" of the Gothic villain (132). Put simply, though some critics still use the terms Male and Female Gothic, it is important to note that they are referring not to the author's gender but to the plot details.

The Female Gothic plot is most often exemplified by Radcliffe's fourth novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which centers on the heroine, Emily St. Aubert, and her attempts to escape persecution at the hands of Signor Montoni. Hoping to obtain her estates, Montoni imprisons Emily in his castle. Her room, the castle's "double chamber," locks only from the outside and comes equipped with a secret staircase up which any manner of threat might (and does) creep. Through a series of often too-convenient coincidences, Emily escapes and rightfully inherits her estates and castle, which she then divides and either sells or gives away to other likewise suffering women encountered throughout the tale. At the novel's conclusion, Radcliffe assures her readers though innocence may suffer at the hands of vice, virtue will always be rewarded in the end. The happy ending in which the heroine has triumphed over persecution to take her place as ruler of the home is, as Williams describes, demanded by the Female plot (103). The Female Gothic heroine, formerly imprisoned in the home, now controls it.

Robert Kiely attempts to downplay the threat Emily faces during her time at Udolpho by suggesting "the preservation of her chastity is not the central issue of the novel simply because the reader is never for a moment allowed to believe that Emily could be raped" (73). However, this assertion ignores Radcliffe's project as a Female Gothic novelist, which was rather to obfuscate than illuminate the threats to the female body in her novels. For contemporary readers, this obfuscation serves to make the threat to Emily and her chastity all the more real, since it mirrors the way the female body and its threats were discussed—or rather, not discussed—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Davison counters Kiely explaining, "the threat of rape is repeatedly suggested and represented, among other manners,

in the form of real men who gain access to Emily's room" (104). The most notable instance of such access takes place when Emily's admirer, Count Morano, uses the aforementioned secret stairs to try to "rescue" Emily only to find himself engaged in a swordfight with Montoni in her very bedroom. Prior to the outbreak of this swordfight, Morano attempts to convince Emily of his love and that leaving with him is preferable to remaining at Udolpho since, he informs her, Montoni sold Emily to Morano as payment of a debt. Emily, however, doubts Morano's intentions:

while she shrunk from the new scenes of misery and oppression, that might await her in the castle of Udolpho, she was compelled to observe, that almost her only means of escaping them was by submitting herself to the protection of this man, with whom evils more certain and not less terrible appeared,—evils, upon which she could not endure to pause for an instant. (Radcliffe 263).

In short, Emily recognizes that while she is now certain that Montoni is only interested in procuring her estates, whatever the cost, Morano wants her body and obviously views it as a commoditized object, capable of being "owned" since he accepted her in place of cash. Weighing loss of fortune against the very real likelihood of rape, Emily chooses to remain at Udolpho "under the protection of Signor Montoni," thereby raising an issue that continues to vex women even to the present day—protection (263).

The issue of women's protection, both by men and from them, is a central issue in Gothic fiction. Emily makes the limited choices she must make based on which of the men she is presented with as potential "protectors" is least likely to rape her. Likewise, the protagonist of an Indian captivity narrative published seven years prior to Radcliffe's



*Udolpho* and commonly referred to as “The Panther Captivity” (1787) decides to go with the tale’s fictional author, Abraham Panther, only after she determines he is unlikely to harm (read, “rape”) her. Emily and the young woman recognize the proper situation of an eighteenth-century woman: behind a man. However, their understanding and exercise of True Womanhood also highlights a key difference between captivity in the European and American Gothic traditions; women in the European Gothic were more likely to be confined to a physical, indoor, domestic space, and they were much less likely to use physical violence to defend their virtue.

### **Indian Captivity Narratives and the American Gothic**

To see how the domestic sphere’s captive space evolved and developed into a tool for dark reformers’ use, we must first gain a better understanding of the Indian captivity narrative. Stories such as Mary White Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), which recounts her abduction and subsequent three-month captivity as a prisoner in King Phillip’s War, often initially functioned as religious tracts. Rowlandson is able, with the aid of her Bible and God’s goodness, to survive her captivity and emerge converted, a member of the Puritan elect. Increase Mather suggests in a preface written for her book that anyone reading it should experience a similar conversion, or “the fault must needs be thine own” (qtd. in

Rowlandson 11).<sup>6</sup> However, a later narrative published in 1702 by Increase's son, Cotton, illustrates the Indian captivity narrative's already evolving form.<sup>7</sup>

Though Rowlandson's tale is one of the most often studied and well-recognized Indian captivity narratives, Hannah Dustan's had much greater influence on later fiction, especially American Gothic fiction. Published as "A Notable Exploit: *Dux Faemina Facti*" in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Dustan's brief narrative provides an account of her abduction in March 1697 by the Abenaki Indians after a raid on Haverhill, Massachusetts. The Indians take Dustan and her nursemaid, but they kill Dustan's week-old infant as well as several other captive colonists and threaten the women with torture and humiliation; once they reach the Abenaki village, the women will be stripped naked and made to "run the gauntlet" before all the village's warriors (Mather). Rather than face these horrors, Dustan, accompanied by her nursemaid and a young boy abducted from Worcester in an earlier raid, kill ten sleeping Abenaki and escape, but not before turning back to scalp

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<sup>6</sup> The preface of the 1682 London edition of Rowlandson's text is signed "*Per Amicum*," and other, subsequent editions list the author as "*Per Amicam*" or "*Ter Amicam*"; however, scholars agree the preface was written by Increase Mather. For further discussion of the publication history of Rowlandson's text, see Kathryn Zabelle Derounian's "The Publication, Promotion, and Distribution of Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative in the Seventeenth Century." *Early American Literature*, vol. 23, 1988, pp. 239-61.

<sup>7</sup> As this is the last mention of Increase Mather in my study, all future references to "Mather" in this project will be in regard to Cotton Mather.

the corpses for which they each claim a bounty of fifty pounds as well as various other rewards, both monetary and otherwise, upon their return to Haverhill.

Readers initially received both Dustan and her narrative as heroic, likely thanks to Mather's positive presentation of the events. However, by 1836 when Nathaniel Hawthorne published "The Duston Family" in *The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, she had devolved from hero to villain.<sup>8</sup> The problem, for most, is that among those Dustan killed were a woman and six children. Mather, not surprisingly, attributes Dustan's and her companions' escape to God's providence and justifies their killing women and children by reminding readers the Indians murdered Dustan's child. An eye for an eye, after all. Furthermore, Mather informs readers these Abenaki had adopted the Catholic faith as a consequence of their dealings with the French. Thus, at least in Mather's eyes, they deserved their fate (Mather). History and human decency, however, would not have it, as is evidenced by Hawthorne's opinions regarding the reward Dustan should have received:

Would that the bloody old hag had been drowned in crossing Contocook river, or that she had sunk over head and ears in a swamp, and been there buried, till summoned forth to confront her victims at the Day of Judgement; or that she had gone astray and been starved to death in the forest, and nothing ever seen of her again, save her skeleton, with the ten scalps twisted round it for a girdle! ("Duston Family")

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<sup>8</sup> Authors have variously spelled Hannah Dustan's name, "Dustan," "Duston," and "Dustin"; however, unless directly quoting from a source, I maintain Mather's original spelling of "Dustan" throughout.

While it is understandable how and why Dustan was eventually vilified and even demonized for killing children, Hawthorne's and history's response to her narrative may have been motivated by other, more ideological concerns that become clear through further study. Reactions to later captivity narratives with similar themes indicate that more was at stake for those reading Dustan's narrative than just how she managed her escape. Published nearly a century after Dustan's narrative, "The Panther Captivity," more laboriously titled *A Surprising Account of the Discovery of a Lady Who Was Taken by the Indians in the Year 1777, and After Making her Escape, She Retired to a Lonely Cave, Where She Lived Nine Years*, is a short epistolary tale written by the fictional Abraham Panther (from whom the narrative derives its sobriquet). "The Panther Captivity" relates the story of a wealthy young woman who flees with her lover into the wilderness after her father refuses to allow their courtship. Indians capture the couple, brutally torturing and burning her lover alive, but she escapes, only to find herself captured by an enormous man who cannot speak English. Gesturing with his sword and hatchet, he indicates that by the next morning she must either choose to share his bed or die. Rather than acquiesce to his demands, the young woman kills him with his own hatchet while he sleeps then uses it to decapitate and cut him into quarters. After disposing of the body parts in the woods, she returns to the cave to which he had taken her and claims it as her home, living there for nine years with only a dog for a companion until Panther and his companion find her while exploring the American wilderness.

Reading this brief account, it is not difficult to determine a major factor in readers' willingness to accept and respond positively to this narrative while they eventually shunned Dustan's. In "The Panther Captivity," the protagonist only momentarily sheds her

“womanly” veneer, and she only does so to save her chastity. Once she is free of her aggressor, she returns to True Womanhood as best she can in a cave, recreating the domestic sphere and attendant submissiveness. She does not move or perform any action not associated with home and hearth, and she certainly does not profit or garner acclaim for her actions. When Panther and his companion find her, she is singing, but she screams and faints when she sees the two men. When she comes to, she tells them her tale, “sheds a plentiful shower of tears,” and then, like a good hostess, invites her guests to rest in her cave (“Panther Captivity”). Back in the company of men, she abandons all appearance of self-sufficiency, declaring, “I trust myself to your protection—I have no reason to question your good intentions, and willingly believe, from my small acquaintance with you, that you will not seek to heap affliction upon a weak woman, already borne down with misery and sorrow” (“Panther Captivity”). After fending for herself in the wilderness for nearly a decade, she still sees herself as weak and in need of male protection. The only action she ever takes is in defense of her honor. Through her actions and speech, the young woman in “The Panther Captivity” presents not only a perfect portrait of True Womanhood but also a model of the early American Gothic heroine.

While “The Panther Captivity’s” protagonist models the Gothic heroine, the tale itself also follows the Gothic formula. Matthew Wynn Sivils suggests as much in his article, “Indian Captivity Narratives and the Origins of American Frontier Gothic,” in which he argues, and I agree, “this brief narrative may qualify as the first fully realized work of American Gothic fiction” (89-90). (I would also note that Radcliffe would not publish her first Gothic novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) for another two years.) Sivils

highlights “The Panther Captivity’s” combination of definitively American settings and themes, like the wilderness and captivity, with definitively European Gothic elements, like a “sword-wielding giant in a cave,” as those most important in marking this as American Gothic (90). However, Sivils fails to notice the fact that “The Panther Captivity” offers a neatly drawn picture of the domestic sphere displaced into the wilderness in order to ensure the protagonist’s continued captivity long after her captor is dead.

Represented in American literature, the domestic sphere, especially, appeared quite different than that represented in European writings. Indian captivity narratives established across the American landscape what Sivils describes as “mental wildernesses” that anticipated those found in later tales such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Roger Malvin’s Burial” published in 1832 (90). While the mental wilderness Sivils refers to is that created by the protagonist, Reuben Bourne’s, guilt, Reuben’s wife’s experience of the wilderness helps to illustrate the unique effect the American Gothic landscape had on women’s experience of the domestic sphere. Setting a makeshift table of wood and leaves for their supper, Reuben’s wife, Dorcas, sings to herself, and as she does, “the walls of her forsaken home seemed to encircle her,” effectively recreating the domestic sphere and all its trappings of captivity even in the vast American wilderness (Hawthorne, “Roger Malvin’s Burial” 22). Although the scene in which Dorcas experiences this phenomenon is not meant to inspire fear or even uneasiness, it draws a clear picture of the constancy of nineteenth-century women’s domestic prison. No matter where she goes or what her situation, a True Woman is never far from hearth, husband, and home. With this in mind, and returning to Hannah Dustan’s narrative, I would argue that Hawthorne and his contemporaries were actually less unnerved by Dustan’s

murders than by her “unwomanly” behavior. Indeed, briefly comparing Hawthorne’s representations of colonial Indian encounters in “The Duston Family” and “Roger Malvin’s Burial” supports this.

Hawthorne’s wishes regarding Dustan’s fate have already been discussed; however, his comments about the rewards she received for her “valor” deserve consideration as well. “This awful woman” and her companions “came safe home, and received the bounty on the dead Indians, besides liberal presents from private gentlemen, and fifty pounds from the Governor of Maryland. In her old age, being sunk into decayed circumstances, she claimed, and, we believe, received a pension, as a further price of blood” (Hawthorne, “Duston Family”). Next to his wishes for her prolonged and painful death, this commentary seems quite tame; however, when compared with his mention of “Lovewell’s Fight” in the opening scene of “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” certain prejudices become clear.<sup>9</sup>

John Lovewell was a scalp hunter. He won celebrity when he led a scalping party of eighty-eight men on an expedition that, many said, thwarted possible Indian raids on the frontiers of New Hampshire. However, the party they killed consisted of only ten Indians, and it is unclear whether these ten Indians were men, women, or children, though we do know that Lovewell’s first expedition ended with him and his men killing and scalping an Indian man and a young boy while they slept (Grenier). Lovewell and his men received £100 for each male scalp retrieved; however, as they were paid £200 for those first two scalps “it seems as long as the Indians were dead, no one would bother to inquire if they were warriors,

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<sup>9</sup> Hawthorne, like many authors of the time, spelled John Lovewell’s name phonetically as “Lovell” in “Roger Malvin’s Burial.”

boys and girls, or women” (Grenier). Considering that Lovewell did not Ambush the ten Indians who made him famous until nearly midnight, it would appear he cared less about their age and gender than he did about whether or not they were awake (Grenier).

Though Lovewell’s celebrity sprang from his second expedition, his third, eventually called “Lovewell’s Fight” would make him a legend. In the spring of 1725, Lovewell set out with forty-seven men to raid the Indian village of Pequawket to kill and scalp its inhabitants. They never made it to the village as an Abenaki hunting party discovered them and set an ambush. This fight, Lovewell’s Fight, is famous because even though the hunting party was twice the size of Lovewell’s expedition, Lovewell’s men killed nearly all of the Indians. Twelve of Lovewell’s men survived to tell the tale, which Hawthorne relates for his readers:

Imagination, by casting certain circumstances judicially into the shade, may see much to admire in the heroism of a little band who gave battle to twice their number in the heart of the enemy’s country. The open bravery displayed by both parties was in accordance with civilized ideas of valor; and chivalry itself might not blush to record the deeds of one or two individuals. The battle, though so fatal to those who fought, was not unfortunate in its consequences to the country; for it broke the strength of a tribe and conducted to the peace which subsisted during several ensuing years.

(“Roger Malvin’s Burial” 1)

One wonders if the judicially shaded circumstances Hawthorne refers to are those surrounding the actual purpose of Lovewell’s final expedition or the fact that he was unable to carry out that purpose as a consequence of walking into the Abenaki’s trap. Whichever is the case, it is clear that neither history nor Hawthorne has any issue with Lovewell’s literally



making a living out of hunting and killing Indians, at least one of whom was a young boy. Indeed, the only stipulation made to the many state-sponsored scalp-hunting parties during this period was that children under ten years of age should be taken captive and sold as slaves rather than scalped (Grenier).<sup>10</sup> However, by receiving acclaim and payment for her actions, Dustan violated the nineteenth-century's tenets of True Womanhood, while the protagonist of "The Panther Captivity" upheld those tenets and the model for the Female Gothic heroine. Hawthorne's nineteenth-century sensibilities and his ties to domestic ideology vilify Dustan for doing out of necessity, fear, and revenge what Lovewell and his men did strictly for profit. Therefore, it becomes clear that history vilifies Dustan not for scalp hunting but for scalp hunting while female.

### **E.D.E.N. Southworth, Propriety, and the Limits of Protest**

Read in terms of early American women's forced and enforced economic dependence, Dustan is simply the first in a long line of women who inadvertently overstepped societal boundaries for appropriate behavior in her attempts at survival. While Dustan's case is certainly not what one would consider the norm in such discussions, subsisting without censure occupied a prominent position in nineteenth-century women's

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<sup>10</sup> Records of scalp bounties can be found in Colonial American legal records from the mid-1670s on. For more on the origins of scalping, see James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, "The Unkindest Cut, or, Who Invented Scalping?" *WMQ*, no. 37, 1980, pp. 451-72. Axtell and Sturtevant describe how the original Indian practice of scalping was adopted and incorporated into European war-making culture during the colonial period.

rights discourse from the eighteenth century onward and continues to be a controversial topic even today. Furthermore, as women working to support themselves or their families became a more familiar topic in literature of the middle third of the nineteenth century, authors—who were often women working to support themselves or their families in their own right—had to negotiate a precarious position between propriety and protest.

Published serially in the *New York Ledger* from 5 February to 9 July 1859, E.D.E.N. Southworth's Gothic-inspired *The Hidden Hand* introduces readers to Capitola Black, more familiarly referred to as Cap. Cap is heir to an enormous fortune that her uncle, Gabriel Le Noir, will do almost anything to possess. He murders his brother and Cap's father, Eugene, and places Cap's mother in an insane asylum after she gives birth to a stillborn child. Gabriel believes himself to be clear of any legal barriers between himself and his brother's fortune, since their father's will indicated that if Eugene died without fathering children, Gabriel should receive the inheritance. Unbeknownst to Gabriel, though, Cap's mother bore twins and convinced her nurse to smuggle the living twin, Cap, away to save her life. These truths are eventually discovered, and Cap inherits her fortune and marries her true love. However, readers initially meet Cap in the opening chapters of Southworth's tale after she finds herself arrested for cross-dressing in order to support herself.<sup>11</sup> In the courtroom, she relates the hardships she faced after the woman who had cared for her as a child left. When she explains that she began selling her clothes for food, the court Recorder tells her “before you became so destitute, you should have found *something* or other to do” (Southworth 43, author's

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<sup>11</sup> *The Hidden Hand* was serialized in the *Ledger* on three separate occasions, first in 1859, then again in 1868 and 1883, and finally published in book form in 1888.

emphasis). Capitola, Cap, then provides an exhaustive list of all the attempts she made at finding work, only to be told, “no” because she is a girl:

‘Sir, I was trying to get jobs every hour in the day. I’d have done *anything* honest . . . but as I was a *girl*, they had no work for me. . . . And so sir, while all the ragged boys I knew could get little jobs to earn bread, I, because I was a girl, was not allowed to carry a gentleman’s parcel, or black his boots, or shovel the snow off a shopkeeper’s pavement, or put in coal, or do *anything* that *I* could do just as well as *they*. And so because I was a girl, there seemed to be nothing but starvation or beggary before me.’  
(43-44, author’s emphasis)

Major Ira Warfield, whom Cap affectionately refers to as “Old Hurricane,” laments that such should have been the case, but immediately upon establishing himself as Cap’s guardian, sets upon the task of turning Cap into a perfect lady. He is not upset that she was unable to care for herself; he is upset that no guardian was there to care for her. Interestingly, though Cap shows no interest in being tamed, once “well and properly attired” as a young woman, she blushed “at the recollection of her male attire” (50-51). Thus, Southworth presents the first of many instances in which Cap paradoxically reifies and refuses the tenets of True Womanhood, creating a moderate commentary on women’s rights via an otherwise liberal, nearly radical, protagonist.

To discover the reason for Southworth’s careful presentation of Cap’s rebelliousness, one need look no further than the editor to whom she owed her livelihood: Robert Bonner. Southworth describes the day Bonner offered to publish her work for “double as much, at least, as you have ever received from any other newspaper publisher” as a day “blessed

beyond all the other days of my life” (qtd. in Dobson xviii). Though Bonner is remembered as an extremely paternalistic patron, his deals with authors such as Southworth, who received an annual income of \$10,000, and Fanny Fern, who received \$100 per column, for their work at the *Ledger*, were anything but charitable (Mott 357-358). By establishing a roster of dedicated writers whom readers loved, Bonner’s story paper reached a circulation upward of 400,000 per year by 1870; nearly three times more than any other leading periodical (359). Bonner did not accomplish this feat by narrowing his prospective reader pool through allegiances with political parties or ideologies; rather, he took the opposite approach by making almost no allegiances at all. In “Southworth and Seriality” Christopher Looby reports that “Bonner’s political program (if it can be called that) was essentially one of apolitical neutrality,” in fact, “*The Ledger* took no stand on slavery even in 1859 . . . when events were rapidly conspiring to make such determined neutrality on the most urgent political question of the day nearly impossible” (Looby 181).

When Bonner did comment directly on politics his editorials were usually worded in such a way as to leave the reader unclear as to who or what he actually supported. In an editorial titled “Woman’s True Sphere” published 14 May 1859, halfway through *The Hidden Hand*’s first serialization, however, he makes his opinions quite clear:

‘Transplant’ woman from the home to the marketplace, he wrote . . . and she becomes a ‘monster, a man-woman.’ ‘The so-called “strong-minded women” of the day,’ said Bonner, are women ‘with their own “independent” platform, self-condemned as infidels, as contemnners [*sic*] of marriage and its obligations, as the advocates of the “largest liberty” in the indulgence of the passions.’ (qtd. in Warren 70)

Even though Bonner was “sympathetic to women’s issues” he “was unable to separate women’s economic independence from ideas of sexual promiscuity and antimaternal feelings” (70). Knowing her editor and benefactor held such beliefs—or at least wished his readership to believe he did—it comes as no surprise that Southworth would present Cap as happy to be reestablished as a young woman under Old Hurricane’s protection and embarrassed by her previous masquerading as a boy, regardless of the financial stability, and not to mention personal safety, it had afforded her.

Southworth follows Bonner’s model in more than just her approach to Cap and women’s economic freedom, however. For example, David Dowling reads several scenes at *The Hidden Hand*’s conclusion in which Cap attempts to save the villain, Black Donald, from being hanged as a “parody of true womanhood” in which Southworth indicates to readers that “her true heart lies with Black Donald and not with conventional piety,” while Paul Christian Jones reads the same scenes as anti-gallows sentiment (“Capitol Bonds” 90 and 153-59). Furthermore, while Jones positions the trap door in the floor of Cap’s bedroom as further evidence of Southworth’s stance against capital punishment, Beth Lueck relies on the housekeeper, Mrs. Condiment’s, explanation of the trap door’s purpose for support of her reading of *The Hidden Hand* as an anti-slavery narrative (152-53 and 119). To further complicate matters, the scene in which Mrs. Condiment relates the story of the trap door is part of a tale she tells Cap that readers later learn is untrue. Thus, it is just as likely that slaves were involved in building Hurricane Hall as it is that they were not. One of the only issues on which scholars are certain Southworth did comment is women’s rights; however, they are divided even on this issue regarding how strenuously she called for reforms specific to

women's equality with men. Most recently, Elizabeth Stockton argues, "Southworth's novels do not advocate that women should become legal equals to men or that marriage should be treated as a contract like any other. Instead, her novels foreground the law's obligation to women, asserting that the law must protect women when male relations fail to do so" (244). Considering Southworth's general tactic of aligning her arguments with Bonner's, and recalling Bonner's comments on women who step outside the domestic sphere, Stockton is likely correct.

While the scholars mentioned above and others offer several theories regarding *The Hidden Hand*, none have discussed in any real depth the implications of Southworth's use of Gothic tropes in the tale. To be sure, nearly every article written on the story recognizes at some point that it is Gothic or Gothic-influenced, but none have examined what this means in terms of possible social commentary. Such a reading reveals that while Cap is certainly an intriguing character in her own right, she is even more so when we consider her in light of what we know about the Female Gothic, since she should easily fit into the mold of a Gothic heroine.

Based on the brief synopsis of *The Hidden Hand* provided earlier, Cap should fit easily into the mold of a typical Gothic heroine; however, readers learn the first night she stays in Hurricane Hall, Old Hurricane's mansion, that Cap is anything but typical. Mrs. Condiment leads Cap to her room "along narrow passages, and up and down dark, black stairs, and through bare and deserted rooms, and along other passages until she reached a remote chamber," which features a trap door in the floor (Southworth 72). Though the trap door does not appear to be a means of ingress for marauding ruffians, as is the case with

Emily St. Aubert's secret staircase, it still presents a mystery since no one seems to know what it leads to. Mrs. Condiment tells Cap a superstitious tale about the door's being installed as a means of trapping Indians and assures her, "if that horrible pit *has* any bottom, that bottom is strewn with human skeletons!" (75, author's emphasis). Mrs. Condiment offers Cap another room if she is too afraid to sleep here, though this alternative is leaky, damp, and full of bird's nests, but Cap reasons, "Those skeletons, supposing them to be there, cannot hurt me. I am not afraid of the dead—I only dread the living, and not them much either" (75). Later that night, Cap and her newly appointed attendant, a young slave named Pitapat, open the trap door and try to see the bottom, but even after dropping in a candle they see nothing but darkness. Cap's reaction to her inability immediately to solve the riddle of the trap door establishes for readers her true role in this novel. Rather than lying awake, worrying over what might lie beneath the door, as Emily does in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* after realizing she cannot lock hers, Cap says her prayers and goes to bed thinking to herself, "It is awful to go to bed over such a horrible mystery; but I *will* be a hero!" (77, author's emphasis). This scene and particularly this line are just one of many proofs that what Southworth presents to her readers is a parody of the Female Gothic plot in which Cap is not the heroine but the hero.

Cap makes good on her word by saving Clara Day who not only fits the Female Gothic heroine's mold but also, unlike Cap, accepts it. After her father's death, the orphan court appoints Gabriel Le Noir to be her guardian until she reaches her legal majority. Seeing a chance to gain control of Clara's fortune, Le Noir takes her to his aptly named Hidden House in Hidden Hollow where his son, Craven, attempts to woo her and make her his wife.

After she refuses his advances and his proposal of marriage, Le Noir informs her she has no choice:

Thanks to the wisdom of legislators, the law very properly invests the guardian with great latitude of discretionary power over the person and property of his ward—to be used, of course, for that ward’s best interest. And thus, my dear Clara, it is my duty, while holding this power over you, to exercise it for preventing the possibility of your *ever*, either now or at any future time, throwing yourself away upon a mere adventurer. To do this, I must provide you with a suitable husband. My son, Mr. Craven Le Noir . . . I command you to receive him for your destined husband.  
(Southworth 302, author’s emphasis).

This is not the first instance in which Southworth cites the laws governing women’s behavior during this period.<sup>12</sup> Clara, only seventeen years old, has few rights and little power when it comes to deciding whether or who to marry, and in the previous chapter she refers to property laws that would see all of Clara’s wealth in Craven’s power once they are wed (300). To stem the possibility of continued resistance on Clara’s part, Le Noir reminds her, “there are still more terrible evils for a woman” than marrying a man she hates; “there are evils, to escape which, such a woman would go down upon her bended knees to be made the

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of Southworth’s dealing with property laws in her fiction, see Bardes and Gosset’s chapter on “Women and Property Rights” in their study, *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. Rutgers UP, 1990.



wife of such a man” (302). These “evils” clearly refer to rape and the subsequent “life of dishonor” Clara would lead following it (302).

Seeing no other options, Clara contemplates suicide, but, fully usurping the role of the Gothic hero, Cap comes to her rescue. Southworth hints in previous chapters that it will be Cap, not Traverse, Clara’s betrothed, who will rescue Clara. Cap has heard much about the horrible traditions connected with the Hidden House and Hollow—. . . the mysterious assassination of Eugene Le Noir; the sudden disappearance of his youthful widow; the strange sights and sounds reported to be heard and seen about the mansion; . . . and above all, Capitola thought of the beautiful, strange girl, who was an inmate of that sinful and accursed house. (Southworth 274)

Though she has heard many rumors of the house, it is not until she hears of the beautiful young captive that Cap determines to unravel the mysteries of Hidden House. As she makes her way through the thickets and brambles of Hidden Hollow, she muses, “one would think this were the enchanted forest containing the castle of the sleeping beauty, and I was the knight destined to deliver her!” (Southworth 270). Cap eventually finds the Hidden House where she is introduced to Clara, and the two form an immediate friendship that ensures Cap’s repeated visits and lays the groundwork for her arriving just in time to help Clara escape a forced marriage.

Cap determines the only way for Clara to escape is for the two to trade places and, indeed, identities. Though it is tempting to read Cap and Clara as doppelgangers, they are actually mirror images of each other. Southworth describes their first meeting:

As they spoke, the eyes of the two young girls met. They were both good physiognomists and intuitive judges of character. Consequently, in the full meeting of their eyes, they read, understood and appreciated each other.

The pure, grave and gentle expression of Clara's countenance, touched the heart of Capitola.

The bright, frank, honest face of Cap recommended her to Clara.

The very opposite traits of their equally truthful characters attracted them to each other. (Southworth 282)

While it is tempting to read Cap and Clara as two halves of one whole person, clearly Cap is the only one of the two capable of surviving the Gothic heroine's situation. Only by adopting Cap's mannerisms is Clara able to escape the Hidden House, and though Cap remains behind in Clara's place and in Clara's clothes, she remains herself, musing over the adventure she has now found herself in rather than giving way to fear. Thus, it is only by ceasing to be Cap's mirror image and becoming her double that Clara can survive. Cap warns her, "if you go doing the sentimental you won't look like me a bit," assuring her that if she can "be cool, firm and alert" then "all will be well!" (Southworth 306). Cap, with her life experience and education in New York's Rag Alley, is able to keep her wits about her and reason her way through and out of dangerous situations as well as any hero. On the other hand, Clara, raised and educated in the sentimental tradition of True Womanhood, always under someone else's protection, never learns to protect herself and is, therefore, only able to pretend.

Cap must perform no small amount of imitation as well to pull off her scheme to outwit the Le Noirs. Dressed in Cap's clothes, Clara blesses Cap as her hero, walks out the

front door of her would-be prison, and rides away, free. Cap, meanwhile, remains behind in Clara's room and clothes awaiting the coach that will arrive to convey her to the chapel for the forced wedding. Indeed, even as Cap plays the part of the Gothic heroine, the inner monologue Southworth provides for readers indicates that she is never fearful as the Gothic heroine would normally be. She wonders, not about what will become of her, but about how Old Hurricane will react when he finds out what she has done and about how the Le Noirs will behave when they learn their plans have been thwarted. She does wonder if the Le Noirs will lock her "in the haunted room to live with the ghost" but upon "doing the sentimental up brown" when the housekeeper comes within hearing, she laughs at her acting ability and the fact that she will likely be "chawed right up" as soon as she is discovered (312-13). Her flippant disregard for the real danger in which she has placed herself is not at all out of character for Cap, and it is acceptable to readers because they know she has sent Clara off with a plan to inform others of her whereabouts and ensure her safety if she is unable to secure it on her own. She remains in character as Clara until the priest asks if she will take Craven as her husband at which point she throws aside her veil and reveals her true identity, explaining to Craven and Le Noir they have both been "outwitted by a girl" and their victim has long since fled to safety, out of their reach (316). Cap's own hero, Herbert Greyson, arrives just in time to ensure the Le Noirs do not flee the scene, but the victory is otherwise all thanks to Cap. Notably, upon her arrival home, Old Hurricane hears her tale and informs Cap, "you deserve to have been a man," which is "his highest style of praise," but, in the presence of Herbert, she relinquishes the role of hero and becomes, again, a "Miss Nancy" (319 and 329).

Even though Cap is able to escape the boundaries of her domestic sphere when Old Hurricane is home, once Herbert arrives she finds herself captive in it:

Cap had to content herself for a week with quiet mornings of needlework at her workstand, with Herbert to read to or talk with her; sober afternoon rides, attended by Herbert and Old Hurricane; and hum-drum evenings at the chessboard, with the same Herbert, while Major Warfield dozed in a great ‘sleepy hollow’ of an arm chair.

(Southworth 329)

It is clear from this description that even though Cap refers to Herbert as her “dear, darling, sweet Herbert,” she is bored by the domesticity into which his presence necessarily places her (470). In fact, Cap’s ultimate marriage with Herbert seems less the likely conclusion of Cap’s adventures than the ending demanded by nineteenth-century society—which, indeed, it is. Cap herself is somewhat surprised at Herbert’s “downright practical proposal of marriage”:

‘Upon my word, he takes my consent very coolly as a matter of course, and even forces upon me the disagreeable duty of asking myself of my own uncle! Whoever heard of such proceedings! If he were not coming home from the wars, I declare I should get angry; but I won’t get upon my dignity with Herbert,—dear, darling, sweet Herbert—if it were anybody else, shouldn’t they know the difference between their liege lady and Tom Trotter? However, as it’s Herbert, here goes! (470)

Southworth attempts to balance Cap’s calm acceptance of Herbert’s assumption that she will accept his marriage proposal by allowing her one final adventure in which she frees the villain, Black Donald, from prison and gives him the money she received for catching him in

the first place. This final act of defiance completed, Cap and Herbert marry and move to her estate, The Hidden House, where Southworth assures her readers, “I know for a positive fact, that our Cap sometimes gives her ‘dear, darling, sweet Herbert,’ the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue, which of course he deserves” (485). Thus, even though Southworth’s tale is largely one of female freedom and an illustration of women’s ability to provide for themselves when properly equipped, she is careful to keep her heroine safely within *Ledger*’s acceptable boundaries for political protest and, thus, imprisoned within the domestic sphere.

Even more than these scenes from her most famous story, Southworth’s life illustrates well the captivity in which nineteenth-century women found themselves as a result of laws associated with property and wages. After splitting with her husband, Southworth worked as a teacher, one of only a few acceptable jobs for women in the mid-nineteenth century and began writing stories in hopes of supplementing her meager income. Her correspondence and diaries depict a woman literally working herself to death to support her children, and it is likely she continued supporting her husband to some degree until his death in the early 1860s (Dobson xix).<sup>13</sup> Writers like Southworth and Fanny Fern were able to use this massive readership to disseminate their messages regarding the antiquated web of laws that effectively subjected women to a life of Gothic captivity. But, as the example of Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* indicates, they were careful to ensure their readers understood that, even for the most well-equipped of heroines, escape from domestic captivity

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<sup>13</sup> See also Melissa Homestead’s *E.D.E.N. Southworth: Recovering a Nineteenth-Century Popular Novelist* for biographical context in Southworth’s life.

would not be assured until not only the laws but also the social mores that upheld them changed.

### **Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, and “the Market”**

Like Southworth, both Rebecca Harding Davis and Louisa May Alcott wrote a variety of sensational and Gothic tales, many of which feature women struggling to find a means of supporting themselves, and these tales often focus on the difficulties women characters face when trying to reconcile the demands of the domestic sphere with the job market.<sup>14</sup> Davis envisions an ideal union of domesticity and self-sufficiency in the conclusion of “In the Market,” discussed earlier in this chapter. Davis’s Margaret Porter only marries her lifelong love, Goddard, after both he and she are financially secure in their own rights. Furthermore, Margaret maintains her herb farm even after her marriage, continuing to contribute both to her family’s wealth and to the employment opportunities of the women in her village. Davis describes for Margaret a nearly utopic existence in which she continues to superintend her business and ensures her daughters each have “a trade or profession, which they can use if the necessity ever comes for them to make their own living” (57). The only hindrance to this perfect life is “the perpetual presence of her sister, Clara, and her half dozen

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to those tales discussed here, Davis discusses women’s economic dependence and rights in most her novels and short stories, in addition to several other popular reform issues. Some of Alcott’s tales that comment directly on women’s economic dependence (again, in addition to those discussed here), include *Little Women* (1868), “Behind a Mask: or, A Women’s Power” (1866), and *Hospital Sketches* (1863).

of children, who were left dependent upon herself and George Goddard by Geasly's sudden, insolvent death" (Davis 57). Unlike Margaret, Clara chose marriage to Mr. Geasly as her "escape" from True Womanhood's domestic prison only to discover it was no escape at all. Worrying that her daughters may not find good marriages, Clara cries, "May God help poor women!" to which Margaret responds, "May He rather show them how to help themselves" (57). Though Davis admits through Clara that agriculture is not a cure-all for the problem of women's enforced dependence upon men, she concludes by reminding her readers that "there is no prison from which there is not a means of escape" (57). In other words, all women have within them the power to escape captivity in the domestic sphere.

Alcott offers a similar narrative but in a much more conservative tone in *Work: A Story of Experience* (1872). First published serially in Henry Ward Beecher's *The Christian Union*, *Work* not only chronicles Christie's struggles as she attempts to make her way in the world but also highlights Alcott's own experiences in and on the job market. Like Davis's Margaret Porter, Alcott's Christie Devon recognizes the pressure her dependent position places upon her Uncle Enos, and his family. Wishing to make her own way in the world, rather than depend upon others, Christie points out that, had she been a boy, she would already have been told to make shift for herself (Alcott 9). Christie's Aunt Betsey, tries to convince her that she should be content with her life as a man will soon turn up to take her from her boredom, but Christie insists she is "not going to wait for any man to give me independence, if I can earn it for myself" (Alcott 9). Like Davis's Margaret, Christie recognizes all too well the captivity inherent in True Womanhood and vows "to break loose

from this narrow life, go out into the world and see what she could do for herself” (Alcott 13).

Davis and Alcott both enumerate a list of jobs nineteenth-century society considers respectable for a young woman; however, their respective lists include some telling differences. While Davis includes teaching, clerical work, type-setting, sewing, factory work, service, and even prostitution, Alcott includes only five possibilities, which she offers as chapter titles: servant, actress, governess, companion, and seamstress. Granted, Alcott limits her sample of women’s jobs to those that she had held herself; however, her options, when compared to Davis’s, are also centered on the home. Only as an actress does Christie truly move outside the domestic sphere, and she nearly dies as a result. After three years of acting, Christie realizes that she has become jaded and discontent and wonders “If three years of this life have made me this, what shall I be in ten? A fine actress perhaps, but how good a woman?” (Alcott 43). She tries to convince herself not to mind the change, exclaiming, “No one cares what I am, so why care myself? Why not go on and get as much fame as I can? Success gives me power if it cannot give me happiness, and I must have some reward for my hard work” (43). On what will become her last night on the stage, Christie nearly dies saving her friend, Lucy’s, life when a piece of stage rigging falls from the rafters, and as Lucy later nurses her back to health, Christie discovers “dependence might be made endurable by the sympathy of unsuspected friends” (47). Alcott tempers her condemnation of acting as a profession for women by clarifying that while it is perfectly respectable, not all women can handle its temptations. Christie’s “earnest nature” causes the “mimic life” of acting to appear unsatisfactory, so she determines to “return to the old ways, dull but safe, and plod along till I



find my real place and work” (48). Rather tellingly, once Christie regains her health, she takes a job as a governess, submerging herself deep within the domestic sphere where she (again, rather tellingly) regains her health and happiness—at least for a time.

Christie’s next venture outside of domestic employment is as a seamstress. Unlike many women of the time who took sewing into their homes, Christie labors in a workroom with twelve other women where she meets Rachel, whom she later discovers is a fallen woman. When the forewoman of the establishment discovers Rachel’s history, she fires her and Christie leaves, refusing to work for “such a narrow-minded, cold-hearted woman” (Alcott 111). Christie then proceeds to take home sewing from another establishment, but “deprived of the active, cheerful influences she most needed, her mind preyed on itself, slowly and surely” (117). Christie falls ill and becomes deeply depressed; eventually she contemplates suicide but is rescued by Rachel. Here, Alcott attempts to make sense of the issues facing women in need of work during this period:

There are many Christies, willing to work, yet unable to bear the contact with coarser natures which makes labor seem degrading, or to endure the hard struggle for the bare necessities of life when life has lost all that makes it beautiful. People wonder when such as she say they can find little to do; but to those who know nothing of the pangs of pride, the sacrifices of feeling, the martyrdoms of youth, love, hope, and ambition that go on under the faded cloaks of these poor gentlewomen, who tell them to go into factories, or scrub in kitchens, for there is work enough for all, the most convincing answer would be, ‘Try it.’ (117)

Put simply, Alcott explicitly agrees with society's differentiation between men's and women's work, especially when the woman in question is from a genteel family. Such a woman must work in a place where she can find companionship and sisterly love.

While Alcott views certain work as more suited to women than others, Davis makes no such distinctions. Approaching Dr. Evoort about renting his land to begin raising herbs for profit in "In the Market," Margaret tells the doctor she made the money for rent sewing but explains that even though sewing is "a more feminine way" to make money, she does not wish to continue with it since "it is a more feminine way, and consequently poorly paid" (Davis 55). Dr. Evoort eventually agrees to rent the land to Margaret, and she begins working it immediately. Unlike Alcott's Christie who performs nearly all her work (save acting) in the privacy of the domestic sphere, Margaret is "brought before the town as a strong-minded reformer" (55). While Christie withers under society's eye, becoming ill and jaded, Margaret "never had looked so fresh and pretty as with her neat, coarse dress and flushed cheeks" working all day each day in the field where all the townspeople could see her (55). After three years of struggle, Margaret finally experiences success, but this, again, she handles much differently than Alcott's Christie. Like Christie, she helps her family and friends where she can, but unlike Christie, Margaret continues working the same job, relying on herself, her will, and her talent even after she marries. These variances between Christie and Margaret highlight a key difference between Alcott's and Davis's approaches to women's work and achievement of economic independence.

Readers today are likely to assume Alcott tempered her message in favor of women's economic independence for a more conservative audience at *The Christian Union*; however,

a brief glance at either the publication or its chief editor, Henry Ward Beecher, reveals no such tempering was needed. Beecher was a staunch supporter of women's suffrage and held several other progressive views including backing Grover Cleveland for president despite Cleveland's having fathered an illegitimate child.<sup>15</sup> Beecher's progressive views were evident in *The Christian Union* as well. In addition to publishing sermons, hymns, and prayers, the weekly paper also published such pieces as "Women Jurors in Wyoming" in which Judge J.W. Kingman applauds the effectiveness of women in the Wyoming Territory who, since being granted suffrage, had not only been appointed as jurors but also as justices of the peace (106). It is more likely, then, that Alcott, unmarried and dependent upon her writing for survival, did not wish to alienate any of her potential readers, liberal or conservative.

Indeed, the same could be said of Davis as she would not marry until 1863. Interestingly, though *Peterson's* would likely seem to a modern reader to be a more liberal periodical than *The Christian Union*, the opposite tended to be true. Popular, high-circulation newspapers and magazines such as *Peterson's* and *The New York Ledger* simply could not afford to back radical views since doing so placed them in danger of losing any readers who

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<sup>15</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of Beecher and the Beecher-Tilton scandal, see Korobkin's *Criminal Conversations*. Admittedly, Beecher's actions did not always fall perfectly in line with the doctrine's he professed. The most famous case in point would be his denunciation of Victoria Woodhull's advocacy for free love while he allegedly practiced its doctrines with his friend's wife, Elizabeth Tilton. Though Beecher was exonerated in this case, it was a rare moment in which he was not suspected of having at least one affair.

disagreed with those views. In the period under discussion in this study, *Peterson's* boasted circulation between 100,000 and 165,000, while *The Christian Union* claimed the largest circulation of any religious paper of the time at between 132,000 and 140,000 subscribers in 1873 after only three years in print (Mott 308 and 425). *The Christian Union's* immediate popularity is greatly attributed to Beecher's popularity, and its failure after Beecher's alleged affair with Elizabeth Tilton provides perhaps the best reason for why periodical publishers did not wish to be associated with scandals, personal or political. Following a series of financial setbacks, not the least of which was the Panic of 1873, Beecher's popularity was destroyed when he was tried for committing adultery. As a result, *The Christian Union's* circulation fell to just 10,000 by 1877 when Beecher sold his interest in the paper (Mott 426). Examples like this make clear why editors such as C. J. Peterson, who did occasionally weigh in on issues of politics, tended to do so in a decidedly moderate tone. For example, though *Peterson's* clearly supported the Union in the Civil War, Peterson himself advocated for a more gradual end to slavery, which he alludes to in his pseudonymously published anti-Tom novel *The Cabin and the Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters* (1852). In the interest of appealing to the largest audience possible, such magazines tended toward a more moderate stance, though editorials and publications in both *Peterson's* and *The Ledger* do indicate support at least for the consideration of expanding women's rights.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while Davis is more progressive in her presentation of Margaret as an economically independent and well-

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<sup>16</sup> The simple fact that Peterson published so much of Davis's obviously suffragist work and that Robert Bonner of the *Ledger* maintained E.D.E.N. Southworth and Fanny Fern as dedicated writers proves their support of many women's reform issues.

respected woman both prior to and following her marriage, she, like Alcott, slightly tempers her message. Once financially solvent, both Margaret and Christie focus their attention on providing care and creating employment opportunities for the less fortunate. Thus, work becomes aligned with the common form of women's "employment" during this period: philanthropy. In other words, both Davis and Alcott are able to make women's economic independence socially acceptable by presenting it as a means of helping other women. However, except for Margaret, the women in each of the nineteenth-century tales discussed so far, *The Hidden Hand*, *Work*, and "In the Market," are unmarried. Without a husband, society views them as in need of protection; however, once a woman marries, not only is she considered taken care of, she no longer legally exists.

### **Davis, *The Second Life*, and Coverture**

Published two years after "In the Market," Davis's *The Second Life* (1863) tells the story of Esther Lashley who agrees to her aunt's dying wish that she marry her cousin, Clayton Lashley, rather than the man she truly loves, John Lashley. Esther's promise is given, and the marriage ceremony takes place while John is away for three weeks on business. When John returns, he finds Esther married to his brother, Clayton, and living in the house he and Esther had originally planned for themselves. Clayton informs his brother, "I took your house, John, thinking your bird would prefer the nest she had helped to build" (Davis 124). This passing reference to Esther as a bird aligns their home less with a nest than a birdcage, and Clayton's command to Esther to speak and tell John she is now Clayton's wife becomes reminiscent of the same type of command one would give to a trained parrot.

Once Esther informs John that she is married to Clayton, John relates that “she was dead to me,” which is the same view society holds of her (124). Under the laws of coverture, Esther no longer exists separate from Clayton and as a man is free to treat himself in the manner he deems most fit, so is he able to treat his wife as he likes.

Davis illustrates Esther’s “covered” position in marriage by relating her story through a series of male narrators rather than allowing her to speak for herself. Indeed, most of the men telling her tale believe her dead, and Davis’s primary narrator, John Lashley, only hopes that she is alive. John, now a wealthy banker, fled West after Esther and Clayton’s marriage, but he returns East after the ghost or image of Esther comes to him—not unlike the voice of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*—in a vision on a cold, foggy night in San Francisco crying, “John Lashley! Help! Help!” (34). Less than two full pages into the tale, Davis has presented readers with the first of many, as Jane Rose describes, “conventional [Gothic] elements such as villainy, insanity, unlikely coincidences, and total resolution” that will appear throughout *The Second Life* (40). These elements, though, which Davis includes in many of her works, do more than simply entertain. They expose social iniquities and inspire not only reflection on the reader’s part regarding his or her own potential immorality but also action through social reform, in this case, reform of coverture laws. Furthermore, by publishing her tale in the popular and widely circulated *Peterson’s Ladies’ Magazine*, Davis is able to reach a very broad audience, and one perhaps more inclined to answer her call for reform, than that associated with the *Atlantic Monthly*, which also published much of her work and which I discuss in the next chapter.

Upon returning from San Francisco, John discovers Esther has been accused of Clayton's murder after enduring a decade of his torture. Indeed, when relating what he knows of Esther's ten years with Clayton to John, John's brother, Robert, points out that after they moved to a small home in Pennsylvania, Esther "never was known to leave the house, except to pace up and down the garden walks each day" and while he did not know precisely why Clayton had chosen to move his family, he thought perhaps "he could better torture Esther there" without family and acquaintances to object (Davis 293). Though acquitted due to lack of evidence, Esther disappeared after giving up her son, Pressley, to John and Clayton's brother, Robert, and she has been assumed dead ever since. John, refusing to believe her dead, sets off to find her, and, with the help of his niece, Emmy, is ultimately successful. Shortly following Esther's return, Pressley also returns and is reunited with the mother he has always thought dead.

One of the most recognizable Gothic devices Davis includes in this tale is the grotesque, animal-like form with which Pressley travels when John first meets him on a ship bound east. Upon reaching Pittsburg, John catches a brief glimpse of Pressley's "passenger": "A horrible, vague shape, that might have been bestial or human, but that from out of its wrappings, there was a great skinny, bony arm extended, covered with hair even to the claws. Clutching: always clutching: the same unceasing motion." (Davis, 206). Readers are almost allowed to forget about this creature until Pressley returns at the close of the penultimate installment of *The Second Life*. John tells Pressley he "looked as if some vampire-bat had been sucking your blood and soul out night after night" (352). Pressley responds with a "desolate, mocking laugh . . . You choose your similitudes well. I think I belong to a

vampire, fresh from glutting itself in graves . . . My fate is fixed” (353). The reader soon learns this “vampire’s” identity: it is Clayton, whom Pressley has recently rescued from a Missouri poorhouse and who has fallen into senility and insanity. The news of Clayton’s “undead” status is both a boon and a bane. On the one hand, it frees Pressley and Emmy to marry, since Robert had not wanted to part with his daughter to a man whose mother’s name was tainted by charges of murder. On the other hand, in true, True Woman fashion, Esther insists on caring for her long-lost husband: after all, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.

Notably, after she tells John that she and Clayton have married, readers do not hear Esther’s voice again until after they learn of Clayton’s “death” and hear the facts in her case which were unable to prove her a murderer. Legally, once Clayton was considered dead, Esther would be free of coverture; however, having been accused of his murder, she was worse than dead or imprisoned: she was notorious. Though she was free to move about in society, she could barely find work enough to survive. John learns that she had an apple stand for a while and that she took in washing, but, as a woman, her opportunities for work were very few, and she barely survived (Davis 298). Once Clayton returns, however, even though neither readers nor characters know he has returned, Esther returns to life. Acquitted as a murderer, readers believe her simply to be widow; thus, she is allowed a voice, a life. John notes as he encounters Esther for the first time since his return that “she was weak, trembling on the verge of death, I must lead her very gently back to life,” and she even asks John, “Am I dead now? Are we both dead—?” (349). As Esther returns to life, still thinking Clayton dead, the possibility for future happiness with John seems real; however, her hopes are soon



destroyed once again as Pressley reveals that the “creature” he had transported on the ship was, indeed, his father, Clayton.

What follows is the second most recognizable Gothic device in the text: Clayton’s madness and subsequent confinement. In *Parlor Radical*, Jean Pfaelzer reads *The Second Life* as a “detective novel” that “raises the issue of self-defense as a justification for killing an abusive husband and calls into question the ethos of female masochism and endurance” (117). The detective novel aspect is easily understood as John spends the entirety of the novel attempting to discover the truth of Esther’s situation, but Pfaelzer’s second claim requires closer attention. Pfaelzer notes that Clayton “must be hidden and confined for his own protection” and that this represents “a gendered twist of narrative revenge” implying that Esther’s offer to care for Clayton essentially allows her to place Clayton in a position usually occupied by the opposite sex in Gothic: the madwoman in the attic (117). I agree with Pfaelzer to a point. Clayton can certainly be read as a madwoman to the extent that he fits that Gothic plot device; however, the device has two parts: the madwoman and her keeper. Since Davis herself introduced the *Jane Eyre* trope of what could only be described as an astral-projected call for help in the novel’s opening, we may continue with that text as a model, as *the* model for the madwoman in the attic as a plot device. And per the model, the madwoman is not “put away” for her own protection; she is confined so her keeper can pursue something resembling a normal life. This is certainly not the case with Esther and Clayton. It takes but one short scene to determine that Esther is not the “keeper” in this madwoman scenario; she is the captive:

Through the long creeping, lonesome evening, I walked to and fro on the solitary hilltop, watching the light burning in the farm house window, where Esther was caged with her foul charge; and, as I walked, I thought, may God forgive me! of how strong he was, with stouter frame, more massive lungs than either she or I, and how he would outlive us, swallow all our lives into his, as he had those dead years gone.

(Davis 428)

Esther in no way parallels Rochester in this scene, however Bertha-esque Clayton may appear. She is a prisoner, and, most tellingly, Davis removes her voice once again as her identity is subsumed beneath her husband's.

As with many of Davis's *Peterson's* tales, her choice of Gothic as the mode by which to issue calls for coverture reform raises several questions, especially when John informs his audience on the first page of the first installment that he will "account for nothing of a supernatural or mysterious character in these facts. They are facts" (33). Emphasizing that each experience John describes in this tale is, indeed, fact, should ensure this story has a place among Davis's Realist texts. However, it seems to do the opposite (especially when Esther "appears" to John on the next page). When dealing with a subject as important as women's rights under coverture and woman's role in the domestic sphere, why would Davis turn to a mode that would later cause scholars such as Pfaelzer to label this text as one of her "potboilers?" The answer is actually quite simple: Gothic texts are, by definition, disturbing. Realist texts, for the most part, are not. Peter Garrett explains in *Gothic Reflections* that

in its darkened and monstrous images, Gothic reflects the central nineteenth-century preoccupation with the relation of self and society, which it shares with more realistic

fiction, but reflects it in crisis and antagonism, where the self is estranged or abandoned, victimized or victimizing, absorbed in self-enclosure of madness, the excess of passion, or the transgression of crime. (3)

Thus, Gothic ceases to be antithetical to Realistic, and what many often refer to as Davis's "hackwork" and "potboilers" cease to be so. When we recognize the power inherent in the Gothic formula, as did Davis and many of her contemporaries, we can begin to understand why we have yet to shake off the Gothic beast.

In *The Second Life*, Davis illustrates for her readers how the restricted view produced by the "separate spheres" mentality in the Cult of True Womanhood turns Angels into Monsters. Because people outside of her domestic sphere were only exposed to Clayton's view of Esther—as Esther herself did not legally exist under coverture—they viewed her as a madwoman, a Monster capable of murdering her own husband. It is not until all secrets are revealed in the final installment of the novel that the reader discovers Esther has always been the Angel. Indeed, though Davis concludes this piece by informing the reader that John and Esther were finally able to begin their second life after Clayton commits suicide, the true second life in this tale is the one Esther lives in the public eye: the life of a Monster.

## **Conclusion**

As illustrated in the writings discussed above, the system of coverture and the separate spheres mentality often created for nineteenth-century women a life that echoed the theme of captivity so common in Gothic fiction. Women in this period had a very restricted area in which they could move without censure, and even when they are able to move outside

of the domestic sphere's boundaries, whether through travel like Dorcas Bourne or rebellion like Capitola Black, the restrictions associated with the role of True Womanhood and its conflation of economic independence with sexual promiscuity followed them wherever they went. Thus, the laws restricting women's rights in the nineteenth century created an atmosphere of domestic captivity that would eventually stifle even the freedom of one as rebellious as Cap.

However Gothic, and loathsome this system of captivity may appear, authors were careful to remind readers, often repeatedly, that there are fates worse than this for women who step too far outside the bounds of True Womanhood. Indeed, the ideology's second tenet, purity, is one that even Cap is most careful to ensure she never breaks, going so far as to challenge a man to a duel and shoot him six times in the face when he spreads a rumor that she has shared his bed. Granted, her gun is loaded only with dried peas, but her point is made and she procures from him a sworn confession that he has spread nothing but lies, thus ensuring her reputation remains unstained. For those who do fall though, there is no way to return even to the domestic captivity of True Womanhood. Instead, writers illustrate a different fate for those women who fall prey either to seducers or rapists which I discuss in the next chapter: live burial.

## CHAPTER TWO:

“I WILL FALL A CORPSE AT YOUR FEET”:

## (ANTI)SEDUCTION AND THE LIMINALITY OF LIVE BURIAL

Arnold van Gennep first outlined the anthropological concept of liminality in his pivotal work *Rites of Passage* to describe the middle stage in the tripartite structure of all rituals. The initial stage involves an individual's removal from a previously fixed state or social structure to a secondary, liminal or threshold state in which the individual is suspended between his or her previous state and the ultimate third phase of reintroduction into a new state or social structure. Victor Turner later expanded upon van Gennep's concept of liminality as a period of uncertainty and ambivalence by pointing out that this middle stage always involves some form of death. In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Turner includes a chapter on liminality titled “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” in which he designates van Gennep's middle stage of all rituals as an in-between state, a life-in-death:

The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible.’

The structural ‘invisibility’ of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge. (95-96)

In short, Turner describes the liminal persona as dying from what he or she once was in preparation for rebirth as something else. Liminality, then, is a process, as well as a state of being.<sup>1</sup>

Van Gennep's and Turner's research help to illustrate that a woman's "fall" through seduction or rape initiates a rite of passage in which she moves from her initial state of social acceptance into one of social rejection. Building on both van Gennep's and Turner's research, Elisabeth Bronfen constructs theories of liminality that deal specifically with artistic representation in her cornerstone feminist study, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. Bronfen posits two possible social constructions of femininity—"the extremely good, pure and helpless, or the extremely dangerous, chaotic and seductive"—that mirror the nineteenth-century conception of woman as either pure or fallen (181). Feminine death, whether literal or cultural, "serves as the site at which cultural norms can be debated" (181). Noting that liminality "often carries feminine encoding and suggests an equation between Woman, the threshold, and death," Bronfen concludes that Turner's model of liminality especially "applies both to social and to biological transitions, so that liminality may also involve a body socially dead but not bodily interred, as well as the decaying corpse" (198). Thus a woman transitioning from "good, pure, and helpless" to "dangerous, chaotic, and seductive" finds herself inhabiting a liminal space of social death

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<sup>1</sup> See also Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry's *Death and the Regeneration of Life* in which funerary practices of the Merina are viewed as illustrating a double death, the first which cleanses negative associations such as pollution and sorrow and the second which reasserts the continuity of order.

from which she can never fully escape since “the notion that rebirth marks the end of the death process denies the irreversible and terminable nature of death” (198). Through seduction or rape, the fallen woman enters a state of social/metaphorical live burial or life-in-death in which she remains until her physical death.

The fallen woman’s social death becomes immediately evident in the language used to narrate not only her fall but also her subsequent life and actions. Such language as well as representations of fallen women as the living dead springs from the tradition of the Male Gothic exemplified in Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). In contrast to the Female plot, the much more prurient Male Gothic narrative relies on tragedy to drive the action, and it does not shy away from horror. Lewis was less famous than infamous for his work in *The Monk* as the scandal surrounding its licentious material—he was, after all, a member of Parliament—led not only to increased readership, but also to a lawsuit (1796-1797) resulting in the recall of all existing copies of the novel. Lewis’s novel focuses on Ambrosio, a Capuchin Monk who, except in Lewis’s bowdlerized fourth edition produced after the aforementioned lawsuit, is not a sympathetic character.

Ambrosio is perhaps the most well-known and hated Gothic villain in the genre’s history. Initially concerned with improving his position within the monastery, Ambrosio eventually becomes consumed by his obsession with Rosario, a young monk whom he later discovers to be his admirer, Matilda, disguised as a young man.<sup>2</sup> His desire is thwarted by

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<sup>2</sup> Rosario/Matilda and her relationship with Ambrosio have become a subject of much discussion in the burgeoning field of Queer Gothic Studies. In his chapter in *Queering the Gothic* (2009), “Love in a Convent: Or, Gothic and the Perverse Father of Queer

Matilda's willingness to comply with his sexual advances, so, after a brief affair, he turns his attention to the virtuous Antonia whom he hopes to take by force. Now completely at the mercy of his libido, Ambrosio's pursuit of sexual gratification drives the novel's action, as opposed to any concerns with power or property. He concocts a plan to dose Antonia with a drug that will simulate death—a plot device reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet* that would continue to appear especially in Male Gothic novels—and presides over her funeral and burial in an underground tomb. There, he waits for her to wake to find herself surrounded by rotting corpses before raping her.

As the preceding discussion makes clear, live burial is not a plot device unique to Lewis or even to the Male Gothic; however, its treatment in this scene is unique in that the narrative stays with Antonia both through and following her rape. After Ambrosio “gradually made himself Master of her person,” Antonia attempts to leave the tomb. When Ambrosio stops her, she asks, ““What would you more? . . . Is not my ruin compleated [*sic*]? Am I not undone, undone for ever? Is not your cruelty contented, or have I yet more to suffer? Let me depart. Let me return to my home and weep unrestrained my sham and my affliction!”” (Lewis 384-85). Ambrosio responds:

Wretched Girl, you must stay here with me! Here amidst these lonely Tombs, these images of Death, these rotting loathsome corrupted bodies! Here shall you stay, and

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Enjoyment,” Dale Townshend identifies Ambrosio as one of the “queer fathers of Gothic writing [who] are nothing if not polymorphously perverse (30). See also Max Fincher's “The Gothic as Camp: Queer Aesthetics in *The Monk*” (2006) for further examination of bodily misinterpretation and perception of gender and desire.



witness my sufferings witness, what it is to die in the horrors of despondency, and breathe the last groan in blasphemy and curses! And who am I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal Witch! was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul into infamy? Have you not made me a perjured Hypocrite, a Ravisher, an Assassin! (385)

Thus, Lewis presents not only live burial and living death as the fate of the fallen woman but also an early iteration of the type of victim blaming language that continues to plague rape cases even today. Had Antonia not been so beautiful and so innocent, Ambrosio would not have been “seduced” into raping her. Though it may seem so, Lewis in no way condones Ambrosio’s actions or sympathizes with his character. Ambrosio is not only punished, but horribly punished for his crimes. After stabbing Antonia to death, he attempts to sell his soul to the Devil to escape execution for her murder; however, his actions are contemptuous even to Satan. The Devil saves Ambrosio from his prison only to drop him from the sky onto a riverbank where he lies battered and broken for seven days being eaten alive by eagles and insects until a flood finally drowns him.

While Lewis’s treatment of Antonia’s situation is unique in Gothic fiction, her experience of literal live burial is not even unique in *The Monk*. Agnes de Medina, is a virtuous young maiden in love with Don Raymond, whom she intends to marry; however, her family wishes her to become a nun as per Agnes’s mother’s dying wish. Her family sends her to the convent from which she flees with Don Raymond; however, they are discovered by Ambrosio who turns Agnes over to the prioress of the abbey for punishment. Discovering Agnes’s pregnancy, the prioress fakes Agnes’s death in order to enact on her an antiquated

Catholic ritual of punishment for fallen women. The prioress describes that below the burial vaults in which Agnes awakened after her faked death “there exist Prisons, intended to receive such criminals as yourself: Artfully is their entrance concealed, and She who enters them, must resign all hopes of liberty” (Lewis 408). Once relegated to her cell, Agnes laments her fate:

At one time my prospects had appeared so bright, so flattering! Now all was lost to me. Friends, comfort, society, happiness, in one moment I was deprived of all! Dead to the world, Dead to pleasure, I lived to nothing but the sense of misery. How fair did that world seem to me, from which I was for ever excluded! How many loved objects did it contain, whom I never should behold again! (411)

Readers recognize that Agnes mourns not only the loss of succor she expected to receive in the convent but also the loss of society she would have enjoyed had she not chosen to run away with Raymond. She recognizes herself as dead not only because she is buried alive but also because she is a fallen woman.

In his presentation of two fallen women who each experience literal live burial, Lewis establishes a framework upon which authors and legislators would build theories of punishment for fallen women for the next century. A modern reader would assume the difference between the two women’s circumstances is one of rape versus consensual sex; however, the delineation is actually between sex with and sex without the intention of future marriage. Antonia is a victim of rape, and she and Ambrosio clearly have no intention of marrying one another, thus Antonia’s punishment for her fall is death. Agnes and Raymond, on the other hand, did intend to marry; Agnes consented to intercourse with Raymond (which

in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century terms meant she was seduced). After spending what seems to be months in her underground cell and delivering and burying her child, Agnes finally gains freedom with the help of another nun and marries Raymond. As a promise of marriage was involved, though Agnes is still harshly punished for overstepping the bounds of True Womanhood, her punishment does not require her physical death.

### ***Charlotte Temple's American Live Burial***

The promise of marriage became for authors of seduction narratives a common trope for instigating an otherwise virtuous young woman's fall. For literary scholars, one of the most memorable cases of seduction and abandonment occurs in Susanna Rowson's enormously popular 1794 novel *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*.<sup>3</sup> Though critics such as Jane Tompkins, Cathy Davidson, and Marion Rust have all discussed the seductive and cautionary language Rowson employs in her novel, none have discussed how this language signals not only Charlotte's fall through seduction but also her social death. Rowson's

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<sup>3</sup> Though commonly considered an American novel, *Charlotte Temple* was actually first published in England in 1791. Admittedly, modern lay readers and even literary scholars are likely more familiar with Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* as the quintessential nineteenth-century fallen woman. However, her situation is less one of seduction and abandonment than of illicit love. Indeed, Hester is less a fallen woman than an anti-fallen woman; a woman who, despite engaging in extra-marital sex, maintains what nineteenth-century readers (and modern reader for that matter) define as domestic virtue.

*Charlotte Temple* follows the eponymous protagonist as a British soldier, Montraville, on his way to fight in the American Revolution convinces her to accompany him to America where he abandons her after she becomes pregnant. Though Rowson never clearly states when or where Charlotte ultimately succumbs to Montraville's advances, readers gather from the narrative's language that she loses her virginity during the voyage from England to America. Immediately upon her arrival in New York and in the space of just a few lines, Charlotte transitions from pure to fallen when Mrs. Beauchamp attempts to make her acquaintance only to be pulled away by her father who informs her that Charlotte is Montraville's mistress. Charlotte hears Mrs. Beauchamp say, "What a pity!" and wonders, "And am I already fallen so low?" (Rowson 47-48). In one of many narrative interruptions, Rowson informs her readers of what Charlotte's future entails as a seduced woman rather than a wife: "She feels herself a poor solitary being in the midst of surrounding multitudes; shame bows her to the earth, remorse tears her distracted mind, and guilt, poverty, and disease close the dreadful scene: she sinks unnoticed to oblivion" (51). The only possible future for Charlotte is a lonely and early death since she is, indeed, already socially dead.

Surprisingly, though live burial would seem to be a common subject of discussion for Gothic scholars, few actually discuss the trope in anything other than indirect and psychological terms. Eve Sedgwick, for example, includes a chapter in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* in which she discusses the language of live burial as it appears in Thomas de Quincey's writing. However, she focuses specifically on Gothic fiction's and de Quincey's delineations between "the inside life and the outside life" of fictional characters (13). In other words, she focuses on a character's inner monologue as opposed to what he or

she actually speaks in dialogue in order to illustrate how a given character's thoughts might be "buried alive." She does not, however, extend her critique to consider how social conceptions of a given individual might shape his or her ability to live a life in society. Nineteenth-century social mores certainly shaped individuals' conceptions of interiority, but so too did they determine an individual's, and especially a woman's, ability to engage in a community, particularly following a step too far outside The Cult of True Womanhood's domestic prison.

### **Live Burial and George Lippard's Defense of the Fallen Woman**

A fallen woman's social life was a relative consideration in the nineteenth century. Indeed, rather than being completely cut off from social interaction, a woman's fall rather indicated a move from one social circle (polite) to another (debauched). While many seduction narratives and moral reform texts focused on a fallen woman's exclusion from polite society, George Lippard focused his attention on the corrupt and depraved world in which the fallen woman might live. Lippard is not a writer known for shying away from depictions of any variety of sexual conduct, no matter who (or what) is involved. Lippard himself is a fairly obscure author by modern standards; however, in the decade following the serial publication of his most famous work, *The Quaker City; or The Monks of Monk Hall* (1844-1845), he became one of the most famous—and most reviled—American writers of the nineteenth century. David Reynolds suggests that by relying on the Gothic model of the newspaper serial novel (the *roman-feuilleton*) which "combined the sensationalism of the penny dreadful with a humanitarian emphasis on the miseries of the poor and the vices of the

rich,” Lippard constructed an urban Gothic prototype which anticipated the realism of such later authors as Rebecca Harding Davis, William Dean Howells, and Theodore Dreiser (*Lippard* 28 and 51).<sup>4</sup> Even in his novels, Lippard relies on the sensationalist style of periodical publication. Not unlike the style adopted much later by Fanny Fern in *Ruth Hall*, Lippard presents in *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (1853), a collection of sketches, some brief, some quite extensive, that more closely resemble what one encounters in serial periodical publication than the standard novel format. Throughout his life, he interspersed novel and newspaper publication in much the same manner he interspersed editing and writing for various newspapers. Therefore, even though *New York* was published as a stand-alone novel, its reintroduction of characters originally created for Lippard’s serial, *The Empire City* (1849), first published in his own *Quaker City Weekly*, as well as his general reliance on the newspaper serial as model for his style of writing makes *New York* a strong addition to this study.

Much of the criticism devoted to Lippard’s work focuses on the capitalist social critiques found in *The Quaker City*; however, as Frederick Frank points out, in addition to being an “innovative Gothicism, talented pornographer, socialist zealot, crusading journalist, union organizer, [and] pre-Marxian Marxist,” Lippard was also a “fervent feminist” (262).

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<sup>4</sup> Urban Gothic fiction is a subgenre of Gothic that takes cities and urban areas as its setting rather than the remote locations favored by earlier Gothic writers. The subgenre emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and is exemplified in works such as Eugène Sue’s *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842-43), G. W. M. Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48), and Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1854).

Likewise, Reynolds observes Lippard's obvious concern for women's rights (*Lippard* 58). Indeed, Lippard not only advocated for women's education, advancement, and equality in his writing, but he also actively participated in women's reform movements, including lobbying for Anti-Seduction Laws. While suffragists often compared women's situation, especially in marriage, to slavery, Reynolds states that Lippard believed that women's situation was worse even than slaves', and "only through organization would woman successfully advance her cause" (61). Lippard rejected societal notions of True Womanhood in his writing, opting instead to create his female characters emphatically as women (not Woman or ladies) who were often "independent, frankly sexual, or interestingly depraved" to foreground the humanity, the reality, of women in the nineteenth century (61). According to Reynolds, Lippard's women characters are "neither the innocent victims of the British penny dreadful nor the pure flowers of the American domestic novel" (34). Instead, rather than follow the model of the Gothic heroine or True Woman, Lippard presents his readers with the actual—and often flawed—human character of woman. Reynolds points out that Lippard "stresses that woman, like man, has animalistic impulses that are at once frighteningly destructive and richly alluring" in his novel *The Quaker City*, and this assertion is also present in *New York* (37). Rather than enforce the dominant belief that "men had a natural sexual energy which women did not possess," Lippard illustrates, in vivid detail, the strength of women's sexuality (Watt 7). In his portraits of fallen women in *New York*, Lippard illustrates that the woman herself is no more or less to blame for her fall than the man, and that she is often, indeed, innocent.

Lippard's treatment of the fallen woman is far different from that of other Gothic or dark reform writers of the nineteenth century and before. Typically, the purpose of the fallen woman, having stepped outside of societal guidelines by losing her virginity or otherwise engaging in sexual intercourse outside of wedlock, is to "warn the ingénue of the consequences of unwedded sexual activity," according to M. Susan Anthony (69). By transgressing the boundaries imposed on women through *The Cult of True Womanhood*, the fallen woman enters a liminal space between polite society and death that she will continue to inhabit until her actual, physical death. Though George Watt divides the model of the fallen woman into two categories—"prostitutes and non-professional fallen women, the latter being victims of one mistake or simply male craft"—society did not distinguish between prostitutes, victims of rape, or adulterers, as this chapter's previous discussion makes clear (2). Whether the fault of the woman or not, once fallen, she can never fully be redeemed, and certainly can never marry since, as Grossberg notes, nineteenth-century courts "did not apply to fallen women the popular belief in the therapeutic effects of marriage, but instead treated them as unsalvageable victims of their own degeneracy" (42). Watt describes the absolute nature of the fall as "completely irreversible," and explains that the woman knows that "the fall, when it comes, will be final" (5).<sup>5</sup> Lippard, however, rather than simply presenting a

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<sup>5</sup> Though reform groups often called Magdalen Societies did exist with the purpose of rehabilitating fallen women for reentry into society, the need for their existence well into the twentieth century indicates society's continued tendency to label fallen women as "Others," thus highlighting rather than obfuscating their liminality. This concept is discussed in more detail below.



fallen woman and commanding his audience to damn her, expands upon her options and possible fate.

Lippard employs the seduction plot in order to illustrate both the fallen woman's and the virgin's innocence. Deborah Lutz establishes that in the traditional seduction narrative, such as that we see in Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, an aristocrat seduces and ruins a lower-class girl and then abandons her (76). Thus, initially, the seduction plot was a metaphor for the aristocracy's malevolent influence upon bourgeois society as well as a reaction against Byronism. Lutz traces in her study the progress of the brooding, romantic Byronic hero and his inherently erotic presence as he permeated not only Romantic and Gothic literature but also nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century philosophical thought. The dangerous or Byronic lover, whom Lutz describes as a combination of the Gothic villain and hero in one man is irresistibly seductive and destructive to those he loves and, therefore, immensely dangerous (62-67). Freedman follows this Byronic influence even further by illustrating how Byron's language actually infiltrated the American courtroom as court officials such as Justice Lumpkin interpreted women's resistance to men's sexual advances as "maidenly modesty," rather than actual non-consent in rape cases, insisting that "no modest girl or woman upon the occasion of her first carnal contact with a man, will readily submit to the intercourse without some reluctance and some show of resistance," Lumpkin opined, after which he quoted Lord Byron's *Don Juan* to support his assertion that "no" means "yes" (*Jones v. State*, qtd. in Freedman). In America, this theme shifted to reflect the class struggles that compose the central theme of Lippard's writing. Leslie Fiedler illustrates that while several authors attempted to "interlace the seduction story with reflections on the

relations of rich and poor, and especially on the desire of young men to marry for money,” none were as successful as Lippard (89). Fiedler suggests that “the seduction of a poor girl by a pampered gentleman” provided Lippard with “the key image for satisfying both the social and sexual demands of his audience” (245). However, considering his lifelong commitment to social reform, it seems more likely he chose to focus on the plight of the fallen woman, and women in general, as part of his larger project for the advancement of the oppressed masses.

However obvious the fallen woman’s innocence may seem to the modern reader, the nineteenth-century reader, for the most part, was equally as confident of her guilt. Nineteenth-century Americans, María Carla Sánchez points out, considered fallen women “not a product of widespread social decline but a source of it” (97). Bronfen reminds us that as a liminal being the fallen woman is dangerous, her realm is chaos, and in her position outside of society, no longer fully subject to its rules, she is seductive (198). Thus, moral reform was aimed less at providing an avenue for these women to return to society than it was at attempting to keep them away from men and impressionable (corruptible) young girls. Seeing the irony in this situation, Lippard insisted that it should be the men, not the women, who are punished for the fall. Indeed, on the first page of *The Quaker City*, Lippard suggests that seducing a woman is a worse crime than murder and that any man who undertakes such an endeavor should be put to immediate death. He offers a similar invective against men lacking respect for women in *New York*:

Take my word for it, (and if you look about the world, you’ll find it so,) the man who has not, somewhere about his heart, a high, a holy ideal of woman, —an ideal

hallowing every part of her being, as mother, sister, wife, —is a vile sort of man, anyhow you choose to look at him; a very vile man, rotten at the heart, and diffusing moral death wherever he goes. Avoid such a man, —not as you would the devil, for the devil is king to him, —but as you would avoid the last extreme of depravity, loathsome, not only for its wretchedness, but for its utter baseness. It's a good rule to go by, —never trust that man who has a low idea of woman, —trust him not with purse, with confidence, in the street or over your threshold, —trust him not: his influence is poison; and the atmosphere which he carries with him, is that of hell.

(Lippard 136)

Lippard's ideal of woman seems nearly to border on worship; however, he is not above illustrating that women are absolutely capable of corruption. For example, Madam Resimer is an abortionist and the proprietor of a whorehouse whom Lippard describes as “the murderess of mother and of the unborn child . . . the wretch who thrives by the slaughter of lost womanhood” (124).

*New York* covers a span of only a few days in which an effort is made to gather “the Seven,” heirs to a huge fortune in a meeting with Dr. Martin Fulmer to determine who will inherit Gulian Van Huyden's money. The novel's plot becomes a metaphor for the Gothic castle with its twists, turns, diversions, and pitfalls; however, rather than peopling his narrative with fainting Gothic heroines, Lippard fills the rooms of The Temple, Francis “Frank” Van Huyden's “house of ill repute,” with tempters and the tempted. First to make the reader's acquaintance is Frank, herself, who is “guilty of being the child of a man who sold me into shame” (Lippard 22). Indeed, as Frank narrates the story of her early years, the

reader learns that her mother and father sold her to Mr. Wallace Wareham for the sum of a furnished mansion and ten thousand dollars when she was still only a child. Wareham informs Frank that she was ““accordingly *educated* for”” him after this “adoption” (46).

Lippard draws in minute detail his portrait of Frank as a pure, innocent virgin having spent her early years in the home of Reverend Thomas Walworth with his housekeeper, and occasionally his son, Ernest. Frank describes a paradise of pastoral life to her mother when she comes to visit, complete with benevolent and indulgent father figure and detailed education in housekeeping, history, science, and religion. Furthermore, the housekeeper “always concluded her lesson with a mysterious intimation that, saving the good Mr. Walworth only, all the men in the world were monsters, more dangerous than the bears which ate up the bad children who mocked at Elijah” (26). Knowing that her financial success depends upon Frank’s accepting Wareham’s advances, Frank’s mother cannot abide her learning such important lessons—especially those about the danger men pose to women. Instead, wishing to keep her daughter naïve and susceptible to men’s advances, she informs Rev. Walworth that “this child will be a woman soon, and she must be prepared to enter upon life with all the accomplishments suitable to the position which she will occupy” (27). In other words, she must be prepared to enter into the city life of upper-class society; therefore, Frank’s mother prescribes “proper instruction in music and dancing” to ensure that when she returns to collect her daughter “in place of this pretty child you will present to me a beautiful and accomplished lady” (27).

Having completed her education, Frank’s mother collects her and ushers her into a new life in the city. With all the gallantry of a proper Gothic seduction, Frank’s mother

presents her daughter with the keys to her own fully furnished and staffed mansion immediately upon their arrival. However, after having lived in the city for only six days, Frank discovers that the mansion and all its contents, including herself, are the property of Wareham. Indeed, Wareham informs her that the combination of innocence and experience that constituted her education, the initial focus on piety with the final polish of feminine accomplishments, “made me mad to possess you at all hazards” (Lippard 46). Frank’s mother, after continued attempts to convince her daughter not to shun Wareham shifts her approach by illustrating the poverty Frank will endure if she refuses Wareham’s hand. Frank tries to convince her mother that she would rather work day and night or even beg than marry Wareham, but her mother simply wonders,

did you ever try poverty, my child? Did you ever know what the word meant— POVERTY? Did you ever work sixteen hours a day, at your needle, for as many pennies, walk the streets at dead of winter in half-naked feet, and go for two long days and nights without a morsel of food? Did you ever try it child? That’s the life which *poor* widows and their pretty daughters live in New York, my dear. (42)

Louisa May Alcott would echo this sentiment a decade later when she suggests that anyone who does not understand how women go without jobs when there are so many positions available in factories should simply try working those jobs themselves; then perhaps they would understand.<sup>6</sup> As she considers her situation, Frank comes to the same realization as many other nineteenth-century women when considering how to approach the prospect of an

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter One of this study as well as Louisa May Alcott’s *Work: A Story of Experience*.

unfavorable marriage: she is no longer a person but a commodity that can be “transferred body and soul to the possession of a man whom I hated in my very heart” (43). By providing this contrast, Lippard makes clear the reasons upon which he bases his theory that women’s plight was worse than slaves’. Unlike slaves who were often born into servitude, knowing no other life but slavery, women, Frank specifically, often began life as free and often indulged beings only to discover that the event for which they have been taught to prepare their entire lives, their marriage, is more likely to resemble a property exchange than a fairy tale.

Unwilling to submit, Frank searches for a means of escape, but, failing this, she informs her mother that she will “fall a corpse at your feet” before she will consent to marry Wareham. From this point, the closer Frank moves toward a possible fall, the more Lippard relies on the language of death and live burial to describe her circumstances.

Even before Wareham and Frank’s mother enact the sham marriage that seals Frank’s fate, her forced betrothal moves her into the liminal state between virginal purity and sexual experience. Frank hears the news that her marriage to Wareham is to take place the next day “as a condemned prisoner might hear the reading of his death warrant” and resolves that “he should not possess me living. He might marry me, but he should only place the bridal ring upon the hand of a corpse” (Lippard 43). The approach of Frank’s nuptials, which represent a rite of passage of their own, coupled with readers’ suspicion that Wareham’s intentions are likely not honorable lead readers to understand that, regardless of the reason, Frank will already have entered the liminal space between virginity and either marriage or debauchery on her wedding day. Regardless of whether she becomes Wareham’s legitimate wife or is tricked into forfeiting her virginity, Frank’s life of purity and innocence ends the moment she

learns she is meant for Wareham. Thus, it should come as little surprise when she procures the morphine she believes will deliver her from her fate by bringing about her physical death. Frank's mother, however, has anticipated this move and replaces the morphine with "a powerful anodyne, which sealed my senses for hours in sleep and—combined with the reaction of harrowing excitement—left me for days in a state of half dreamy consciousness" (44). Frank awakes to find Wareham "surveying me as a ghoul might look upon the dead body which he has stolen from the grave" and, indeed, having fallen victim to a fake marriage, she is now socially dead (46). She has only two choices remaining: stay with Wareham and her mother, or "begin the life of a poor seamstress, working sixteen hours per day for as many pennies, and at last, take to the streets for bread?" (46). Frank chooses the former and her resulting proximity to corruption coupled with the desire to forget her shame result in her falling even further from rape victim to prostitute, and eventually to poisoner.

Frank's situation illustrates a fairly "stock" fallen woman; however, at one point it appears as though Frank is about to be married and her life of trial and hardship put behind her. She approaches the marriage altar with the man readers know only as "Nameless," the ceremony is performed, rings and kisses exchanged, and Nameless implores her to "let the past be forgotten. Arisen from the graves of our past lives, it is our part to begin life anew" (Lippard 167). Neither Frank, nor Nameless is aware, however, that it is not they who will escape the graves of their pasts, but instead Nameless and his true wife who enters the marriage chamber just as Nameless is about to sign over his fortune to Frank and her father. With this entry, Frank's hopes of redemption are lost; however, according to the tenets of nineteenth-century True Womanhood, she should have expected this. Frank is a fallen

woman, and should never be allowed redemption, no matter that she did not fall of her own fault. Recognizing that she has missed her last chance to leave her life as The Midnight Queen, Frank drinks the poison her father had instructed her to give Nameless after they were wed.

While Frank's death would seem to reify nineteenth-century prevailing notions of a fallen woman's irredeemable status, Lippard eschews the standard by constructing for a Frank a near apotheosis. Her betrothed from childhood, Ernest, now a priest, at her side, Frank asks forgiveness of God, and remembers that she "was so innocent once, and did not know what sorrow was, and felt such gladness, at the sight of the sky, of the stars, of the flowers, —at the very breath of spring upon my cheek!" (Lippard 233). Frank then turns to Ernest, now a priest, for his forgiveness to which he responds "Forgive you! . . . God's blessing and His consolation be upon you now and forever! And His curse . . . be upon those, who brought you to this!" (233). Ernest sees nothing to forgive and rather blesses Frank while cursing those caused her fall. Though earlier in the scene she would not allow Ernest to touch her because she is "but a poor polluted thing," Frank now allows him to take her hand (232). Ernest's curse proves immediately effective as Frank's father realizes his hopes of seizing Nameless's fortune have been dashed. Frank has sacrificed her own life to save Nameless and this action reveals that, though fallen, she is still just as pure in heart as when she lived with the Reverend, which Lippard makes clear when he reveals that beneath the dark robe of the Midnight Queen, Frank wears a white gown. Frank, in fact, dies clad as a virgin not only in a white dress but also with a white veil to match. To further establish her return to purity, Nameless's "pure and beautiful" wife "stole silently to the side of the dead



woman, and smoothed her dark hair, and put her kiss upon her clammy forehead, and closed those eyes which had looked their last upon this world” (234). Now physically dead, Frank has not only exited the fallen woman’s liminal space but Lippard also places her on a level with one whom nineteenth-century society would label a True Woman.

One might wonder why Frank receives Lippard’s pardon while another of Lippard’s fallen women, Marion Merlin does not. Put simply, Frank restricts her vengeance to those men who are directly responsible for her fall: Wareham and her father. Otherwise, she simply does what she must to survive in a world that damns her to living death for circumstances over which she had no control. Initially, Marion follows a similar tack to Frank when she kills her first husband. By Lippard’s reckoning, readers can forgive her since she is simply retaliating against the one who wronged her. Matters are complicated a bit, however, when she murders her second husband, but, again, her motives appear genuine. Marion learns that her second husband plans to seduce a very young girl into a fake marriage, so she stabs him to death partially to save the girl and partially out of jealousy. Now a double murderer, Marion seeks to clear her conscience through confession and invites the Reverend Herman Barnhurst to her home to that end, but they instead begin an affair. Again, not unlike Frank, Marion seems on the verge of happiness as she and Barnhurst discuss why they do not simply marry, but Barnhurst informs her he is engaged to “the daughter of the wealthiest and most influential member” of his congregation, Fanny Lansdale (Lippard 220). Marion attempts to behave nobly at this and give up Barnhurst, but events soon conspire to present Marion with the opportunity to remove her rival. Fanny’s father hears of Marion and Barnhurst’s affair, Fanny runs to Marion to ask her to refute the tale to her father so she may still marry

Barnhurst, and then faints. Marion seizes her opportunity and leaves the unconscious girl with Gerald Dudley, one of Marion's "fashionable" friends, who rapes her. Fanny's ruin accomplished, Dudley leaves the city, Marion apparently commits suicide out of guilt for her part in Fanny's rape, and Fanny is placed in an insane asylum.

While this tale seems to be yet another example of the typical fallen woman plot, the reader soon learns that we have met Fanny before. Earlier in the novel, Lippard offers "A Brief Episode," an ekphrasis in which a beautiful mother sits before the fire with her son at her knee and her baby at her breast. This woman is Fanny Lansdale, now Fanny Barnhurst. Lippard indicts his audience for the scorn he knows they will show her when he informs them that her hair is red, and ensures the reader that despite her red hair, the mark we later learn is indicative of her "fallen" status, she is the "simple hearted woman" who knows "no higher learning than the rich intuitions of a mother's love" (Lippard 137). In this tale, Marion is the villain, but not because she is fallen as a result of her affair with Barnhurst or even because she is a murderess. Marion only becomes the villain after orchestrating Fanny's rape. In her case, Lippard must follow his own rules, and once Marion plots Fanny's ruin, she becomes "vile man, rotten at the heart, and diffusing moral death wherever he goes" (136). Certainly, Marion is still a woman; however, Lippard, in a scene of ghoulish resurrection, brings Marion back from the dead after her attempted suicide following Fanny's rape. Having lapsed into a cataleptic stupor rather than death, Marion is literally buried alive and later exhumed by grave robbers hoping to sell her corpse to a doctor for dissection. She makes clear that she does not intend to return to her old life but rather "to begin life anew. The name which I bore lies buried in the grave vault. It is with a new name, and under new

auspices, that I will recommence life” (Lippard 228). Indeed, even had she wanted to, Marion would not be able to return to her life in society after committing such crimes. Taking the name “Godiva,” Marion, along with her new suit of men’s clothing, dons the identity of the malevolent seducer who, according to Lutz has lost all morality. “Complete embitterment leaves no moral sense”; Lutz explains, “it leads to rampant, glowing vengeance on the innocent as well as the guilty” (75-76). Godiva begins her project of corruption immediately when she seduces Arthur Conroy, the doctor who brought her back to life.

Lippard’s inclusion of fallen women who are, indeed, fallen serves to level his proverbial playing field by indicating that he does not deal in absolutes. His inclusion of both redeemable and irredeemable fallen women provides the contrast necessary to an understanding of what constitutes a fallen woman. In both Fanny’s and Frank’s case it is the men who rape them who are at fault. Marion, however, allows anger to consume her and becomes not only a murderess but also a seductress and an accomplice to rape; therefore, rather than a chance at redemption, Marion receives, first, literal live burial followed by a death scene reminiscent of the ending of Lippard’s *The Quaker City*. The conclusion of this earlier novel features Byrnewood Arlington fantasizing about drinking Gus Lorrimer’s blood and dancing upon his corpse after he shoots him for seducing his sister. Godiva’s end features no such fantasy. Following a shipwreck that leaves Godiva, Herman Barnhurst, Arthur Conroy, and Arthur Dermoyne stranded at sea in a life raft for five days, Barnhurst kills her and he and Arthur Conroy literally drink her blood to survive dehydration. Finally witnessing his fantasy’s fulfillment, seeing Barnhurst’s hands “stained with the blood” of his “paramour,” Dermoyne kills Barnhurst for seducing his sister, Alice. Lippard is careful to

ensure not only that none of his seducers go unpunished, but also that the punishment fits the crime; therefore, he deals the most horrible deaths to the most malevolent seducers and rapists.

### **Anti-Seduction Law and the Irrelevance of Rape Versus Seduction**

While the boundary between seduction and rape remains unclear even in many current legal cases, it was even more vague in nineteenth-century legal proceedings.<sup>7</sup> In *Redefining Rape*, Estelle Freedman asks readers to

imagine a continuum that ranged from a mutually consensual sexual act, to one in which a man persuaded a reluctant or unwilling woman to engage in sex through verbal coercion (including deceit, promise of marriage, or emotional manipulation), to a purely physical coercion (or conquest) despite verbal resistance, to a violently aggressive sexual assault. A woman might ultimately consent in all but the last of these scenarios. (42-43)

Such was the range of possibilities included in what a nineteenth-century court considered seduction, and even the final scenario might be thrown out as possible rape if the jury determined that the victim had not resisted sufficiently (58). Interestingly, just as women often resorted to seduction as the “‘legal fiction’ that stood for the act of forcible sex,” so too was the term “seduction” often used as code for rape (along with such terms as “ruin,”

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<sup>7</sup> The question of consent has been central to rape cases for centuries. As was the case in the nineteenth century, the issue of consent often comes down to a woman’s (or man’s) ability rationally to decide whether to engage in sexual activity.

“dishonor,” “shame,” and even “outrage”) in courtrooms, newspapers, and fiction (42).<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the terminology employed to describe the act, however, once she experienced either rape or seduction a woman became a pariah.

Though a woman’s chastity and the value of that chastity would eventually become central to both the legal and societal discourse of the time, loss of a woman’s honor or virtue was initially considered in strictly economic terms. Specifically, and especially in cases in which a woman’s rape or seduction led to pregnancy, courts determined damages in seduction cases based on the loss of a daughter’s service to her father (Grossberg 45, and Freedman 38). With a child of her own, not only could she not act as a servant in the household, which was the expectation, but her prospects for marriage were severely hindered, thus creating the real possibility that the father would have to continue to support her as well as her illegitimate child well after the age at which she should have been settled in her own marriage (45-47). As we move further into the nineteenth century, however, courts began to consider seduction in both economic and social terms and to award damages based on losses for both a woman and her family. During this shift, courts “redefined seduction as victimization that sprang from the passion and deceit of males; the passivity of women was newly emphasized, as was her instinct for a selfless life as wife and mother” (47). The cases Grossberg discusses here all deal with seduction achieved through a man’s promise of marriage to a woman. Had no such promise been made, the woman was considered not a victim of “sexual weakness” but of “immorality”; “Female submission after a marriage

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<sup>8</sup> See Korobkin’s *Criminal Conversations* for examination of the nineteenth century’s appropriation of sentimental language in the courtroom.

promise was excusable and understandable; active sexual behavior without the pretense of a nuptial pledge was not” (48). Generally speaking, nineteenth-century courts, like nineteenth-century society, treated women who engaged in sexual activity without any promise of marriage as morally depraved “unsalvageable victims of their own degeneracy,” regardless of the circumstances that may have led to their fall (42).

While such opinions likely held a grain of truth on a case-by-case basis, they did not stand up to the cyclical nature of so-called moral depravity as described in many seduction narratives of the time, including Davis’s “The Promise of the Dawn,” examined in detail later in this chapter. Lot is not a prostitute because she chooses to be or because she is morally depraved; she is a prostitute because prostitution was the only means of survival available to her to support herself and her younger brother after her mother’s death. Indeed, Lot finds herself in a situation not unlike that in which Cap finds herself at the beginning of E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*. Describing the events that ultimately led her to dress as a boy, (for which she has been arrested) Cap explains that after the woman who cared for her as a child left, she eventually found herself sleeping in the streets. The Court Recorder notes, “That was dreadful exposure for a young girl,” to which Cap responds that this is what finally drove her to dress as a boy (45). Her shame at this admission leads those in the courtroom, including “Old Hurricane,” to believe that she has been raped, but Cap is adamant that she was not, exclaiming, “Oh! But I took care of myself, sir! I did, indeed, your Honor! You mustn’t, either you or the old gentleman, dare to think but what I did” (45). In this brief scene, Southworth illustrates not only the disadvantage at which women find themselves in the labor market but also the danger they face in the public sphere simply because they are

women. Where chastity is concerned both socially and economically, women had an immense stake in ensuring false attacks on their virtue were immediately discredited.

Unlike Cap, however, Lot was not raised by a woman whom society would consider virtuous. Though both Cap and Lot find themselves abandoned in the worst parts of New York City, Cap has been raised “gently” by a woman who took in washing to support Cap and herself. Lot, on the other hand, is almost literally born into prostitution. Despite the environmental factors that led to her fall, though, socially and legally, Lot is beyond redemption so long as social strictures refuse to allow for such exercises of republican virtue as we see performed by characters like Rowson’s Mrs. Beauchamp. Even more troubling though, is the fact that it does not matter if Lot had sacrificed her virtue for money or been raped; in either case, she is ruined.

María Carla Sánchez notes that nineteenth-century society seemed to expect at least some degree of licentiousness in men. Discussing the seeming difficulty of applying the sentimental ideals voiced in early seduction narratives to nineteenth-century young men and women, she cites advice writer William Alcott as insisting that “few young women could blame young men for their transgressions”; however, the same could not be said for young women. “Let young women . . . be well aware, that few, indeed, are the cases in which this apology can possibly avail them” (qtd. in Sánchez 44). In other words, boys will be boys, but women had always to be on their best behavior as they were not allowed to make mistakes where sexual propriety was concerned. This double standard left many women, suffragists especially, wondering how women could truly defend themselves when society believed they should rely on men, who could not be blamed for their transgressions against

women, to protect them. To this question, Elizabeth Cady Stanton offered an at once radical and frighteningly logical solution in *The Revolution*: “every young girl should be taught the use of firearms, and always carry a small pistol for her defense. Moreover, that she should be accompanied by an immense Newfoundland dog whenever she is in danger of meeting her *natural protector*” (qtd. in Freedman 52, Stanton’s emphasis). Especially in the post-Civil War period, women began to realize they could not rely on men for protection, but had, instead, to rely on themselves. In the meantime, however, writers continued to voice their protests against the double standard for sexual conduct between men and women.

### **Seduction, Republican Virtue, and Magdalen Societies**

After drawing the blueprint for nineteenth-century women’s domestic prison in *Captivity and Sentiment*, Michelle Burnham charts a unique phenomenon in the history of American conceptions of virtue in which virtue itself, not unlike Gothic fiction, undergoes a process of bifurcation. During the revolutionary period, Burnham notes, “few images inspired a more sympathetic response . . . than that of a captive female” (67). In these images, the colonies are aligned with the captive, deprived of freedom by their captor, Great Britain. As evidenced in the examples of Emily and “The Panther Captivity’s” protagonist, a captive woman, or, more specifically, a captive virgin, must always fear the threat of rape, regardless of whether she articulates this fear in words. The same holds true for revolutionaries like Thomas Paine who viewed the colonies as a virtuous virgin in need of protection by equally virtuous defenders (29). In Paine’s writings, Burnham recognizes the first appearance of “two versions of virtue: an active civic virtue that is gendered male and a passive sexual virtue that



is gendered female” (71). When translated to the Indian captivity narrative, this gendered virtue makes it perfectly acceptable, and even expected, for a woman like “The Panther Captivity’s” protagonist to defend her sexual virtue but unacceptable for a woman like Hannah Dustan to accept payment or receive acclaim for it. But Burnham follows American virtue’s evolution further to the development of what she calls republican virtue—a virtue tied not to sexual purity but to honesty and disinterested benevolence. Unlike sexual virtue, republican virtue is renewable, which she demonstrates through a reading of Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*. Rowson’s novel is most certainly a cautionary tale, but not in a form that might be most recognizable to many readers since Rowson warns her audience as much against Charlotte’s seducer as she does against her French schoolteacher, La Rue.

Furthermore, and as Burnham also points out, Rowson instructs her readers that, if they read her text properly, they will find their model for right action not in characters who shun Charlotte for her “fallen” status, but in those like Mrs. Beauchamp whose disinterested benevolence directs her to befriend Charlotte, regardless of what people might think.

A key concern of the separate spheres concept is the extent to which a woman’s body is displayed in public and/or exposed to so-called “polluting” influence. As both captivity and seduction narratives make clear, woman, regardless of her situation, is a sexual object. The male protection sought by characters like “The Panther Captivity’s” protagonist is as much physical as it is financial or emotional; however, as the Industrial Revolution blended the public and domestic spheres in the form of women entering the marketplace, women found themselves almost constantly on display before the public eye and in close proximity to those “dangerous, chaotic, and seductive” liminal beings: fallen women. The increased

casual contact between men and women combined with the society's acceptance of marriage as the ultimate prize for every nineteenth-century young woman eventually created the perfect conditions for licentious seducers to stalk their prey. The societal expectation that a woman should be in the home as opposed to working in the public sphere created a sense of urgency to find a husband that seducers could take advantage of, contributing to an ever-increasing population of fallen women. Worse still, societal prejudices against fallen women all but ensured the only options left for them were prostitution or death, and, as much reform writing of the period makes clear, the slightest misstep around The Cult of True Womanhood's tenet of purity could easily result in social death.

Attempting to ameliorate the death-like effects of a fall, nineteenth-century reformers established Magdalen Societies in major cities such as New York and Philadelphia that offered fallen women, especially prostitutes, a home and a chance at rehabilitation. The presence of such societies as well as narratives like Rowson's make clear that not all members of nineteenth-century American society viewed fallen-women as creatures to be avoided; however, these women's position as "Others" even for reform-minded citizens further establishes their liminality rather than suggesting their potential for redemption. Reentry into society was predicated upon a fallen woman's being "retrained" in domesticity and "right behavior," and though many fallen women were able to find employment or marriage after being rehabilitated, their liminal status would remain even if only in the form of a "checkered" past.

As discussed in the previous chapter, women's opportunities for employment in the middle third of the nineteenth century were limited to begin with; however, deprived of

virtue whether through seduction or rape, a woman's opportunities for economic subsistence became almost nonexistent since, especially in the case of prostitutes, fallen women were often considered "poisoned" and "themselves a poison" (Sánchez 106). Already lacking economic independence, even the suggestion that the Cult of True Womanhood's tenet of purity had been violated often led such women to be ostracized even from the most menial of manual labors and no amount of Magdalen reform could ensure an employer would offer a former fallen woman wage labor. As Rebecca Harding Davis explains, giving voice to nineteenth-century societal notion of the fallen woman in "The Promise of the Dawn," (1863) "when a woman's once down, there's no raising her up" (19). The words nineteenth-century writers and citizens used to describe a woman whose chastity had been violated—"down," "fallen," "ruined"—all bring the imagination deep into the pit of social death and live burial, so even as Davis's Lot creeps about town in "The Promise of the Dawn" desperately searching for the employment that could save her life and her reputation, readers are reminded that "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death" (21).

Published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The Promise of the Dawn" not only illustrates the hardships faced by women once they have fallen but also implicates nineteenth-century societal norms in the perpetuation of their plight. Indeed, this depiction nearly halted the story's publication altogether as Davis's *Atlantic* editor, James T. Fields, felt "the depiction of a prostitute, driven to her decline not by her own sinfulness but by societal hypocrisies, was not 'realistic'" (Harris, *American Realism* 99). Founded during the period Frank L. Mott describes as "the period of New England supremacy in American letters," *The Atlantic* set a very high literary standard from its inception (496). Unlike the "popular" *Peterson's* in which

Davis also published much of her work, *The Atlantic's* focus on literary quality over entertainment value called for a level of verisimilitude not always present in story papers. This was not the first time Fields objected to the content of one of Davis's tales; however, rather than allow him to force revisions as she had done with her 1861 story *Margret Howth: A Story of To-day*, Davis, with the help of Fields's wife, Annie, persisted. Though the original letter in which Fields voices concern regarding *Margret Howth's* plot and Davis's original manuscript have been lost, Davis's letter in response reveals that Fields felt Davis "assembled" too much "gloom" in her initial draft (qtd. in Yellin 288). In the afterword to the 1990 Feminist Press edition of the novel, Jean Fagan Yellin charts the substantive revisions made to everything in *Margret Howth* from its content to its title (originally *The Deaf and the Dumb* and serialized as *A Story of Today*) at Fields's behest. Though Davis would eventually claim she preferred Fields's revisions to her own original tale, when it came to "The Promise of the Dawn," Davis would not relent. In a letter to Annie Fields, Davis explains, "I never wrote anything so hard or repugnant to my feelings to write"; yet once it was completed, "I was [never] more indifferent to censure or praise. I *knew* I was right" (qtd. in Harris 100, Davis's emphasis). Davis's persistence and Annie's intervention with her husband eventually prevailed, and "The Promise of the Dawn" appeared in the *Atlantic's* January 1863 number.

The short story initially follows Adam, a cobbler, as he makes his way around a small Virginia town completing last-minute chores and purchases on Christmas Eve. He congratulates himself on his charity and sympathy for the poor as he recognizes that even the Confederate soldiers in the town jail are God's people and thinks of his wife, Jinny, who was once an orphan. But when a sick and filthy young woman asks him to give her the flowers he

has just purchased for his wife, Jinny, he has no charity to give. Rather, he hits her and throws the flowers in the gutter, angry that Jinny's "fingers would be polluted, if they touched them now" (Davis 14-15). What Adam does not know is that the sick woman is his niece, daughter of his dead twin sister, Nelly, who had been seduced and abandoned to die of "starvation and whiskey" in New York (17). Adam tells Jinny of his sister later that evening, and Jinny informs him "they're tryin' to help [fallen women] now at the Five Points there" (17). "God help them as helps others this Christmas night!" Adam responds, but then reminds Jinny, "but it's not for such as you to talk of the Five Points" (17). For Adam, and for many in the mid to late nineteenth-century, moral reform, especially that having to do with rehabilitating fallen women via Magdalen societies was something to be handled by anyone other than himself and his pure, innocent wife.

For Jinny to involve herself in any way with a woman whose virtue had been sacrificed would place Jinny's own virtue in danger. Despite Lot's direct plea to Jinny for help, to "stop the boys from hooting at me on the streets, make a decent Christian woman out of me," Jinny replies, "I dare n't do it. What would they say of me?" (Davis 22). Jinny fetches her husband, Adam, who promptly "opened the street-door for Lot to go out. He had no faith in her. No shrewd, common-sense man would have had" (22). Lot makes a final plea to Adam, but he responds, "I know your like. There's no help for such as you" (22). Adam's comments mimic not only nineteenth-century societal beliefs but also the legal language of the time. In *Governing the Hearth*, Michael Grossberg discusses an 1864 decision handed down by Justice John F. Dillon of the Iowa Supreme Court in *Denslow v. Van Horn* that "spelled out the rigid code of sexual conduct maintained by the bench . . . Soiled virtue was

unredeemable . . . a ‘woman who falls from virtue, no matter how artful the deception, or how distressing the circumstances, is, by the severe edict of society, dishonored’ (41-42). Recognizing that no amount of pleading will raise her from social death, Lot commits suicide.

Aside from the brief studies appearing in various biographies of Davis and Sharon Harris and Robin Cadwallader’s introduction to their collection of several of Davis’s tales, *Rebecca Harding Davis’s Stories of the Civil War: Selected Writings from the Borderlands*, “The Promise of the Dawn” has received no critical attention. Those who do examine the text focus on its religious, economic, and feminist underpinnings; thus, Harris and Cadwallader describe “The Promise of the Dawn” as a retelling of the birth of Christ. Even as Adam has no idea that the young woman he encounters on the street is his niece, “he has no idea the Christ child will come to him on Christmas Day in the form of his sister’s orphaned daughter and son, revealing the Christ in everyone and making His promise real for the doubtful” (xxviii). While there is no denying the Biblical allusions in the tale, Jean Pfaelzer points toward another, more practical motivation on Davis’s part suggesting, “The Promise of the Dawn” illustrates that “despite their [women’s] changed roles during and after the Civil War and their new roles in an emerging industrial society, they were still illiterate, unemployed, impoverished, and frequently dependent on cruel or inept men” (12). This motivation is evident in Davis’s presentation of Lot not as a beggar but as a woman in search of honest work so that she might better care for her brother, Benny—in other words, Lot is a model of republican virtue, despite her fallen status.

Abandoning Adam for some time, Davis follows Lot as she stumbles throughout

town, looking for work. She attempts to sing carols in the concert-hall, but even though she is, indeed, a good singer, the manager, Pumphrey, refuses to hire her, offering instead to have her thrown in jail. She pleads, "I want help. Give me some honest work," but such a request is ridiculous since to employ her would be to associate her fallen status with the hall (18). After she leaves the concert-hall, Pumphrey follows her and offers to give her money, but she refuses, explaining she does not want charity; she wants to work to earn an honest wage. Noticing that Lot seems no older than his own daughter, Pumphrey asks who she is, and her response illuminates the cyclical nature of women's situation that Pfaelzer recognizes in Davis's work:

‘I’m Lot. I always was what you see. My mother drank herself to death in the Bowery dens. I learned my trade there, slow and sure.’

She stretched out her hands into the night, with a wild cry,—

“My God! I had to live!”

What was to be done? Whose place was it to help her? He thought. He loathed to touch her. But her soul might be as pure and groping as little Susy's.

‘I wish I could help you, girl,’ he said. ‘But I’m a moral man. I have to be careful of my reputation. Besides, I couldn’t bring you under the same roof with my child.’ (19)

Earlier in the story, Adam points out to his wife while explaining what happened to his sister that a good deal of her situation arose from the fact that she was “young, unlearned” (16). She was never taught much of the world, and, so, was unable to fend for herself either against her seducer or for her own survival once he left her. Lot is a repetition of the moral and

economic cycle created by her mother, Nelly; Lot is her mother's double created of Nelly's own liminal existence as Turner points out in his study that liminality is the site in which we find the double and the ghost—and Lot is about to meet her own end in the same way as her mother (95-96).

Harris discusses the economic side of Davis's call for reform when she examines "The Promise of the Dawn" in *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism*. Harris points out that "Davis was more concerned with the environmental forces that led women into prostitution, and she sought in 'Promise' to synthesize those forces with the idea that prostitution was often an inherited 'career'" (Harris, *American Realism* 100). Harris cites an 1858 survey of two thousand prostitutes conducted in New York City that found that most of the women worked as "servants or seamstresses, positions that typically paid less than living wages," and about half also had children to support (100). The survey proves, regardless of any qualms Fields had with the "reality" of the subject matter, Davis's depiction of Lot is as painfully realistic as they come. The societal double standard allowed "the men who used her" to maintain their societal positions while she could never rise. Thus, Lot eventually realizes "Benny's only chance to escape this hereditary cycle is her own demise, she arranges for Adam to take him in, and kills herself. To Davis's mind, the crime was society's" (Harris 102). Suffragists described the situation which often led women like Lot to commit suicide as a paradox in which both men's behavior and their laws regarding the consequences of that behavior left women both "legally and sexually vulnerable" (Freedman 53). Women, the victims of seduction and rape, had neither say in crafting legislation regarding these crimes nor the right to sit on juries deciding guilt in their commission.



While this synopsis thus far seems to indicate a tale that “assembles the gloom” in even greater measure than Davis’s *Margret Howth*, the Gothic elements present in “The Promise of the Dawn,” particularly those associated with Lot, cast an even darker pall over the plot. When readers first encounter Lot, it is as an uncanny, disembodied hand, “a dirty hand, with sores on it,” reaching out of the crowd of people around Adam to take hold of the flowers he has just bought (Davis 14). Then, “a woman thrust her face from under her blowzy bonnet into his: a young face, deadly pale, on which some awful passion had cut the lines; lips dyed scarlet with rank blood, lips, you would think, that in hell itself would utter a coarse jest” (14). He strikes her because “if it had been a slimy eel standing upright, it would have been less foul a thing than this” (14). Lot appears like a living corpse, presenting a decidedly terrifying scene in an otherwise cozy Christmas story.

Though the encounter between Lot and Adam appears early in the story, Davis brings the specter of Lot as a living corpse back to the reader’s attention as she interacts with Pumphrey by having Lot identify herself as such. As Lot and Pumphrey part ways after he explains why he cannot offer her employment, Pumphrey sees Lot stumble and asks if she is ill. Lot explains, “I only keep myself alive eating opium now and then. D’ye know? I fell by your hall to-day; had a fit, they said. It wasn’t a fit; it was death, Sir” (Davis 20). She explains that she refused actually to die in that moment since she had to ensure her younger brother, Benny, would be cared for, which is why she has been so frantically searching for work. She knows she is going to die, is already in many ways dead, and wants to ensure that she can leave her brother with money but without the knowledge that both his mother and sister were prostitutes. She ultimately obtains her goal, and the redemptive quality of Lot’s

death provides a measure of positivity that likely accounts for Fields's ultimate agreement to publish the piece. Based on the correspondence regarding "The Promise of the Dawn," Fields was not troubled with Davis's Gothic presentation of Lot as a living corpse—indeed, this would be more in line with societal expectations of the time (Harris 99-100). Rather, he took issue with Davis's blaming society rather than Lot, herself, for Lot's situation in life, which opposed the general consensus regarding fallen women at the time. Davis is careful to focus her social critique of moral reformative action (or rather the lack thereof) by taking her cast of characters from the lower and working classes rather than the upper echelon. Indeed, by laying the blame at the feet of rich men like those from whom Deborah steals for Hugh Wolfe's ultimate demise in *Life in the Iron-mills*, Davis offers a decidedly poignant critique of the *Atlantic's* Brahmin readership. Her parenthetical finger-pointing at Jinny for not helping Lot even though Lot was "so near at hand" though "neither a Sioux nor a Rebel" appears almost gentle in comparison (Davis 21).

## **Conclusion**

Seducers were just one of the many social "vampires" Lippard sought to vanquish in his urban Gothic novels. Indeed, no aspect of nineteenth-century American society was completely safe from Lippard's pen. A champion of the oppressed in all forms, regardless of race or gender, Lippard fought for human equality on all levels; however, in his crusade for women's rights, Americans were presented with some of the most forward-thinking ideas of the time. Even as Lippard illustrated scenes of female power and empowerment, though, he could often only do so by also featuring their opposite in the forms of women who fall prey

to the evils he sought to reform via his fiction and activism. Just as Lippard and the authors discussed thus far in this project fought for expanded opportunities for women in the public sphere, so too did they fight to ensure those who remained captive or buried alive did not disappear entirely. Indeed, though women faced a number of perils created by the nineteenth-century's Cult of True Womanhood, so too were men endangered by one of the many institutions often used to hide the heinous acts committed against those women. Initially established as a means of helping those less fortunate, insane asylums—such as the one in which Fanny Lansdale finds herself for a brief time in Lippard's *New York*—came to function as a convenient means of disposal for those with the desire and the money to have someone put out of the way. However, unlike True Womanhood, which set the boundaries for women's domestic prison and created the liminal space in which to bury fallen women alive, asylums provided a veil behind which to hide not only problematic women but also troublesome men. As the next chapter illustrates, asylums and the laws governing commitment to those asylums created a macabre mirror image of women's domestic prison in which men, too, could find themselves captive.

## CHAPTER THREE:

“A VERY CHARNEL WHOSE ROTTENNESS WAS COVERED WITH FLOWERS”:  
 CIVIL COMMITMENT REFORM AND AMERICAN GOTHIC MANIPULATIONS OF  
 THE VEIL

In the recently released *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, noted Gothic scholar Catherine Spooner devotes an entry specifically to discussion of “Masks, Veils, and Disguises” and their prevalence in Gothic fiction. Indeed, veiled women, whether virgins, nuns, or occasionally corpses, are so common in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic that many scholars have labeled them “claptrap,” treating them as little more than a signal directing the reader’s attention to what lies beneath the veil while neglecting to perform any deep analysis of the veil itself. In fact, Spooner’s short entry, coupled with her book, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, in which she extends the discussion of “veiling” to include other items of clothing, are two of just a few projects that treat the subject in any depth since Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s chapter on surface imagery in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Both Sedgwick and Spooner argue that such quick dismissals of surface imagery leave unexamined “the most characteristic and daring areas of Gothic convention, those that point the reader’s attention back to surfaces” (Sedgwick 141). Furthermore, they establish the veil’s importance in and of itself—albeit through a decidedly psychoanalytic lens—as it functions specifically on or in association with an (usually female) individual.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Sedgwick, “the veil itself . . . is also suffused with sexuality,” since it represents both “a metonym of the thing covered and . . . a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by

Focusing on American Gothic literature, Teresa Goddu discusses the veil's role in nineteenth-century American commodity culture in her landmark study, *Gothic America*. Goddu ties the veil to the American woman's attempt to maintain purity even as she "embodie[s] the market transactions at the heart of 'true womanhood'" (97). Pure or not, the true woman is nevertheless property, an asset bought and sold by men on the marriage market. Noting that for many readers and scholars, "Zenobia's Legend" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) offers one of the most memorable deployments of the veil in nineteenth-century American fiction, Goddu employs the scene to illustrate "how the market is mediated through the veiled lady" (105).<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne's Priscilla, we learn, is the story's mystical mesmerized medium "sold" by Zenobia to the mesmerist, Westervelt, and, thereby, to the public gaze. For Goddu, Priscilla represents "pure exchange value" and her silver veil "marks her relationship to money" (107). However, Goddu is more concerned with Priscilla's positioning as a female medium "psychically enslaved" to Westervelt:

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which sexual desire is enhanced and specified" (144). Using this rationale, Sedgwick concludes, "characters in Gothic novels fall in love as much with women's veils as with women" (144). That is until the veil covers or is covered with blood, in which case it becomes a sign both of violence and violent contagion. For both the characters and readers, the woman in the bloody veil is a harbinger of sadness, loss of love, and even death.

<sup>2</sup> Though Zenobia's legend of the Veiled Lady may not be quite as often discussed as Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil," for the purposes of establishing the most common approach to current discussions about Gothic veils, Zenobia's legend is more appropriate.

By turning people into slaves, magnetism reveals that everything and everyone is subject to commodification: Zenobia is willing to sell Priscilla for Hollingsworth's love, just as Hollingsworth sacrifices his friendship with Coverdale when Coverdale refuses to invest in his scheme. Indeed, the blackness associated with descriptions of the two master magnetists of the novel, Westervelt and Hollingsworth, suggests the market economy's relationship to another economy that turns people into property—slavery. (107)

Her free will removed via mesmerism, Priscilla becomes, for Goddu, a slave in a Gothic marketplace that turns people into products. However, though Zenobia may be responsible for Priscilla's sale, Goddu reminds us that it is Hawthorne himself who sells them both: he, “like the veiled lady, is a market commodity” (116).

Goddu's conclusions regarding Hawthorne's participation in the Gothic marketplace open a forum in which to discuss the limitations inherent in classifications like Sedgwick's and Spooner's that only function insofar as the veil remains associated with a particular female character. To illustrate these limitations, one need only recall that though the black veil in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is one of the most often referenced in Gothic studies, it does not actually cover a woman, or even a person, but a wax sculpture. Thus, even the original foundation for the veil's association with female characters is flawed. It comes as no surprise, then, that this character-driven model becomes unstable when we attempt to analyze scenes featuring veiled men, and it falls apart completely when applied to surfaces that, though they obscure what lies behind or beneath them, are not actually veils. Especially in later Gothic texts, and even more so in American than in European texts, the

veils in question are often figurative or metaphorical rather than literal—they create barriers between the reader and reality but are constructed of nothing more substantial than belief. For example, on the one hand, in Rebecca Harding Davis's *Put Out of the Way*, the beatific grounds and façade of an insane asylum act as a material, physical veil, masking the true horrors the patients face within. On the other hand, Davis's refusal to claim authorship of her work drops a metaphorical veil between her and her readers, leading many to believe the story was written by a man. This metaphorical veil masks Davis's participation in the Gothic literary marketplace in which Goddu places Hawthorne, but, I will argue, for the sake of philanthropy rather than privacy. Practical reasons for anonymity aside, Davis recognized that her readership was likely to include more men so long as her femininity remained hidden. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term "veil" takes its broader meaning, as suggested in Goddu's project, of an object or action that attempts or succeeds in disguising, concealing, or obscuring something else, rather than the more limited, literal, usage to which models such as Sedgwick's and Spooner's subject it. Employing this broader definition illustrates the extent to which nineteenth-century dark reform writers recognized the veil's power and employed it most often to highlight inconsistencies between appearances and reality, accepted ideas and truth. These authors illuminate for their readers that much of the world they experience is little more than a fabric of half-truths, a veil obscuring the realities beneath. Those who employ the trope successfully realize not only its potential but also that the speed at which they reveal the truth could spell the difference between affective terror and repellant horror. Dark reformers who successfully deployed the veil in service of reform recognized that the social experience of periodical reading created a

buffer between the reader and the truth, ensuring that what would otherwise be a horrifying ordeal was perceived as a terrifying revelation.

### **Early Iterations of the Veil**

From its first appearances in America and America's literature, the Gothic veil was already much different from that normally depicted in the European Gothic fiction Sedgwick and Spooner discuss in their respective studies. Furthermore, though many identify Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) as America's first Gothic novel, Gothic tropes, including veils, had already begun to appear in much earlier works. Indeed, these earlier works and their authors anticipate the manner in which later authors, such as those discussed in this project, would employ the Gothic veil in their writing. Perhaps the most appropriate example of such usage appears in Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), published nearly two decades prior to Brown's *Wieland*.<sup>3</sup> The text reads for the most part like so many other pieces written during the period in which the purpose of publication

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<sup>3</sup> Cotton Mather's writings certainly have a place in establishing the importance of Gothic themes in American literature as well. However, as he was writing long before what we now recognize as Gothic literature was being published, and as he was recording actual events as he and others perceived them at the time, I hesitate to use his work as an example of the ways in which Gothic tropes were used in America. Rather, I would argue that Mather laid the groundwork for America's distinct mode of Gothic literature, a mode already under development that was then influenced by the influx of European Gothic texts in the 1700s. This, however, is a topic that requires its own study.



seemed to gesture more toward propaganda aimed at convincing young people—men especially—to immigrate to the New World than toward simple entertainment. That is until “Letter IX.” In this letter, Crèvecoeur’s protagonist, John, relates the experience of a single afternoon that would effectively disabuse him of the notion that America’s is the “most perfect society now existing in the world” (41). In short, Crèvecoeur allows John a brief glimpse of slavery’s real horrors, and John is forever changed. John’s brief glimpse of a slave, caged for killing an overseer and left to be eaten alive by insects and carrion birds, changes not only his ideas about slavery but also his entire worldview.

Initially, Crèvecoeur presents John as a Northern landowner, content in his perception of his slaves’ contented and happy lives. In “Letter II,” John makes no secret of the fact that he owns “tolerably faithful and healthy” slaves, while in the ninth letter, he is careful to describe Northern slaves’ (i.e. his slaves) fair and humane treatment not only to provide a contrast to the treatment of slaves he witnesses in the South but also as a defense of his own continued involvement in the trade (Crèvecoeur 26 and 156-57). However, walking through the woods on his way to visit a South Carolina planter’s home, John encounters the following scene:

I perceived, at about six rods distance, something resembling a cage, suspended to the limbs of a tree, all the branches of which appeared covered with large birds of prey, fluttering about, and anxiously endeavouring to perch on the cage. Actuated by an involuntary motion of my hands, more than by any design of my mind, I fired at them; they all flew to a short distance, with a most hideous noise: when, horrid to

think and painful to repeat, I perceived a negro, suspended in the cage, and left there to expire! (163-4)

Prior to this revelation, John was enjoying a pleasant walk through the woods, paying little attention to his surroundings. As he had been for the previous eight letters/chapters, John was blissfully ignorant of the veil of normalcy and innocence pulled over the institution of slavery to make it more palatable. But Crèvecoeur does more here than just use John's ignorance prior to his encounter with the caged slave in the same manner as a Gothic veil. He employs a flock of carrion birds to hide the scene from John until he is physically a part of it, close enough to feel "the air strongly agitated" by the birds' wings before revealing the truth (163). John's proximity to the caged slave parallels his proximity to the institution of slavery in America—regardless of the justifications and defenses he provides for Northern slavery, he is part of it.

John's reaction to the scene is recognized by Gothic scholars such as Charles Crow and Goddu as one of the most definitively Gothic moments in American literature:

I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek-bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places; and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped and tinged the ground beneath. No sooner were the birds flown, than swarms of insects covered the whole body of this unfortunate wretch, eager to feed on his mangled flesh and to drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror,

my nerves were convulsed; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily  
contemplating the fate of this negro in all its dismal latitude. (164)<sup>4</sup>

The horror described in this scene would likely make Matthew Gregory Lewis proud. Unfortunately, this type of horrific encounter, though it certainly affects the reader, does not necessarily do so in a way that may inspire reform. John's visceral response to slavery's brutality strips him of any illusions he had previously regarding America's perfection and sets him on a path of questioning. More importantly, he no longer accepts as fact the veil of innocence and virtue he himself has thrown over the New World's settlers but sees instead what he describes as the inherent perverseness of a human nature that would cause one man to leave another to be eaten alive (160). But he takes no action beyond giving the slave a drink of water before walking away. He makes no attempts to free the man, nor does he adjure the slave's owner to free him or at least to end his suffering. John's reaction to the caged slave illustrates the problem of horror, especially when used in attempts to inspire action of any kind—it often repels rather than attracts.

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<sup>4</sup> The only study to treat this scene in any depth as an example of Gothicism appears in Crow's *American Gothic*. Crow recognizes this scene as "a true Gothic moment" in its ability to horrify not only John but also the reader (24). Furthermore, he notes that the scene effectively disabuses John of any notions he may have had of America's and Americans' superiority to other nations and people; however, he does not discuss the implications of this scene as one of horror rather than terror, nor does he discuss Crèvecoeur's work in terms of anything other than its ability to lead American readers to realize that they are far from perfect.

### **Horror, Terror, and Periodical Manipulations of the Veil**

As outlined in previous chapters, Gothic scholars often delineate between the Lewisite and Radcliffean schools of Gothic fiction by noting that Radcliffe relies on terror to frighten her audience while Lewis relies on horror. Until recently, however, most studies examining the horrific and terrific elements of Lewis's and Radcliffe's texts did so in an effort to determine how or if each author attempted to morally educate his and her respective audience. Such studies tend to rely on Edmund Burke's theories of sublimity and beauty and discuss how both authors deploy sublime and beautiful scenes throughout their writing. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin or Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke establishes theories and categories of sublimity and beauty that critics have employed to analyze Gothic writing's moral effects and its authors' moral intentions. Burke defines beauty as "that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it," associating it with the pleasurable, the social, domestic, and feminine (83, 103). He defines sublimity, on the other hand, as "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger," and suggests that "it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure" (36, 103). Sublimity, then, is associated with masculinity, power, danger, fear, and even pleasure if the danger does not threaten destruction. Thus, Burke's ideas regarding masculine sublimity and feminine beauty underlie, in part, the problematic "gendering" of the Gothic canon that occurred in twentieth century literary criticism.

More recent projects such as Ellen Malenas Ledoux's, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing* move beyond questions of beauty and sublimity to determine how the terror and horror produced by the imagery in a given text can affect that text's ability to inspire readers to work for social change. As Radcliffe herself noted, terror "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties" while horror "contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (168). John's response upon seeing the caged slave in Crèvecoeur's ninth letter exemplifies Radcliffe's description of horror and illuminates the enervating effect horror can have on reform efforts. According to Ledoux, whether Crèvecoeur's intention was to inspire reform, or not, should be the least of our concerns. She reminds us that due to the legal issues of marriage, property, and freedom at the heart of so many Gothic texts, "Gothic writing has a particular power . . . to raise audience consciousness about political issues . . . but the degree to which it succeeds in doing so depends much more on reader response than it does on authorial intention" (1-2). Thus, regardless of whether Crèvecoeur was responding to a reform impulse when he wrote "Letter IX," Radcliffe's theories of terror and horror and Ledoux's concept of aesthetic distance explained below combine to indicate that this Letter would have failed in creating social change. Readers looking to John as a model for "right" action, would have found no hint as to how they might help abolish slavery. John writes a letter to his fictional correspondent; however, rather than describing any actions he might have taken regarding abolition or the treatment of slaves, John embarks on a project of bitter venting and rhetorical questioning, the only outlets available for a mind that "is, and always has been, oppressed since I became a witness to" the scene (Crèvecoeur 163). The shock of this revelation

removes from John any ability to act and, thus, provides no further edification or motivation for readers.

The debilitating effects of shock like that experienced by John were not unfamiliar to nineteenth-century citizens. Though it may seem extreme to a twenty-first-century audience, those who experienced the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic in literary or theatrical form would occasionally succumb to fainting fits or even convulsions in response to the subject matter. Likely the most well-known and extreme case of this phenomenon occurred in London in 1803 during the one and only staging of Lewis's play, *The Captive*. The play follows the eponymous captive on her descent into madness after her husband imprisons her in a private insane asylum. Though, as I have already noted, Lewis was known for his horrific imagery both in print and on stage, the play's effect on his audience was beyond what even Lewis expected:

When it was about half over a man fell into convulsions in the boxes; presently after a woman fainted away in the pit; and when the curtain dropped, two or three more of the spectators went into hysterics, and there was such a screaming and squalling, that really you could hardly hear the hissing . . . As it really is not my wish (whatever others may think) to throw half of London into convulsions nightly, I immediately sent on a Performer to say, that I had withdrawn the piece. (qtd in MacDonald160)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> While this account of the performance (quoted from David MacDonald's *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography*) may seem unbelievable, the truth of Lewis's monodrama's effect on the audience is recorded in at least three separate contemporary newspapers, the

Ledoux discusses this account in the opening pages of *Social Reform and Gothic Writing*, suggesting that Lewis's *Captive* failed because it did not allow the audience to experience the aesthetic distance necessary to reflect on and process its subject matter (2). Not only were there no breaks in the production but also the pit audience's position was such that spectators actually had to look up into the already underground cell in which the captive is held.<sup>6</sup> Even for those in the boxes, the stage direction, which called for the only light to be provided by the jailors' lamps, created an atmosphere so stifling that no degree of physical distance allowed for the psychological distance necessary to process the action rationally. Thus, unable to reason their way clear of panic, many fell into fits.

This situation aptly portrays the main struggle inherent in employing Gothic tropes as a means of inspiring reform. Gothic affects. Skilled authors could and can control its affective potential; however, when the author's message is intended to inspire action, he or she does not have the luxury of lightening the effect to a point that will not provoke fear. As I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, this is where the periodical press comes into play. Certainly, periodical publication allowed authors to deal quickly with time-sensitive, controversial reform topics, but by publishing their work in serial form, authors could also

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*Monthly Mirror*, the *Satirist or Monthly Meteor*, and the *Biographia Dramatica*, as Jeffrey Cox recounts in the introduction to *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825* (43).

<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, the piece is so short that any breaks would make little sense. Indeed, Paul McCallum notes in "Cozening the Pit" that "it was not even a full play and was even less than an afterpiece" (24). The full text of the play, with complete stage direction, spans no more than four and half pages of Jeffrey Cox's *Seven Gothic Dramas*.

maintain the level of Gothic sensation needed to express the need for reform while allowing the audience the aesthetic distance necessary to process the events in the story. Rather than experience the violent tearing away of the veil illustrated in Crèvecoeur's and Lewis's work, in serial publications, readers were allowed to realize gradually the severity of the social issues dark reformers treated in their fiction. Furthermore, in periodicals—and in great contrast to the usual scenario of a lone heroine peaking behind a veil—readers of both short stories and serials did not have to face their experience alone since the very nature of periodicals made even a solitary reading experience a social encounter by placing the text within the context of a larger cultural conversation.

### **The Asylum's Architectural Veil**

One of the largest and most overlooked reform movements of the nineteenth-century involved a critique of the methods by which one could find oneself committed to an insane asylum. Writing during the same period in which national debates over slavery and abolition became increasingly heated, asylum reformers often found themselves overshadowed by what many considered, both then and now, to be more pressing questions of individual liberty. However, Benjamin Reiss notes in *Theaters of Madness* that mental institutions and reform of both standards for commitment and treatment of patients “constituted a site no less crucial—and in some ways more complex—for the discussion of individual liberties and their limitations than did the slave system” (15).<sup>7</sup> For reasons similar to those for which

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the establishment of asylums in America during the early nineteenth-century, see David J. Rothman's foundational work, *The Discovery of the Asylum:*



Goddu aligns slavery and true womanhood in *Gothic America*, Reiss draws parallels between mental institutions and the institution of slavery:

Both institutions revoked the civil liberties of a confined population in the name of public order and the creation of an efficient labor force, and both housed a purportedly subrational population that was deemed incapable of handling the complexities of life in a modern democracy. Lunatics, like slaves, were deprived of the right to vote, to sign contracts, to make wills, and to hold property. Both blacks and the insane were viewed as children, with the asylum's triumph over madness paralleling the white race's subduing of the black. (15)

Thus, Reiss aligns the nineteenth-century lunatic with both slaves and women while simultaneously highlighting the contradictions hovering below the surface in such comparisons. Only one population of nineteenth-century individuals would see their rights restored upon release from the asylum: white men. For this reason, most critics, including Reiss, view stories that feature wrongfully institutionalized characters, regardless of gender, as appeals on behalf of women's rights. However, though this may often be the case, consideration of certain texts in light of Goddu's and Reiss's parallels can also reveal other motives.

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*Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. His follow-up work, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* also provides valuable background on how asylums and reformers continued to attempt revisions of means by which the mentally ill were incarcerated.

In nineteenth-century Gothic, the asylum replaced the castle or dungeon as the ideal space for confinement. The laxity of governance surrounding institutionalization, especially civil commitment, became a Gothic trope of its own as characters such as Louisa May Alcott's Sybil in "A Whisper in the Dark," (1863) and Fanny Fern's Mary Leon in *Ruth Hall* (1854) both find themselves wrongfully committed to asylums by the men who are supposed to protect them. The most Gothic aspect of this trope is not the imprisonment itself though, but the legality of it. Earlier Gothic villains had to fear discovery when they hid away wives or faked an elderly relative's death, but nineteenth-century villains had the law on their side.

As I will discuss in more detail below, civil commitment laws required very little documentation to place someone in an asylum. Perhaps one of the most well-known cases of civil commitment was that of Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard. Upon the word of her husband and two physicians from his Bible group, Packard was institutionalized in 1860 at the Jacksonville Insane Asylum in Jacksonville, Illinois. She was declared "incurable" and released in 1863 after which followed the trial of *Packard v. Packard*. After hearing the evidence, the jury took all of seven minutes to find in Packard's favor. Following the trial, in 1867, the State of Illinois passed a "Bill for the Protection of Personal Liberty," which required public hearings for all those accused of insanity. Something Packard herself had been denied. Furthermore, Packard's subsequent lobbying for custody of her children led to the establishment of the state's Married Women's Property Act in 1869 stating that women had equal rights to property and child custody.

To be sure, asylum exposés like Elizabeth Packard's *The Prisoner's Hidden Life, or Insane Asylums Unveiled* helped influence lawmakers in some states to make it more difficult

to commit friends and relatives to mental institutions, but in Pennsylvania and New York (the locations for the texts discussed here) all that was required to have someone committed was a friend's or relative's petition and a physician's certificate attesting to the patient's insanity (Appelbaum and Kemp 345).<sup>8</sup> In "The Evolution of Commitment Law in the Nineteenth Century," Paul S. Appelbaum and Kathleen N. Kemp, both experts in legal and ethical issues in psychiatry, explain that the 1851 opening of the first state-sponsored asylum prompted creation of the first statutes for institutionalization. However, even then, "the state asylum's bylaws continued to allow admission of private, paying patients, accompanied only by the request of family or friends, and a doctor's certificate" (351). Such civil commitment cases accounted for "nearly half of the hospital's patients in its early years" (351). Civil cases alleging wrongful institutionalization eventually led to the "Act of 1869," which had a significant effect on judicial commitment in which patients were admitted based on the ruling of a court trial. However, it added only the provision of a second physician's signature for civil commitment, and penalties for obstructing patient/attorney communications (350). The Act of 1869 actually overturned a previous court ruling by Judge Frederick Carroll Brewster that effectually ended the possibility of civil commitment, leaving provisions only for judicial commitment. Judge Brewster, who presided over the cases of Morgan Hinchman (*Hinchman v. Richie*) and Ebenezer Haskell (*Haskell v. Pennsylvania*), both claiming wrongful institutionalization, ruled in *Draper v. Kirkbride* that no one could be committed

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about Packard and/or the "Packard Laws," see Linda V. Carlisle's *Elizabeth Packard: A Noble Fight* (2010). Packard's collected works are available via open access at *Project Gutenberg* and the *Internet Archive*.

without a court order (Appelbaum and Kemp 348-49). It was only after this ruling that prominent legal psychiatrist, Isaac Ray, drafted a statute for institutional commitment that reinstated informal, civil commitment procedures based on views shared by him and a committee he chaired for the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane. The bill adopted in the Act of 1869 is nearly identical to Ray's draft (349). Following the Act of 1869 both legal and literary activists continued their efforts to affect change, but Pennsylvania's civil commitment laws were not substantively revised until well into the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

New York State's civil commitment statutes follow a similar trajectory to Pennsylvania's. As the New York State Lunatic Asylum prepared to open its doors in 1842, statutes were created to ensure protection of civil liberties for those who might be confined. However, as Ellen Dwyer, a Yale historian who focuses on laws governing social control, explains in "Civil Commitment Laws In Nineteenth-Century New York," New York's state and private mental institutions "almost immediately ignored" these statutes "in the commitment of two groups: paupers and private patients" (83). Furthermore, Dwyer reveals that in 1850, when the New York State Legislature opened the state asylum to private, paying

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<sup>9</sup> For detailed discussions of civil commitment Laws in Pennsylvania, New York, and the U.S. see Appelbaum's *Almost a Revolution: Mental Health Law and the Limits of Change* (1994), Appelbaum and T.G. Guthiel's *Clinical Handbook of Psychiatry and the Law*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (2007), and Appelbaum and Kemp's article, "The Evolution of Commitment Law in the Nineteenth Century: A Reinterpretation" in *Law and Human Behavior*, vol. 6, no. 3/4, 1982, pp. 343-54.

patients, “there was no formal commitment process whatsoever” outside of the requirement for certifications “not from physicians but from county or bank officers or other prominent individuals attesting to the financial reliability of those who promised to pay patient fees” (85). The situation would remain until the first three sections of Article 1 of the Laws of the State of New York Relative to Certificates of Lunacy were passed on 12 May 1874. Article 2, specifically, established that

it shall not be lawful for any physician to certify the insanity of any person for the purpose of securing his commitment to any asylum, unless said physician be of reputable character, a graduate of some incorporated medical college, a permanent resident of the State, and shall have been in the actual practice of his profession for at least three years. (*Medical Record* 551)

However, even then, certifying physicians, not to mention asylum superintendents, could still be paid to bend to the will of those wishing to dispose of an inconvenient spouse, family member, or friend.

Considering the number of court cases held and asylum exposés published during the period between the Pennsylvania Hospital’s opening in 1752 and the Act of 1869 and law of 1874, as well as the fact that wrongful institutionalization had become an almost clichéd aspect of nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, it is clear that the public was very much aware of the need at least for civil commitment reform.<sup>10</sup> Not unlike those lobbying for abolition,

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<sup>10</sup> Established by Pennsylvania Quakers, the Pennsylvania Hospital was the first in America to include accommodations for the mentally ill. Located in the hospital’s basement, the rooms were offered “complete with shackles attached to the walls” (“Diseases of the

asylum reformers recognized that the sentimental tactics often employed in asylum exposés and even in reportage of the need for commitment reform were not working. While much of the public's and even lawmakers' lack of attention to this issue could be attributed to the so-called bystander effect, it can also be linked to the fact that, at least until 1869, the mental institutions themselves were still considered "humane and meritorious" (*Hinchman v. Richie*, *supra* note 12, qtd. in Appelbaum and Kemp 349). The cases leading up to the legislations of 1869 and 1874, however, proved to the courts, and, by extension, the public, what authors like Alcott and Fern, as well as George Lippard and E.D.E.N. Southworth, had been attempting to illustrate in their fiction for years. Nineteenth-century insane asylums too often became places of imprisonment capable of driving a sane person mad. Therefore, dark reformers depicted the asylums' serene, peaceful grounds and beautiful exteriors as precisely what they often were: veils hiding the truth.

These veils hid a number of different depravities, and they were depicted differently by different authors, usually depending on the aspect of the asylum and its maintenance the authors were aiming to reform. For example, in the final chapter of *The Quaker City's* (1845) fifth volume, Lippard describes a private mental institution run by the mad doctor, Signor Ravoni. The paradisiacal scene features Ravoni's beautiful, young, female patients frolicking in lush courtyards filled with marble fountains and exotic flowers while birdsong fills the air (Lippard 535-36). Lippard informs his readers that many of the young women are "the daughters of rich and haughty families" who have been sent to Ravoni's "temple" for  


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 Mind"). In 1754, the hospital added a new ward to answer the demand for admittance of those deemed insane.

treatment but have become “the dupes of his will and instruments of his power . . . the willing slaves of his magnetic glance” (527). References to mesmerism or animal magnetism aside, Lippard is less concerned in his writing with civil commitment reform than he is with advocating for the powerless; however, the end he drives for is the same. For Lippard and others, insane asylums, sweatshops, factories, and, more obviously, slavery were simply another method by which people could be turned into profit. Lippard reveals that beneath the beautiful façade of Ravoni’s temple lurks a system of slavery that does not discriminate based on race or class. And, just like America’s peculiar institution, Lippard reminds his readers that Ravoni’s “Legal Mad-House” operates “under the solemn sanction of the Law”:

Let me picture to you, . . . that this Quack and his Mad-House are both the creatures of your Statute-books, that sane men have been dragged into their clutches, by designing relatives, and kept chained and lashed, until insanity came to their relief, followed by sudden death; *then* quarrel with the Mad-House of the sorcerer! Even now as I write, there rises before me, the records of a judicial investigation, which gave to this Legal Mad-House, all the horrors of the Bastile, in its most gory hour! (527-28)

It becomes clearer in Lippard’s later text, *The Empire City* (1853), that mental institutions profited not only from the patients’ labor but also from hospitalization fees. Certainly, asylum inmates did perform various forms of labor, since “work was always a key component of the moral treatment movement in asylum medicine” (Reiss 174). The “moral treatment” of mental illness developed during the Enlightenment and, as the name suggests, focused on the moral and humane treatment of the mentally ill. Many attribute the original

framework of humane treatment, free movement, sun, exercise, and work to the combined theories of former asylum patient Jean-Baptiste Pussin and physician Phillipe Pinel of the Bicetre in France. In America, Benjamin Rush, the “father of American psychiatry,” followed an essentially moral plan at Pennsylvania Hospital, though he did still rely on some antiquated methods of treatment, such as “bleeding” and imbibing “medicinal wine.” Thomas Story Kirkbride later established what became known as the Kirkbride Plan, which extended the moral treatment to include guidelines for asylum architecture and landscape management. At many state-funded asylums, work was compulsory whether the patient’s fees were paid privately or by the state; however, those who paid enough at either state or private institutions could essentially buy lighter labor for the patient they committed. As Lippard and later writers illustrate, they could also purchase discretion.

Lippard’s Martin Fulmer commits the man readers know in *The Empire City* only as “Nameless” to what is almost certainly the Pennsylvania State Lunatic Hospital in Harrisburg—Pennsylvania’s first public asylum, which was established under the Kirkbride Plan in 1851. Fulmer does not commit Nameless out of spite or for nefarious purposes though. Rather, knowing that Nameless has been is in both legal and personal danger, Fulmer hides him in a private asylum for his protection. Hoping to make Nameless’s stay as easy and safe as possible, Fulmer tells the asylum’s Quaker superintendent he will pay a substantial fee to ensure that, for up to two years, Nameless has no visitors, other than those Fulmer approves, a pleasant, comfortable room, and free movement through the facility and grounds. In response, “the portly man in the Quaker garb, rubbed his hands, and said, ‘Yes, yes, yes,’ over and over again,” but “that night [Nameless] slept in a room, six feet square, with iron



bars across its solitary window” (Lippard 191). Secure in the knowledge that Fulmer cannot know whether his wishes have been followed or not once Nameless is safely within the asylum walls, the Quaker pockets the money rather than providing these added comforts to his new “patient.” The situation of the private asylum, in which a person, regardless of their actual mental state, can be “put away” for a fee, has so corrupted this kind and charitable Quaker, that Nameless eventually “learned to divide the Quakers into two classes; one mild in speech and benevolent in deed, caring not so much about strictness of belief as purity of life,” and the other, “talking *spiritualism* all day long, . . . believed in nothing but Flesh and the Dollar . . . ‘The Devil Quakers’” (Lippard 191, author’s emphasis). Lippard makes clear that, like so many other humanitarian reform institutions taken to task in his work, once corrupted by capitalism, mental institutions become “sites in which the social elite abuse, enslave, and rape those who come under their control” (Reiss 183).

Since Lippard’s writings tend to focus on labor and class reforms, his qualm with private asylums is the ease by which they can use the less fortunate to make money. Lippard reminds his readers, “the entire machinery of their establishment revolved around one fact, to wit, a ‘Physician’s Certificate’”:

Was a rich man tired of his wife, or did he desire to get rid of her, without the trouble of a Divorce? He had but to get a certificate from some Physician or other, that his wife was insane, and lo! the doors of the Private Mad-house opened at the touch of that magic paper. Was a Husband in the way of an amorous wife, surrounded by crafty relatives? The Physician’s Certificate settled him safely within the walls of the Private Mad-House. Was a Father living too long, and keeping scores of hungry heirs

too long away from the enjoyment of his property? Touch the grey hairs of the old man with a Physician's Certificate, and at once he became mad—at once the doors of the Mad-House opened for him, never to uncloset until he went forth in his shroud.

(191-92)

Lippard first presents his readers with the situation with which they would be most familiar—a husband ridding himself of a wife—and then uses that example in an attempt to illustrate that men are just as susceptible to such treatment. Mental institutions, especially private mental institutions, served a myriad of nefarious purposes, and the then-current laws made it all too easy for those corrupted by “Flesh and the Dollar” to take advantage of those purposes. The situation is then exacerbated by “the reputation of the place, (fortified by the peaceful reputation of a sect),” which places it “above reproach” and the fact that it “looked so calm and peaceful . . . surrounded by a garden, intersected with pleasant walks . . . [that] it was to all seeming (in the eyes of the passers-by who surveyed it from the gate) a very Eden” (Lippard 192). In short, both the asylum and the Quakers who run it veil the truth of the inmates’ often torturous situations.

Fanny Fern and E.D.E.N. Southworth discuss similar situations in *Ruth Hall* (1854) and *The Hidden Hand* (1859), respectively; however, they focus solely on the plight of women in the asylum. Furthermore, and especially in Southworth’s case, the situations described are less Gothic than they are sentimental. Southworth, like Lippard, is less concerned with asylum reform than she is with issues of oppression, especially women’s oppression. Through a series of convenient—and unlikely—coincidences, the reader discovers that the protagonist, Capitola Le Noir’s, mother is not dead, as has been suggested

throughout the story, but has been locked away in an asylum by her evil brother-in-law, Gabriel Le Noir. Though Mrs. Le Noir's situation mirrors that of many other men and women who found themselves wrongfully committed, Southworth uses the situation as a continuance of her critique of nineteenth-century women's rights. Because her lack of rights and access to labor left her entirely dependent on her brother-in-law's protection after her husband's death, Mrs. Le Noir's brother-in-law was able to use the already flawed system of civil commitment to clear his way to his brother's fortune. Similarly, Fern's Mary Leon finds herself in an asylum when her husband tires of her company. Mrs. Leon is not as lucky as Mrs. Le Noir, however, and she dies just one day before Ruth arrives to visit her at the institution.

Though each of these stories illustrates how its respective author used the lens of asylum reform to focus readers' attention on different, but parallel, social issues, they all describe the asylum's appearance in a similar manner. Just like the Edenic settings of Lippard's private asylums in *The Quaker City* and *The Empire City*, Southworth's "Calm Retreat . . . looked like the luxurious country seat of some wealthy merchant or planter" while Fern's "Insane Hospital" featured "terraced banks, smoothly-rolled gravel walks, plats of flowers, and grape-trellised arbors" (439 and 109). Each author's detailed description of the asylum's "outward serenity" further highlights its contrast with what Reiss describes as the "inward chaos of the institution, as well as between its reputation as a space of healing and comfort and its actual practice of brutality" (Reiss 182). Inside Southworth's asylum, Traverse Rocke, a young doctor visiting the institution awakens to "maniac voices from the cells. Some were crying, some laughing aloud, some groaning and howling, and some

holding forth in fancied exhortations” (440). The inmates are not so much tortured, however, as they are exposed. Traverse observes through the grates on the doors that “these were all women, and some of them delicate and refined even in their insanity” (440). Southworth’s inmates for the most part, are the tragically, sentimentally insane. Traverse is shocked not by the horrors of the institution (as Southworth describes none), but by the women’s inability to enjoy even the privacy of their own rooms.

Fern’s hospital offers to Ruth a much less sentimental view of mental institutions. As she is escorted through the building to view her friend’s corpse, Ruth hears the “gibbering screams of the maniacs” and of one inmate in particular whose “husband ran away from her and carried off her child with him, to spite her” (Fern, *Ruth Hall* 111). Ruth’s guide, the unsympathetic Mrs. Bunce, explains that the woman tried to appeal to the courts for custody of her child, but the law, “as it generally is, was on the man’s side” (111). Upon finally reaching the corpse, Mrs. Bunce explains that Mrs. Leon “said something about calling Ruth” but she ignored her (112). At this point, the woman produces a note from Mrs. Leon to Ruth explaining that she is “not crazy, . . . no, no—but I shall be; the air of this place stifles me; I grow weaker—weaker” (112). But it would still be almost two decades before the courts recognized the potential of asylums to drive the sane insane.

Meanwhile, Louisa May Alcott added her own comments to the discussion of civil commitment in “A Whisper in the Dark” (1863). Indeed, it is likely that both Fern’s *Ruth Hall* and Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* influenced Alcott as she wrote her later tales of women’s madness. Alcott’s “A Whisper in the Dark,” first published anonymously in the June 1863 issue of *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* and reprinted posthumously in 1889

under Alcott's name, tells the story of Sybil who, like Southworth's Mrs. Le Noir, is drugged and imprisoned in an asylum after refusing to marry her uncle. While an inmate in the asylum, Sybil receives whispered warnings from a fellow patient to flee before the place itself and the sinister Dr. Karnac drive her insane. After the patient's death, Sybil heeds the warnings, escapes the asylum and encounters Guy, her cousin, on his way to rescue her himself. Guy informs Sybil that her uncle is now dead and that her fellow inmate was in fact her mother, driven to "melancholy madness" by Sybil's father's death. Both now free, Guy and Sybil marry, though Sybil remains haunted by the image of her dead mother and her "spectral whisper in the dark" (Alcott, "A Whisper in the Dark" 58).<sup>11</sup>

In her study, *Whispers in the Dark*, Elizabeth Lennox Keyser aligns Sybil's need to share her story with the Female Gothic need to ensure daughters hear their mothers' stories from their mothers' own lips (12). The Gothic heroine's fate is historically to suffer the same oppression and persecution as her mother, often at the hands of the same man, simply because the mother is never allowed to "speak." Noting that Sybil only hears of her mothers' mental malady from Guy, Keyser protests that even though she has more information about her past, Sybil still only "receives the authorized or masculine version" of it (11). Such is also the case with those nineteenth-century women such as Packard who "escaped" asylums. However, unlike the Gothic heroines of old, these women not only wrote their own stories, they shouted them to the masses via public speeches.

Though Alcott certainly did not shout Sybil's story from the rooftops, she did publish

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<sup>11</sup> All quotations from Louisa May Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" are taken from *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*.

it in one of the most widely read periodicals of the period. With circulation of 50,000 and more in 1863, *Frank Leslie's* was a popular, widely read newspaper (Mott 460).

Furthermore, Alcott's anonymous publication allows Sybil to assume absolute ownership of the piece. In effect, Sybil becomes supreme arbiter of her own tale, with no male intermediary acting as censor; therefore, she becomes not only the wished-for Gothic mother, teaching her daughter(s) about the dangers of patriarchy, but she also becomes the ideal asylum reformer, sharing first-hand accounts of her treatment at the hands of her "caretakers."

After waking from her drug-induced sleep and hearing Hannah's advice to stop "clench[ing] your hands and look[ing] in that way," Sybil regales her readers with the tale of her weeks spent at the asylum (Alcott, "A Whisper in the Dark" 50). Unlike the asylums described in Lippard's, Fern's, and Southworth's tales, the asylum in which Sybil finds herself offers no veil of architectural beauty behind which to hide its inmates. Rather, it is the location itself that provides the veil. Looking out her grated window, Sybil finds "a lawn, sere and sodden . . . and a line of somber firs hid[ing] the landscape beyond the high wall which encompassed the dreary plot" (49). The wall provides a barrier not only to those beyond it but also for those within. Sybil spends her days aimlessly wandering the building's halls and "the neglected garden, where no flowers bloomed" and "no birds sang" or locked in a room with nothing but the sound of the patient above her and "a collection of ghostly tales and weird fancies" to distract her (53, 51). This is the first hint the reader receives that Sybil has been placed here, not because she *is* mad, but because her uncle and Dr. Karnac wish to drive her mad.

Insanity, nineteenth-century doctors believed, could be caused by anything from “poisonous vapors” to indigestion, and from “excessive study” to “reading vile books” (Reiss 4). Rather than ensuring her lack of exposure to these things, however, Dr. Karnac keeps Sybil completely isolated in a damp climate “heavy with vapors from the marsh,” tries “various mixtures and experiments” with her diet and provides her with only lurid Gothic tales to occupy her fancy in response to which Sybil soon finds herself in “a state of terrible irritability” which mimics the “weird fancies” she reads in her books (Alcott, “A Whisper in the Dark” 53, 52, 51). Dr. Karnac’s prescription for Sybil is in direct contradiction with the “purifying” agenda associated with asylums at the time (Reiss 3-4). It follows then that by aligning the reader with Sybil, Alcott suggests that the reader could just as easily find him or herself institutionalized as Sybil herself. As a result, readers are much more likely to take note of the peculiar circumstances surrounding Sybil’s incarceration, and take an interest in the efforts of the reformers attempting to amend the laws that made it so easy for Karnac and her uncle to have Sybil committed.

Each of these examples, Lippard’s, Fern’s, Southworth’s, and Alcott’s, illustrate the parallels between the asylum, slavery, and women’s rights that Goddu and Reiss point out in their studies. And though many novels and short stories of this period highlight the problems both inside and outside mental institutions, none did so in such obvious and forceful calls for action as Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Put Out of the Way* (1870). In this story, Davis relies fully on Gothicism without the added sensationalism of Lippard or the sentimentalism of Southworth, Fern, and Alcott. Furthermore, Davis pushes the periodical press to its full potential to ensure a gradual revelation of the truth, allowing her readers to learn a bit more

with each installation to avoid overwhelming them with the truth. Eschewing the conventional method of continuous, linear storytelling from one installation to the next, Davis alternates between linear, real-time, and time-lapse strategies. Additionally, Davis uses each new installment to reveal a new truth to her readers not only about the asylum but also about the story itself because in *Put Out of the Way*, the Gothic genre itself is a veil.

### **Davis, Gothicism, and Mastering the Veil**

Though Davis produced a number of pieces for *Peterson's Magazine*, *Put Out of the Way* is one of only a few to receive scholarly treatment. In fact, we have only two in-depth studies of this tale to date: Michele Mock's insightful article, "An Ardor That Was Human, and a Power That Was Art: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Art of the Periodical," that foregrounds Davis's active engagement with the periodical press as reform medium, and David Dowling's essay, "Davis, Inc.: The Business of Asylum Reform in the Periodical Press," which builds on Mock's in order to examine *Put Out of the Way* as a carefully planned tandem strike between Davis and her husband, L. Clarke Davis.<sup>12</sup> Both Mock and Dowling recognize the carefully constructed Gothic apparatus in Davis's tale, but neither attempts to determine why, in an historical moment when sensationalism, sentimentalism,

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<sup>12</sup> To avoid confusion, from this point forward I will refer to Davis's husband, L. Clarke Davis, as "Clarke Davis." The tandem strike referenced here is made possible by Clarke Davis's 1868 *Atlantic* article, "A Modern *Lettre de Cachet*," in which Clarke Davis cites and discusses several cases of both men and women being wrongfully institutionalized as a result of then-current civil commitment statutes.



and especially Gothicism were considered passé, Davis chose to employ the Gothic genre as a means to communicate the need for asylum reform. But this seeming omission should not be surprising since, though Charles Crow notes that Gothic literature narrates “that which is left out, what is excluded” when we only focus on the Howellsian “smiling aspects of life,” Gothic writing itself is often left out or excluded in scholarly studies especially of the post-Civil War period (xiii).<sup>13</sup> Gothic is an afterthought for many critics, a nagging feeling rather than a driving purpose. Nevertheless, for Davis, Gothic, specifically Female Gothic, became a powerful weapon in her quest for reform.

Indeed, at first glance, Davis’s *Put Out of the Way* presents like a solid Female Gothic romance. The villain, Colonel Ned Leeds, targets Davis’s “protagonist,” Lotty, sole heiress to her family’s lead-mine, when she falls into his care after her father’s death. Leeds convinces his equally villainous son, Fred, to pursue Lotty for a wife, so her fortune can allow him and

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<sup>13</sup> In an 1886 “Editor’s Study” column for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, William Dean Howell’s notes that

every now and then I read a book with perfect comfort and much exhilaration, whose scenes the average Englishman would gasp in. Nothing happens . . . Yet it is all alive with the keenest interest for those who enjoy the study of individual traits and general conditions as they make themselves known to American experience. (641)

According to Howells, these types of novels—which would eventually be called “Realist”—as opposed to romances and other types of writing, “concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than social interests” (641).

his son to continue their dissipated ways. But, unbeknownst to anyone but Lotty's cousin, Dick Wortley, Fred is already married. Fearing that Wortley will betray his matrimonial secret to Lotty and thwart their chances at obtaining her fortune, Fred and his father determine at the close of the story's first installment to "let him be put out of the way" (Davis 367).

Readers familiar with the Female Gothic formula just discussed expect at this point to see Wortley imprisoned or otherwise removed from the narrative in order for Davis to focus the plot on Lotty's persecution at the hands of the Gothic villain(s). However, rather than treating her audience to a detailed account of Lotty's screams, swoons, and sublime speeches, Davis shifts the perspective half-way through the second installment, turning the narrative focus from Lotty to Wortley and following him as he is legally committed to an insane asylum by the Leedses. This shift provides Davis an opportunity to illustrate in vivid detail the amount of damage nineteenth-century civil commitment laws could do. Furthermore, it allows Davis to direct her narrative at the audience with the best chance of influencing the legal statutes for commitment: men.

As briefly noted in the introduction, Jane Tompkins's study, *Sensational Designs*, illustrates just how powerful the stereotypes and clichés featured in formulaic fiction can be. Tompkins examines the similarities in plot and characterization of several popular sentimental texts to illustrate that "a novel's impact on the culture at large depends not on its escape from the formulaic and derivative, but on its tapping into a storehouse of commonly held assumptions" (xvi). Novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were both popular and effective because readers knew what to expect from the characters. They knew which characters'

actions to emulate and which to shun. The same was and is true of the Gothic texts that reformers such as Davis turned to as models to tap the fear necessary to inspire action where sentiment had failed. Readers knew the Gothic heroine well. They were familiar with her role, recognized her actions, and knew her didactic purpose. They knew she was not male, which is precisely why Davis created Wortley in her image. Davis does not feminize Wortley to draw attention to women's plight. Davis adopts a male authorial persona and casts Wortley as the Gothic heroine to illustrate how mental institutions could make men like women. Thus, Davis's work effectually illustrates how the contradictions inherent in the parallels drawn between slaves, women, and men all but disappear when we rewrite them as slaves, women, and the insane.

Many will argue that my assertions here are problematic because *Peterson's* was a women's magazine. While I certainly cannot ignore that women were *Peterson's* primary audience, I also cannot concede that this in any way suggests that men never read the stories published in its pages. In her study of "Ideologies and Practices of Reading" in the nineteenth century, Barbara Sicherman cautions that many of our ideas in regard to class and gender boundaries when it came to reading material are based more on our own "presentist" need to classify the genres and movements of the period than on facts (296-302). By studying letters, diaries, and journals of the period, Sicherman concludes that "men and women, adults and young people, all read and discussed the same books, a circumstance that suggests less age and gender stratification in reading than is often supposed" (298). For further proof that *Put Out of the Way* almost certainly found its way into men's hands, one need look no further than Charles J. Peterson's editorial statement included with the second installation of the

novella. After assuring readers, at Davis's request, that "there is no exaggeration in the story," and that every incident described "can be proved from the records of various courts," Peterson goes on to state that "his"—Davis's—"purpose" in writing the "novelet" is "to assist in awakening public sentiment to the necessity of a reform in the manner in which patients can be committed to such hospitals" (472). Mock notes that "Peterson referred to Davis in the generic masculine form" and even expands upon this in her notes, stating that in so doing, Peterson renders Davis able to "make sense" of the masculine world in which he has placed her; however, she does not go on to discuss the implications of this action (132, 145n). Domestic ideologies of the time period lent a deeper level of trust to men's writing even, and perhaps especially, for women readers. By referring to Davis in the generic masculine form, Peterson establishes that she is worthy of commenting on those political and social issues discussed and debated within the public sphere. As such, her work and the opinions she expresses in it are "worthy" of being shared with men. In short, Peterson ensures that, at the very least, women will express the need for civil commitment reform to their husbands, brothers, and fathers; at best, they will give the men in their lives Davis's story to read themselves. Therefore, the veil hiding her female identity is one Davis certainly did not wish to see lifted.

The expectation her story would be read by men as well as women also helps to explain why Davis would choose to feature a male protagonist. As this chapter has already illustrated, asylum and civil commitment reform were not new topics in 1870, and literary attempts to raise awareness on the subject were fairly common. First-hand accounts of forced commitment had already been published, but, Reiss explains, "protests by wrongfully

confined men met a deafening silence, proceeding from a culture reluctant to hear (or fearful of hearing) the voices of failed men (188-89). For a man, recovering one's reputation after release from an asylum, whether he was wrongfully imprisoned or not, was highly unlikely. In fact, Reiss suggests, "institutionalization was more of a threat to nineteenth-century masculinity than to femininity," first because men lost rights, such as voting, which were only available to men, and, second, because "men's illnesses were more likely . . . to be ascribed to immoral behavior like alcohol abuse or sexual promiscuity" (75-76).

Furthermore, short of escape, any means of release from the institution could only be achieved through submission to the asylum regime and, thereby, emasculation. Interestingly, though both Dowling and Mock discuss Davis's male protagonist, neither attributes any calculated effort to her choice. Dowling recognizes that "male victims would have appealed more directly to the male legislators who eventually did" amend the laws that determined how and when an individual could be committed to an asylum, but he only gives further attention to these male victims as they appear in Clarke's *Atlantic* article, "A Modern *Lettre-de-Cachet*" (31). Mock, on the other hand, argues that though Wortley is male, Davis employs "reversible gendered economies" by feminizing his character after his incarceration "to better epitomize nineteenth-century women's plight" (136). It seems more likely, though, that Davis recognized that in order for those with the power to affect change—men—to be moved to action, they needed to be shown, rather than told, what institutionalization would look and, more importantly, feel like if and when it happened to them. Sentiment had not worked, women's narratives had not worked, and men's narratives certainly had not worked. Reviewing these failures, Davis recognized that telling a truly sane man's tale of wrongful

institutionalization from an objective, male, third-person perspective was the only approach that might work, especially considering her editor, C. J. Peterson was willing to back her up with assertions that her tale is based in fact. Indeed, Davis's approach could be considered an early docu-drama in which facts are related through actor portrayal rather than simple reportage, but they are, clearly, still facts.

Contrary to Mock's suggestion that she feminizes Wortley to better align him with nineteenth-century women, Davis is careful to illustrate, even in the one instance when Wortley gives way to tears, that he is still a man, even as he recognizes that his weakened state after a year of institutionalization often makes him feel like "an hysteric girl" (110). Following a failed attempt to convince a member of the asylum's committee to send him a lawyer, Wortley begins to fear that he might remain in the asylum forever, and, worse, be driven mad by it:

'Am I, indeed, insane?' he cried in his heart. 'Has reason gone from me? Do my very looks reveal to others that I am mad? Mad! Mad!' he said, with his fingers wildly tearing at his hair. 'Good God, mad! and I knew it not!'

A burst of tears come to his relief. When a man weeps, it is terrible; but those tears saved Dick's intellect, perhaps his life. Dick, for the moment, had been insane. If he had gone on, dwelling on his hopeless condition, speculating as to his own insanity, he would, like others, have gone mad before morning. As it was, he had a respite. But for how long? (41).

Far from emasculating him, Wortley's tears allow him to maintain his sanity and, more importantly, his capacity for reason. He awakes the next morning refreshed, and resolves to

continue his attempts to achieve freedom. These attempts, he recognizes, will be made all the more difficult by the fact that his confinement has made him feel like a woman. He even observes after listing the countless obstacles between him and freedom that “I am as weak as an hysteric girl! . . . They’ve sealed my manhood from me pretty thoroughly” (110). These observations, rather than aligning him with women, serve to highlight in stark contrast the robust man he was prior to his imprisonment with the weak one he recognizes himself now to be. More importantly, Wortley recognizes that these outward, physical manifestations of his manhood are not lost; they are simply sealed away, and it is his reason, his brain that “he felt, had never been so clear” that will help him reclaim them (110). In short, Davis features a male protagonist in *Put Out of the Way* in order to illustrate for nineteenth-century men how the then-current system of civil commitment could easily strip them of every physical element that makes them *feel* like men.

Given her selection of a male protagonist, understanding Davis’s reasons for choosing the Gothic mode is difficult for some critics. They suggest that her reliance on Gothicism effectively undermines Wortley as a protagonist, since Gothic is usually considered a “popular,” literary form. Dowling belittles Gothic writing as “pulp” while Mock proposes that Davis chose this mode in order to destroy “the lines between ‘high’ culture and popular culture” to ensure her art’s efficacy (24, 127). This selection of a “lower” narrative form combined with Davis’s female-ness is precisely the reason, according to Mock, many of Davis’s *Peterson’s* pieces, including *Put Out of the Way*, have been labeled “‘trite’ and ‘melodramatic’ fictions” since, historically, “women writing for women have been leveled with allegations of ‘hack work’ and ‘potboilers’ in reference to their literature” (130, 132).

According to these theories, scholars should be surprised that *Put Out of the Way* was influential at all. Studies such as Sicherman's, though, remind us that even when they were writing for so-called ladies magazines, women authors knew they were writing for the entire family, and history shows us, especially in the case of *Put Out of the Way*, that Davis's writing was unquestionably influential in the conversations that led to changes in Pennsylvania's civil commitment laws.

But the question remains: why Gothic? Elaine Showalter notes that in the years following the Civil War "readers' appetites for serious literature declined and their appetite for escapist fiction, military treatises, and biographies increased" (130). However, while this seems to gesture toward an opportunity for writers like Davis to revel in Gothic and sensational modes of expression, Showalter goes on to explain how "the war marked a shift from sentimentalism to realism" and that readers sought entertainment less in the "domestic topics of poetry and fiction" than in "a more wide-ranging analysis of society, gender, and public issues" (131). Davis's *Put Out of the Way* provides precisely this mix of realism with the "escapist" Gothic form to produce a work that simultaneously entertains and foregrounds questions of ethics, morality, gender, and the public issue of asylum reform. By juxtaposing reality, the commonplace, with Gothic elements usually associated with imagined circumstances, Davis draws on the same Gothic rhetoric of fear that Dowling asserts Clarke Davis employs to such great effect in "A Modern *Lettre de Cachet*." Clarke Davis's rhetoric, however, is much less Gothic than it is sentimental.

Published in the *Atlantic* in May of 1868, "A Modern *Lettre de Cachet*," like many other articles of its kind, relies on pathos to move its readers to action. Clarke Davis



repeatedly urges his readers to “put your soul into the place of this man’s soul,” and though the cases are factual, the sheer number accumulates to create somewhat of a paradox for his readers. As Clarke Davis not only outlines the problem but also outlines what needs to occur to find a solution, his article is an example of the kind of advocacy he claims does not exist. Davis, on the other hand does not suggest societal inaction on this subject in her anonymous *New York Tribune* article, “Asylums for the Insane,” published in November of the same year. Rather, she notes that by “calling public attention to the manner in which people in this country are confined as lunatics, the keepers of insane asylums are disarmed of their most effective weapon of defense, *secrecy*” (“Asylums,” author’s emphasis). In fact, Davis is more concerned with the amount of attention being paid to the “display of splendor in the building where [the insane] were confined” rather than the patients’ “minds and interior comforts” (“Asylums”). Unlike her husband, Davis’s target is the very thing that made it impossible for many nineteenth-century readers to think poorly of mental institutions: their palatial exteriors.

In *Theaters of Madness*, Reiss describes nineteenth-century insane asylums as “surprising centers of cultural activity. The buildings themselves were magnificent structures with verdant grounds, . . . and they attracted streams of tourists” intent on seeing the insane and their treatment on display (3). Clarke Davis makes passing mention of many asylums’ deceptive beauty, but Davis anticipates her audience’s skepticism of the institution based on the possibility they may have visited one:

It is desirable to impress the *visitor* to such an institution, as much as possible, favorably; he is led through carpeted halls and listens to the pleasant trickling of

fountains—he sees no more of the inmates than shrewd officials choose to permit, . . . Of course the visitor leaves with a favorable impression; he sees nothing of the dark cells, of harmless letters ruthlessly torn open, and detained; nor does he penetrate into that mysterious system of misrepresentation by which inquisitive patients are ingeniously cajoled. (“Asylums,” author’s emphasis)

Davis makes little attempt to appeal to anything other than the reader’s logic. Using matter-of-fact language, she informs her audience of what was perhaps the most important element standing in the way of asylum reform: the asylum’s architectural veil.

As Wortley is the protagonist of Davis’s story, much of it is told from his point of view. Thus, readers do not see the beautiful, tree filled park that surrounds the institution in which he is imprisoned until the story is almost finished. Instead, we are inside with Wortley. While Wortley’s asylum boasts sixteen wards, Davis informs readers that visitors are allowed to see only two:

Visitors came from all parts of the country, and were enraptured with the cleanliness, the beautiful grain of the flooring, the snugly carpeted little chambers, the white bedspreads, the parade of cheap books, the chapel, the laundry . . . If any, blessed with curiosity beyond the rest, asked about the fourteen wards that remained unseen, they were silenced by the reply that they were devoted to the patients whom Minch styled ‘woyolent.’ (30)

Thus, the visitors are made to believe nothing is being hidden; rather, they are being protected from the violent prisoners. Wortley initially finds himself in the third ward, but

after commenting on the poor quality treatment received by the truly insane in the asylum, he is relocated to the eighth ward and a stone cell,

six-by-ten feet . . . lighted by a slit in the wall, placed about two feet higher than his head” and “only wide enough to admit his hand . . .

The cell itself was . . . precisely the same as those set apart for convicts, sentenced to death, in the New York prison.

‘Except that here . . . Dr. Harte is judge, and executioner, and public. The law gives its discipline before the eyes of the whole nation; but Harte works his will on us undisturbed, as though we were rats in a hole.’ (34)

Aside from an iron cot with a straw mattress and night soil vessels, Wortley sees no other furnishings. Thus, Davis quickly illustrates that what visitors witness is a lie, and though she never puts the question directly to her readers, it is clear she is asking what they plan to do about it.<sup>14</sup>

While “Asylums for the Insane” appeals to “thinking men’s” logic, Davis’s Gothic premise in *Put Out of the Way*—the idea that anyone, man or woman, could be involuntarily institutionalized—revolves on the essential anachronism of the laws then associated with civil commitment. Indeed, anachronism plays a key role in establishing the unsettling atmosphere of almost any “good” Gothic tale. Specifically, Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall establish that it is part of the “business” of Gothic fiction to negotiate the problems that arise

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<sup>14</sup> Presumably, *Put Out of the Way* should have been published soon after “Asylums for the Insane,” in late 1868 or early 1869; however, it was delayed by complications until 1870.

when vestiges of the past survive into modernity (279). The Leeds's discussion about how to get rid of Wortley highlights the anachronistic tendencies in institutionalized mental health care that lead to the Gothic situations Davis then narrates throughout her text. Fred Leeds tells his father that he wishes they were back in Revolutionary France, or "Italy, in other times" when Wortley "could be got rid of for a few scudi." His father's response outlines what Lippard, Southworth, Clarke Davis, and Davis all see as a key problem with nineteenth-century civil commitment law:

‘There are Bastiles [*sic*] in the United States, by the aid of which any inconvenient person can be put out of the way for life. It is a quiet, safe means, which a gentleman can use with no fear of punishment. There must be secrecy, and—the scudi,’ with a laugh. ‘Only pay enough, and get up your case right, as the lawyers say, you have science and philanthropy both to assist you.’ (435).

By equating U.S. mental institutions and the ease with which one may find oneself an inmate with the Bastille, Davis points out the dire nature of this particular anachronism for America's supposedly forward moving society.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lippard and Davis both equate nineteenth-century asylums with the Bastille. In fact, Lippard's observation that "Even now as I write, there rises before me, the records of a judicial investigation, which gave to this Legal Mad-house, all the horrors of the Bastile [*sic*], in its most gory hour" is very like Peterson's later note that "Even as we write, we read, in the newspapers, of a sane man being entrapped, and buried alive in a lunatic asylum (528 and 472). Not only do these similarities highlight the distinct lack of progress in asylum reform in

The fact that “science and philanthropy,” the tools of innovation and modernism, are at such a corrupt system’s disposal reveals yet another central concern in Davis’s reform project. Davis calculates that the somewhat sentimental language throughout her novella will cause her readers to respond to Col. Leeds’s assertion that science and philanthropy will assist Fred in putting Wortley out of the way with disbelief; however, she continually destroys the reader’s disbelief via assertions of the reality of Wortley’s situation, which are then further supported by the fact that Davis’s readership believed they were reading a story written by a man. Indeed, Peterson himself notes in his editor’s column “even as we write, we read, in the newspapers, of a sane man being entrapped, and buried alive in a lunatic asylum, under circumstances very similar to those described in the novelet” (472). But, as Wortley himself muses once he finds himself “buried alive,” “he had heard of people being imprisoned in lunatic asylums, who were perfectly sane; but he had never believed such stories” (Davis 443). This scene coupled with Peterson’s “Editor’s Table” entry contributes to an uncanny realization on the readers’ part that they are doing the same thing Wortley used to do: reading, but not necessarily believing. Davis thereby performs one of the most difficult tasks of any fiction, but especially of Gothic: she effectually creates the reader as Wortley’s double, performing the same actions he did prior to his imprisonment:

Not even when he had read in the newspapers, accounts of trials growing out of these false arrests, had he had more than a half skeptical belief in their truth. There was some mistake, he had been wont, in his charitable way, to say: at least, the parties

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the three decades between the two publications but it also begs the question of how familiar Peterson and even Davis were with Lippard’s work.

incarcerated must have been guilty of eccentricities that had deceived their family, or others. But now he realized his error. (443)

Wortley's thoughts highlight the circular reasoning that has and likely will always lead to at least some amount of victim blaming, and Peterson's "Editor's Table" comments make clear that so long as they subscribe to the logical fallacy that if the prisoners were truly innocent they wouldn't be in the asylum, it may only be a matter of time before they join Wortley in his living grave.

Peterson actually wrote two comments in consecutive months regarding *Put Out of the Way*'s veracity. The first, as already noted, appeared in the June 1870 issue, and it is at the end of that month's installment that Wortley is taken to the asylum. The second, which appears in the July issue, seems to be written in answer to his readers' questions about the story's truth. "Our New Novelet, 'Put Out of the Way,'" Peterson writes, "causes a very general sensation. We repeat, what we said last month, that it is not a bit exaggerated," and to support his statements, Peterson includes quotes from "A prominent New York Daily" attesting to the deplorable conditions faced by those who found themselves imprisoned there (76). Peterson's comments coupled with the knowledge Sicherman provides in regard to nineteenth-century communities of reading indicate that in the time between Davis's serial installments, her readers were not only talking but also worrying about civil commitment. As noted previously, one of the greatest benefits for dark reformers of publishing in periodicals was that readers were allowed month-long reprieves, during which they likely forgot the protagonist's ordeal or began to doubt the likelihood of its veracity. By not publishing any comments in regard to Davis's story's truth with the first installation, Davis and Peterson

ensure readers have nothing to expect from the story other than a standard Female Gothic tale. But between the second and third installments of her story, Davis foregoes the usual practice of picking up her narrative where she left off the previous month and, instead, provides a brief recap of what Wortley has experienced over the past weeks. Having written letters to a lawyer—which, unbeknownst to Wortley, were burned rather than posted—Davis describes the panic in which he awaits his rescue. Realizing his letters must not have been sent, he determines to wait to speak to the asylum’s assistant superintendent, Dr. Harte, who “went the rounds personally” once a month (Davis 30). We rejoin Wortley at the beginning of the third installment on the day of Dr. Harte’s rounds to find him “half crazed at times. He had got into a way, like really insane persons, of repeating his words. He would run his hand through his hair, would stop in his rapid pacing to and fro, would mutter to himself—any one, almost, seeing his wild gestures and wilder looks, would have pronounced him mad” (30). After just one month in the upper wards, Wortley is already beginning to succumb to the effects of his incarceration. Alongside this revelation comes Peterson’s assurance that the events described are based on fact and a reminder that such has been the case for decades.

Davis employs a different tactic in transitioning between the third and final installments of her story. In the final installment, she resumes her narrative the morning after the scene in which Wortley breaks down in tears. He awakes refreshed and clear headed, and for a moment, Davis treats her audience to a calm, pleasant scene in which a well-rested Wortley relaxes in bed imagining the breaking dawn. As he begins to imagine birds singing, he “remembered it was too late in the year for birds; that he could not see the sky, or the sun; that he had not seen the sun rise for months, not, indeed, since he had been in this foul hole.

It was nearly a year! A year, and deliverance seemed further off than ever! A year!” (Davis 109). In the July issue (Vol. 58, No. 1), Peterson quotes a New York paper taking readers to task for the negligence that has allowed asylums to be used “as convenient prisons for sane people” and in her August installment, Davis informs her readers that yet another year has now passed with no relief for such prisoners (76). Furthermore readers learn that with the onset of winter, Wortley is about to enjoy his last day with access to the outdoors until spring, and a desperate attempt at escape allows him finally to get a letter outside of the asylum by throwing it over a wall.

At this point, Davis’s narrative provides a direct response to Peterson’s “Editor’s Table” comments of the previous month. A father and his daughters, Hetty and Jessy, find Wortley’s note on the ground outside the asylum wall, and their subsequent conversation regarding how to handle it reveals the derisive manner in which the insane were perceived that likely formed the foundation for many of the issues facing asylum reformers. The father, “a middle-aged, stout built business man” instructs Hetty to destroy the letter: “It has been thrown over the wall by some wretched lunatic. I have found them often here” (Davis 113). When Jessy attempts to retrieve the letter from Hetty with an aim toward sending it, the father warns Hetty to “throw the letter down . . . How do you know who has handled it?” (113). Hetty follows her father’s instructions, throwing the letter in a puddle and later entertains her classmates with the tale, explaining that she threw the letter away because “I would do nothing to give Dr. Chase [the asylum superintendent] annoyance. Papa says his Institution is one of the noblest charities of the age” (113). The similarity to Peterson’s comment the previous month that “we have been so wont to regard” asylums “as one of the



great humanitarian triumphs of the age” is hard to miss (76). Also similar is the father’s attitude toward the asylum inmates to that Wortley admits to having held prior to his own incarceration. Both he and the father allow circular reasoning to lead them to victim blaming rather than considering the possibility that the system may, indeed, be flawed. Even more importantly, this scene puts readers at odds with the current ideology surrounding asylums. If Wortley is the hero in Davis’s story, and he is, then the father in this scene is an antagonist, a villain whose actions stand in the way of the hero’s potential victory. However, his actions are likely no different than those Wortley would have performed prior to his incarceration or those the reader might have performed prior to reading Wortley’s tale. Being given the opportunity to identify with the wrongly accused rather than the accusers, Davis’s hope is that, like Wortley, the reader will vow to “right other wrongs than my own, when I am free!” (30).

That freedom comes to Wortley via a somewhat convenient coincidence. In telling contrast to her father’s identification of the insane as “wretched” and obviously filthy, if not contagious, Jessy refers to the letter’s author as “some poor prisoner” (Davis 113). Unable to “cure Jessy of her absurd sentimentality,” her father would be appalled to discover that she would become the means of Wortley’s emancipation (113). Retrieving the letter from the puddle, Jessy places it in a clean envelope addressed to the New York judge whose name Wortley had scribbled in pencil on the outside of his own, now ruined, envelope and drops it in the mail that very afternoon, thus illustrating all that may be required to save the wrongfully incarcerated is a little disinterested benevolence. Jessy does not tell anyone she posted the letter, and Davis makes it clear that the act itself required very little effort on

Jessy's part, but within three days, Wortley is released. In Jessy, Davis presents readers with a foil for the father and also provides a model for right action. As readers identify with Wortley and Jessy's actions help save him, we, the readers, should strive to act as she does.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the Davises' publications and their advocacy for asylum reform, Clarke Davis was appointed to a Pennsylvania state commission tasked with investigating the condition of the criminally insane in May of 1874. Mock notes in her study, "that very month, another act for protection of the insane was passed"; however, she does not provide details of that act (131). As no other significant legislation related to treatment of the insane was passed that month, the act to which she refers is likely the Act of May 14, 1874, which states that if a jury finds a prisoner not guilty by reason of insanity, "a subsequent application by the prisoner to be discharged as no longer of unsound mind . . . must be [accompanied by] evidence of a *change* of mental condition" (*Weekly Notes of Cases* 515). Furthermore, if the crime committed was homicide, evidence not only of the patient's change in mental condition but also that he or she "is now *safe to be at large*" must be provided, and, regardless of the evidence, proof the patient is of sound mind prior to the conclusion of his or her sentence will not result in a shortened or canceled sentence (*Weekly Notes of Cases* 515). During Clarke Davis's time on the commission, Pennsylvania also added the Act of March 23, 1876, which established penalties for physicians who "negligently or maliciously committed individuals" and the Act of May 8, 1883, which required physicians to indicate that "hospitalization was desirable for care and treatment, and that they were not related to

the individual to be committed” (Appelbaum and Kemp 351). This act also expanded inmates’ rights to communication and treatment and, for the first time, allowed voluntary self-admission.

Though rarely discussed in scholarship of nineteenth-century reform literature, civil commitment and asylum reform were important issues of the period. Like many humanitarian reforms of the time, those interested in this movement did not necessarily form societies or clubs, but approached the topic through literature and the networks provided by the periodical press. “Many reform efforts in this era hinged on magazines,” Heather Haveman notes, “to transmit news about social wrongs and protest efforts over great distances and to spur and coordinate protests in many locations; in doing so magazines knit together communities of reformers that spanned the nation” (221). By publishing their literature in large national magazines and newspapers like *The New York Ledger*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Peterson’s Magazine*, authors like those discussed here ensured their message reached the masses who could then disseminate it through their own unique communities of readership. But by employing the Gothic to create dark reform literature rather than sentimental tales, these authors ensured their readers would also be frightened into social action.

CONCLUSION: “NEVERTHELESS, SHE PERSISTED”:  
TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOTHIC FORMS AND FUNCTIONS IN THE  
PRESENT

Fanny Fern predicted the arrival of the New Woman in her brief piece, “The ‘Coming’ Woman” published in *The New York Ledger* February 12, 1859. “*This* wife,” Fern warns, “is not to be had for the whistling”:

Thick-soled boots and skating are coming in, and ‘nerves,’ novels and sentiment (by consequence) are going out. The coming woman, as I see her, is not to throw aside her needle; neither is she to sit embroidering worsted dogs and cats, or singing doubtful love ditties, and rolling up her eyes to ‘the chaste moon.’

No, the coming woman shall be no cold, angular, flat-chested, narrow-shouldered, skimpy sharp-visaged Betsey, but she shall be a bright-eyed, full-chested, broad-shouldered, large-souled, intellectual being; able to walk, able to eat, able to fulfill her maternal destiny, and able—if it so please God—to go to her grave happy, self-poised and serene, though unwedded. (310)

Appearing the week following the first installment of E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*, readers would certainly notice the similarities at least in spirit between Fern’s “coming woman” and Southworth’s Cap, but we see her too in Rebecca Harding Davis’s Margaret Porter of “In the Market” and Louisa May Alcott’s Christie Devon of *Work*. Each of these women focuses first on self-sufficiency before considering marriage, but each does eventually marry. Thus, three years later, Fern is still waiting. In *The Ledger*’s June 8, 1861

issue, Fern published a brief column in which she laments society's continued disapprobation of savvy businesswomen whose pursuit of economic independence is seen as unwomanly:

No matter how isolated or destitute her condition, the majority would consider it more 'feminine' would she unobtrusively gather up her thimble, and, retiring into some out-of-the-way place, gradually scoop out her coffin with it, than to develop that smart turn for business which would lift her at once out of her troubles; and which, in a man so situated, would be applauded as exceedingly praiseworthy. (318)

Beneath Fern's satire is the classificatory foundation of gender difference that continues to plague women in the workforce and the world even today.

The texts treated in this study represent just a few of the issues nineteenth-century women faced as they struggled for economic independence. In the decades following the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, women were extended a number of rights and freedoms to which they had never previously had access. From the right to own and dispose of property to the right to earn and keep wages, it appeared as if the women's movement was truly approaching a moment when women might experience equality with men. However, both legal and social history draw a very different picture. As Reconstruction gave way to the Progressive Era and women continued to seek increased opportunities for economic independence as well as social equality, new forms of oppression appeared in the form of Protective Labor Laws.

Initially conceived as protective measures for women in the workplace, as the name implies, Protective Labor Laws, or Protective Legislation, had several unforeseen consequences that continue to plague working women in the twenty first century. On the one

hand, organizations such as the National Consumer League, founded in 1891, successfully lobbied for legislation that led to “improved factory conditions, shorter hours, and the start of the minimum wage,” but these same laws might also “limit income, crush opportunity, and diminish citizenship” (Woloch 271). In short, Nancy Woloch describes how “classification by sex, ‘the law’s graciousness to a disabled class,’ cemented women’s secondary role in the workplace and society” (271). Women’s continued separate and secondary role became abundantly clear in the landmark 1908 Supreme Court case, *Muller v. Oregon*, in which Justice David Josiah Brewer handed down the court’s unanimous opinion that a woman:

is properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection may be sustained even when like legislation is not necessary for men, and could not be sustained . . . Even though all restrictions on political, personal, and contractual rights were taken away, and she stood, so far as statutes are concerned, upon an absolutely equal plane with him, it would still be true that she is so constituted that she will rest upon and look to him for protection; that her physical structure and a proper discharge of her maternal functions—having in view not merely her own health, but the wellbeing of the race—justify legislation to protect her from the greed, as well as the passion, of man. The limitations which this statute places upon her contractual powers, upon her right to agree with her employer as to the time she shall labor, are not imposed solely for her benefit, but also largely for the benefit of all.

(208 U.S. 412)

As Justice Brewer’s opinion makes clear, women such as the one made to work more than ten hours in a day at Curt Muller’s laundry deserve protection under the law not because they

have the right to demand a work day of no more than ten hours but because society needs them in healthy child-bearing condition. Rather tellingly, the Supreme Court's ruling in *Muller v. Oregon* did not overturn its ruling from *Lochner v. New York* (1905) three years prior in which justices ruled 5-4 that limiting Joseph Lochner to a ten-hour workday in his bakery violated his Constitutional rights under the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause.<sup>1</sup> The court's decision in this case stated explicitly that the decision was based solely on the difference between the sexes, and not on Constitutional law. As was the case with coverture in the nineteenth century, traditional common law and societal notions of female frailty ruled in the courtroom.

The *Muller* decision established a precedent that is often referred to as the "mothers of the race" argument in which Progressive Era reformers justified labor reforms that excluded women from various opportunities in the workforce based on their eugenic duties as mothers. Though the Eugenics Movement's pursuit of "fitter families" lost momentum in the 1940s and was completely discredited following the Holocaust, the end to protective legislation based on mothers of the race arguments would not come for another half century.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." In *Lochner v. New York*, the Supreme Court determined that the due process clause implies "freedom of contract," and limiting Lochner's work hours would deprive him of that freedom without due process of law.

In *United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America v. Johnson Controls, Inc.* (1991), plaintiffs argued and the Supreme Court upheld that the company's fetal-protection policies which denied fertile women but not fertile men the right to work in environments in which they may be exposed to lead were discriminatory. Key in this decision is the fact that the justices overturned previous court assumptions that "because the asserted reason for the sex-based exclusion (protecting women's unconceived offspring) was ostensibly benign, the policy was not sex-based discrimination. That assumption, however, was incorrect" since Johnson Controls only maintained restrictions on hiring practices for women despite evidence that lead exposure is harmful to both the male and female reproductive systems (*UAW v. Johnson Controls*). It only took one hundred years from the NCL's inception to what appeared to be the removal of the final impediment to women's achieving equal rights in the workplace; however, as the next twenty-five years, and especially the last several months, have made clear women still have some distance to travel before reaching true equality with men.

Women's "maternal destiny," as Fern describes it in "The 'Coming' Woman" appears as a subject of contention from the first wave of feminism through today. Indeed, for many, controlling reproduction appears central to society's attempts to control women in general. The need to control and even legislate women's bodies thus becomes a central concern in works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892) in which the narrator finds herself subjected to S. Weir Mitchell's "rest cure" following delivery of her baby, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) in which Esther Greenwood fears pregnancy and the resultant marriage that would follow it, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)



in which fertile women are forced into completely relinquishing their personhood to become not women but “two legged wombs.” The continued appearance of women who lose control over their bodies in the fiction of the last century serves to prove that though the True Woman has long since relinquished her seat in the parlor of the average household, her specter looms large over discourse surrounding women’s rights even today. A particularly chilling case that could easily have sprung from the very pages of Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* is currently unfolding in Oklahoma, for example, where a bill recently passed through the legislature in which a woman seeking an abortion must first obtain the informed, written consent of the fetus’s father before the procedure can be performed. When asked how the bill reconciles a woman’s personal liberty with her inability to make a life-altering choice on her own, the bill’s author, Justin Humphrey, responded that while he understands that women think their bodies are their own, he feels their bodies are actually fetal “hosts.” In short, once pregnant, a woman loses her personhood and becomes simply a vessel for a new life—like Atwood’s “two legged wombs”—devoid of rights and autonomy. In this scenario, pregnancy replaces marriage as the situation that “covers” a woman’s personhood rendering her an undead tool for procreation rather than a human. This is only one of many such bills introduced in state governments across the nation and each has raised its own protests, but the current climate around women’s rights (or the removal of those rights) has recently led to the largest worldwide protest in history.

On January 21, 2017, millions of women in cities both in North America and around the world gathered to march in protest of Donald J. Trump’s inauguration as President of the United States of America. Citing the new administration’s openly hostile, racist, classist, and

misogynistic rhetoric directed toward almost anyone who does not fit the criteria of rich, white, Christian, and male throughout the 2016 election cycle, the March organizers sought to remind Trump and his transition team on the first day of their administration that “women’s rights are human rights” (“Guiding Principles”). Despite these and countless other protests that have taken place in the weeks since Trump’s inauguration, what many view as attacks on women continue to issue forth in the form of legislations aimed at limiting women’s reproductive rights and access to health care. Nearly two centuries after the Seneca Falls Convention twenty-first-century women are reminded daily that we have yet to reach the end of the road to equality.

Today, social media has largely taken the place of the periodical press in disseminating information about and calls for reform; however, magazines and newspapers still have a large part to play. Indeed, the press’s influence on the lay people who might support or protest their government becomes abundantly clear when that government’s administration attempts to discredit any news source that does not openly support its rhetoric, and many who had long ago turned to the Web or television for their news are once again looking to newspapers and magazines for Truth. In this new era of reform, the periodical press in conjunction with social media has equally as great an influence on the common people as it did two hundred years ago, and many of the reform goals, especially those women seek, are uncannily similar to those sought in the 1800s. Thus, it seems that despite myriad legal and social advances made since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, women continue to struggle toward a life less Gothic.

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