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This project explores nineteenth-century Southern women writers' discussions of self-regulation in their sentimental fiction. This dissertation seeks to enrich literary scholarship's understanding of Southern women's writing in Victorian America; while nineteenth-century women's embodied experiences have long been studied, there has not heretofore been a study of nineteenth-century Southern women's sentimental fiction through the lens of sentimental rhetoric. I have chosen women authors whose works were relatively popular for Americans north and south of the Mason Dixon line but remain obscured by the canon of nineteenth-century American literature privileging works by Northern writers. These women authors are Caroline Gilman, Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Grace King. Scholars tend to study Northern women writers, if they study women writers at all; this gives scholars of nineteenth-century literature a false sense of the influence Southern women writers had on American social reform. Further, scholars can take for granted the rhetorical nuances Southern women writers possessed to be relatively popular among Northern and Southern authors—despite intense divisiveness in nineteenth-century America.

WRITING THE BODY: SENTIMENTAL RHETORIC IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN WOMEN WRITERS' FICTION

by

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Jay Hugh Watson, Sr.—"Pop"—who just wanted to see me graduate from preschool.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Jamie Watson has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Self-government of mind and body was central to how nineteenth-century Americans understood who deserved autonomy in political, economic, and social spaces. To advocate for social change, both Northern and Southern women argued that they could self-regulate; women could control themselves. In a society moving away from the public spectacle of corporal punishment, nineteenth-century American disciplinary powers treated the body as a vessel for controlling the subject-made-object. As Michel Foucault writes, to "intervene upon [the body] to imprison it, or to make it work" is "to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property" (11). A disciplined body is one that is controlled through rules, rituals, and systems of codes rather than tortured to maintain expectations of behavior. And the patriarchal culture of nineteenth-century America defined many expectations of what defined proper womanhood.

Barbara Welter called this socially accepted code of behavior for nineteenth-century women the "Cult of True Womanhood." For Welter, the "Cult of True Womanhood," defined how "a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society" and "could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (152). Welter dates the "Cult of True Womanhood" from 1820 to 1860. However, these expectations derived from social pressures far predated this period, and this way of thinking about proper womanhood far exceeded 1860.

Further, Welter's cardinal virtues cannot explain the nuance of gender expectations for all woman of various experiences, classes, racial backgrounds, and circumstances. Rather, expectations proper womanhood varied based on a woman's perceived race, class, age, ability, and gender expression, among other markers of identity. Offering a complex analysis of Welter's

contribution to American women's history, Nancy Hewitt acknowledges that Welter "did focus primarily on the experiences of northern white women"—particularly middle-class northern white women—"when examining the patriarchal expectations driving this Cult of True Womanhood. Welter's scholarship inspired future scholars to question how "respectability among African American women […] were rooted in black women's complex relations to the ideas that defined white women's experiences" (159). In the words of Mary Louise Roberts, scholars have used Welter's work to then question how such expectations of women's behavior "structured the worlds of private and public, the home and the workplace, the family and the professions." Further, these expectations "helped to maintain class- and race-based hierarchies of power" and "justified women's exclusion from participatory democracy" (151).

Furthermore, in scholarship surrounding nineteenth-century history and literature, many have been careful to critique the seeming boundary between public and private. It is easy to oversimplify the complex dynamics of nineteenth-century American society. One could easily say that pious, pure, and submissive women were relegated to the private, domestic sphere while men were free to occupy the public sphere. Men and women were not always physically separated, and the "boundaries of these spheres were quite fluid," as Danaya C. Wright notes. Instead, this concept of separate spheres for men and women loosely describes "men's and women's separate and gendered social roles that was deployed most effectively during the nineteenth century" (53). While the delineation of public and private spheres lacks the nuance of social behaviors and dispositions, the labeling of public vs. private allows scholars to explore the limitations of gendered, raced, and classed roles prescribed in nineteenth-century America (269-70).

As far as the scope of this project, Southern women in nineteenth-century America experienced intense scrutiny from their peers for how well they embodied or challenged expectations of women. With such expectations influencing the North and the South, middle- and upper-class women were invested in resisting or maintaining such norms. The disciplining of women's bodies, while often including discussions of sexuality, maintained social norm of American motherhood, the centrality of the American family, and women's typical relegation to the domestic sphere. However, as we shall see, socioeconomic differences deeply affected women's relationships to this Cult of True Womanhood. Not all women were relegated to the domestic sphere or experienced the same limitations. Middle-class white women had to show they could handle the privileges allocated to middle- and upper-class white men, such as the ability to engage in political activity. Thus, women writers had to show their commitment to self-regulation, self-surveillance, and self-governance.

In nineteenth-century America, the terms "self-regulation" and "self-government" often characterized expectations of ideal masculinity. In *Learning to Behave* (1994), Sarah E. Newton argues that "self-control, self-government, self-denial, self-restraint, and discipline of the will" constitute the construction of nineteenth-century masculinity and manhood (59). But the Uxbridge Female Seminary in Massachusetts named "entire self-government" as its goal for the women attending (Rouse 239). While "self-regulation" and "self-government" appear as a common expectation of men and sometimes an encouragement for women, the most explicit contemporary discussion of self-government I could locate was Lydia Sigourney's Letter X—entitled "Self-Government"—from her *Letters to Young Ladies* (1833).

Sigourney's words had power in antebellum America, with the author publishing a wide variety of popular works, including poems, essays, and conduct manuals.[1] *Letters to Young Ladies* maintained steady sales throughout the century in America and abroad.[2] In the publication, Sigourney describes self-government as a method for young women to control their emotions in a culture that deprives them of many rights and resources. For Sigourney, self-government is a way for a woman to have agency and to surveil herself (161). While men could often find themselves in subordinated position, as Sigourney later argues, women are faced with more emotionally complex and traumatizing experiences in the domestic space.

Early feminist work such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) also emphasized the importance of "self-government" specifically to bring attention to women's denied citizenship. Writing of upper-class women, Wollstonecraft says:

> These women are often amiable; and their hearts are really more sensible to general benevolence, more alive to the sentiments that civilize life, than the square elbowed family drudge; but wanting a due proportion of reflection and self-government, they only inspire love; and are the

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[1] In the words of Reverend E. B. Huntington from his chapter of *Eminent Women of the Age* (1868): "Were any intelligent American citizen now asked to name the American woman, who, for a quarter of a century before 1855, held a higher place in the respect and affections of the American people than any other woman of the times had secured, it can hardly be questioned that the prompt reply would be, Mrs. Lydia Huntley Sigourney" (Huntington 85).

[2] Sigourney herself writes about the popularity of *Letters to Young Ladies*: "After its unexpected publication in England and Scotland, where it was very kindly received, I was embarrassed by the solicitations of publishers wishing to secure the copyright. It has appeared, for the last sixteen or eighteen years, under the auspices of Harper & Brothers, in New York, and still meets a steady sale, having passed through between twenty and thirty editions, including those on the other side of the Atlantic" (*Letters of Life* 336).

> mistresses of their husbands, whilst they have any hold on their affections;
> and the platonic friends of his male acquaintance. (130-1)

Wollstonecraft argues here that women, while denied their deserved reflection and self-government, are unable to inspire anything other than love. Women cannot be seen as equals so long as they cannot demonstrate self-government.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that scholarship has undermined nineteenth-century women writers' contributions to social change. Southern women writers, across the nineteenth century, heavily influenced women's rights efforts through fiction that utilized sentimental rhetoric. Further, scholars of nineteenth-century American literature need to recognize the heterogeneity of the category "Southern woman writer" if we seek to continue interrogating what works are taught, anthologized, retired, or reconsidered.

This project examines the ways that some Southern women writers fictionally rendered or explored the implications of social reforms. As Jan Bakker argues, the "indoor, triumph-of-love domestic romances […] of women authors of the antebellum South reveal suppressed rebelliousness against the expected submissiveness of females in the nineteenth century" (1). As such, this project explores how Southern women writers Caroline Gilman, Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Grace King [3]use sentimental rhetoric in what Bakker calls "domestic fiction" to persuade readers regarding social issues. Further, using sentimental rhetoric in their fiction, these authors argue for women's ability to self-govern,

I define rhetoric as the art of persuasive communication, wherein a rhetor strategically crafts a text in the form of speech, signs, gestures, and sounds, among other forms of

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[3] Henceforth, when referring to the following authors by their full names, I will refer to them as Caroline Gilman, Augusta Jane Evans, and Frances E.W. Harper. I will also refer to them by the following: Gilman, Evans, Harper, and King. This is for clarity and brevity. Further, scholarship also refers to Evans as "Evans Wilson." For clarity, I list her as "Evans" in the Works Cited.

communication. The rhetor uses rhetorical strategies to appeal to an intended audience. Sentimental rhetoric, therefore, utilizes the public display of emotion to persuade an audience. Jane Donawerth traces sentimental culture--the Anglo-American focus on "sentiment, sensibility, sympathy, or emotion" in "literature, art, psychology, and "moral philosophy" (166)— to eighteenth-century European epistemology and moral philosophy. Sentimental culture eventually found its way to the United States via British poetry and prose (108). In nineteenth-century America, sentimental culture—was associated with women and an emphasis on the "public display of emotion" (105).

While arguing for the rhetorical persuasiveness of sentimental American women's poetry, Wendy Dasler Johnson notes that because "sentimentalism focuses on moral questions, […] the poetry characteristic of sentimental discourse much also be a part of rhetoric" (4). Further, Johnson argues that sentimentalism seeks to "re-create bodily experience in print, so readers share a writer's sensory perceptions and judgments" (9).

I extend this argument to include sentimental prose fiction. Sentimental fiction in narrative prose allows authors to explore moral options via a variety of characters and circumstances. Then, this exploration of moral pathways can be shared with readers.

Donawerth notes that nineteenth-century American women utilized sentimental rhetoric in conduct manuals, elocution handbooks, and textbooks—among other genres of didactic literature. Further, Donawerth argues that sentimental culture did not conclude with the Civil War but instead thrived in elocution and other acts of embodied expression. Similarly, I argue that sentimental culture continues to thrive in fiction for marginalized authors seeking connection with their audience (108).

Further, I want to separate the following often-interchangeable terms in studies of nineteenth-century literature: "domestic fiction," the "domestic novel," "sentimental fiction" and "woman's fiction" While I have used these accepted scholarly terms, using them can often cause confusion; furthermore, there has been a long scholarly debate about which term is most appropriate to define these nineteenth-century novels. According to Susan Fraiman, English domestic novels of the nineteenth century typically focus on the middle class, with the especially rich or impoverished serving in secondary roles. Generally, main characters in British and American domestic novels were not especially affluent but could rise or fall significantly in class rank through the events of the story (Fraiman 169). Fraiman also writes that, in contrast to the sensational fiction that showcases the "extraordinary," "exotic," domestic fiction focuses on the "common" and the "familiar" (Fraiman 174). The domestic novel strives toward the realistic, and while most novels end with a marriage that raises the status of the heroine, this marriage is not idealistic or grand.

Nina Baym writes that in woman's fiction, "in accordance with the needs of plot, home life is presented, overwhelmingly, as unhappy. There are very few intact families in this literature [....] Domestic tasks are arduous and monotonous; family members oppress and abuse each other" and "social interchanges are alternately insipid or malicious" (*Woman's Fiction* 26-7). Baym continues, "Between her unhappy childhood and the conclusion, the heroine experiences an interlude during which she must earn her own living. Generally, she turns to some form of teaching [….] Although almost all the heroines do eventually marry, the stories assert that marriage cannot and should not be the goal toward which women direct themselves" (*Woman's Fiction* 39).

Citing Elaine Showalter, Jane Tompkins, and Joanne Dobson, Faye Halpern struggles to define "sentimentality" but points out that sentimental novels tend to share themes of ascent and descent and celebration of domesticity and human connection. But Halpern is right to point out that "plots and themes cannot get at what is most distinctive about sentimentality." Halpern argues that sentimental novels having intended reading and that the authors write in such a way that they want a singular type of reading or interpretation to convince the reader of a certain standpoint. Halpern asks, "How does a sentimental text direct its audience to read?" (5). All literary texts offer intentional and unintentional arguments that either challenge or reinforce social norms. I am reserved about making assumptions of authorial intent. However, using close reading methods. I prefer to understand the text in the ways that it offers ideas to the reader through its context, through its language, through its tone, and its expression in the novel or short story.

I have chosen to refer to these women's writings as "sentimental rhetoric." Texts that utilized sentimental rhetoric occupy a wide variety of genres, and the "domestic novel," "sentimental fiction," and "woman's novel" seem limiting in their criteria. Furthermore, utilizing the phrase "sentimental rhetoric" gives credence to the intentionality of these women's rhetorical decision makings and the ways that they sought to persuade and influence others through writing. This project seeks to show how Southern women writers participated actively in literary production in ways that have been taken for granted.

Yes, many Southern women "commonly upheld the boundaries of the existing social system without question" to maintain their privilege (Talley 9). Therefore, this project explores how Southern white women writers, alongside Northern women, furthered efforts towards white feminism. White feminism, unlike intersectional feminism, seeks to only benefit white women.

Further, authors like Francis Ellen Watkins Harper utilized sentimental rhetoric in works like *Iola Leroy* to take advantage of and subvert the language of white women writers. I seek to complicate scholarly understandings of Southern womanhood and authorship. Much of my analysis underscores the racism embedded in the women's rights movements of the nineteenth century.

In this project, I interrogate the rhetorical strategies women use in order to justify white feminism within their protofeminist arguments. I define "protofeminist" as one whose philosophical beliefs anticipate modern feminism before such a term was coined. As Koa Beck points out, "If you asked suffragettes—the elite white women who built the first wave of American feminism—the term 'feminist' evoked obtaining the vote and having access to what their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers had" (20). In *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, Lisa Tetrault examines the repeated narratives and images that have shaped the feminist myth of the Seneca Falls Convention and collective historical memory of the women's rights movement in America. But Tetrault emphasizes that the events that cite the beginning of any such movement is largely arbitrary and depends on whom you ask. Indeed, "[w]omen's rights had many beginnings" (5). Further, Tetrault notes the tense disputes over whether black men or white women deserved priority for the right to vote, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton arguing for the prioritization of white women's suffrage (19).

As Tetrault points out, Frances E.W. Harper, at the 1866 AERA convention, encouraged listeners to "remember that the rights of black men, black women, and white women were all 'bound up together,' and that the organization therefore ought to avoid arguments over priority" (19). A skillful rhetor keen to appeal to a diverse audience, Harper knew that her audience, to work for the rights of others, would need persuading that their freedom depended on achieving

freedom for others. But, that is not to say that Harper felt black men and white women were equally to blame for the AERA's and Anti-Slavery Society's shared neglect of black women's needs and rights. One should remember how Harper concludes "We Are All Bound Up Together." At the end of the speech, Harper emphasizes the viciousness of self-interested white women: "While there exists this brutal element in society which tramples upon the feeble and treads down the weak, I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America" ("We Are All Bound Up Together").

Chapter Two, "Self-Government and the 'Mingled Sympathies' of Southern Womanhood in Caroline Howard Gilman's *Recollections of a Southern Matron,*" concerns Gilman's emphasis on women's embodied experiences during the early years of the Cult of True Womanhood. While this section primarily examines Gilman's *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (1836), it is vital to recognize Gilman as an intermediary between the North and the South. Nina Baym writes that *Southern Matron* is a "story of girlhood on a southern plantation that breaks different ground from Gilman's earlier work" and created the "novel of southern womanhood" (70). Gilman's *Southern Matron,* told from the vantage point of a woman originally from the North, strives to express Southern womanhood in its truth. However, this literary work, despite how popular it was, "has been largely overlooked by literary critics, or understood primarily in the context of the Southern domestic novel. Even Maureen H. Beasley, one of Gilman's biographers, writes largely dismissively of Gilman as a 'sentimental moralizer' (qtd. in Patterson 150-1). But, an 1838 review of *Southern Matron* in *The Knickerbocker* reads, "We intended to have done justice to this charming volume, but our leisure and space will not permit. We may commend it, however, to our readers, as natural, various, and entertaining, in no common degree [….] Miss

[Catharine] Sedgwick must look to her laurels. She has a counterpart in the field" (190). Despite Gilman's contemporary popularity and competition among women writers celebrated today, her work has remained understudied and undervalued for its rhetorical influence as a disciplinary force.

The current scholarly consensus on Gilman's *Southern Matron* is that the author struggles to reconcile her conservative views with her desire for autonomy. Just as one example, Bakker writes that Gilman's feminist critique is "not so much an objection to the secondary part at best allotted to women in the broadly national political, social, and economic spheres of life, as it is a protest against the legal tyranny of the husband in the home" (Bakker 2). Gilman's argument is not one for equality. But I argue that Gilman presents women's bodies in a conservative manner in a way that intends to liberate women within their circumstances. Just as one example, by presenting men as ignorant of the "moral and physical" characteristics of the female body, Gilman undercuts the often-oppressive realities of nineteenth-century medicine. Gilman tells women readers to practice self-control "almost to hyprocrisy"—emphasizing that Gilman's priority is survival, even at the sacrifice of her principles (257).

Chapter Three, "Slaves to Honorable Satisfaction in Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *St. Elmo*," underscores Evans's focus on self-government in *St. Elmo.* I argue that in *St. Elmo,* Evans discusses the possibility for women to pursue a literary career and to marry happily. But Evans's protagonists Edna and St. Elmo must free themselves from their own personal enslavements via embodied self-realization and self-regulation.

Although Evans was an avid supporter of the Confederacy, her work was sensational for both Northern and Southern readers—despite critical reviews. Within four months of publication, the novel sold over one million copies and inspired theatrical productions, films,

parodies, and other forms of sensation. Written a year after the conclusion of the Civil War, Augusta Jane Evans's *St. Elmo* continues the author's fervent support of the Confederacy. However, as I argue in this chapter through the concept of self-government, Evans practiced an iteration of feminism that served white women's interests; and while this may not be the ideal of fourth wave, intersectional feminism, scholars should not deny the racist foundations of early feminist efforts to promote white women's education and independence.

Chapter Four is entitled "Sentimental Rhetoric and Southern Identity in Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy.*" For me, "Southern" in the nineteenth century means falling beneath the Mason Dixon line. That is just one reason why I include Frances E.W. Harper in my discussion of Southern women writers. As I will later discuss in greater detail, including Frances E.W. Harper in a discussion of Southern women writers recognizes that she grew up in Maryland. which was at the time beneath the Mason Dixon line. Harper was born free, but Maryland was a slave state at the time. Furthermore, including her in the southern category recognizes that black authors influence the category of southern by occupying space in the South and helping to define the South.

Caroline Gilman and Augusta Jane Evans could be accused of simply writing themselves into the narratives—arguing for their political agendas, giving advice to bolster their ethos, and selling in the literary marketplace. Frances E.W. Harper, however, achieves a sense of detachment from the narrative in her novel *Iola Leroy* (1892).

In contrast, Harper's fiction must consider expectations of African American authorship and the expected obligation of black writers to write their own bodies—an obligation that was often morbidly sensational for readers. Rather than arguing for the humanity of African Americans, intimations of rape and sexualized violence could thrill certain audiences.

In this chapter, I argue that Harper writes a character objectively separate from herself, emphasizing imagination and leaning into the metaphorical; doing so undercuts expectations of her gender and race. Further, Harper de-emphasizes the body in a way that the white women writers of previous chapters did not. What is useful for Gilman and Evans would not be useful for Harper in the same manner, though all three authors discuss similar concerns regarding social change—despite their contrasting political leanings.

And in Chapter Five, "Authorial Intent and Confederate Memory in Grace King's *Balcony Stories*," I argue that Grace King's *Balcony Stories* has received a varied critical treatment, but overwhelmingly so, critics have read King's works while trying to affirm or deny her racism. Instead, I stray from reading for authorial intent, emphasizing the variety of interpretations available in the collection, though the collection is diverse and fascinating in its depiction of various types of bodies. Ultimately, I argue that the *Balcony Stories* collection encourages women specifically to attend to the variety of women surrounding them instead of looking back to the past as better than what it was.

CHAPTER II: SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE "MINGLED SYMPATHIES" OF SOUTHERN WOMANHOOD IN CAROLINE HOWARD GILMAN'S *RECOLLECTIONS OF A SOUTHERN MATRON*

In the 1854 edition of *The Female Poets of America*, Rufus Griswold writes that Caroline Howard Gilman "will long be valued for the spirit and fidelity with which she has painted rural and domestic life in the northern and southern states" (52). Though her work sold well and widely among her contemporaries, Gilman is underrepresented for her literary influence prior to the Civil War. Heretofore, scholars of nineteenth-century American literature have neglected closely examining Gilman's fiction. This is, in part, due to the ongoing debate of whether Gilman sympathized with the racist ideologies of slave-owning Southerners. Gilman, born in Boston, moved with her husband to South Carolina in 1819, where she eventually wrote *Recollections of a New England Housekeeper* and *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. Both novels received critical attention and achieved relative popularity among Americans on both sides of the Mason Dixon line. Joining nineteenth-century Americanists' efforts to recover Southern women writers' participation in contemporary reform movements, I argue that Gilman's *Southern Matron* doesn't just advocate for reconciliation among Northerners and Southerners; the novel also offers the idea that women can self-regulate and self-govern in nineteenth-century America during a time where married women did not have separate legal rights from their husbands under coverture.

Recent literary or historical scholarship regarding Caroline Howard Gilman's writings is difficult to locate. As Cynthia L. Patterson notes, "twenty-first century scholars have largely neglected Gilman's contribution to Southern literature." Patterson speculates that this neglect

may be due to Gilman's identity as a "a privileged, white, middle-class, slave-owning Southern woman" ("The Caroline Howard Gilman We Don't Know" 154). While this may be true in an academic landscape where interest is shifting toward less privileged groups, Gilman was relatively popular amongst her contemporaries, selling well and widely across the Mason Dixon line and abroad.

Furthermore, Gilman offers strong support of women's independence without equating Northern and Southern domesticity. I agree with Elizabeth Moss that, "far from affirming the essential similarity of northern and southern domesticity, Gilman's novels highlighted the differences between the North and the South, translating contemporary political debate into a uniquely feminine language" (Moss 63). Gilman often discusses these disparities between the North and the South as trivial and enriching to American culture rather than problems that need solving. While scholars have discussed Gilman's participation in contemporary political discourse, scholars of nineteenth-century American literature have yet to closely examine Gilman's reckoning with women's rights reform. While *Southern Matron* is a domestic novel, it first appeared in serial form in Gilman's children's magazine *The Southern Rosebud* and continued in *The Southern Rose*—Gilman's magazine for adults. Gilman's choice to publish this story for both child and adult audiences suggests the didactic purpose of the novel; it is meant to teach a variety of audiences and show them the potential consequences of political and social action.

Even among Gilman's contemporaries, the novel was acknowledged in regard to its emphasis on self-government, self-control, and self-regulation interchangeably. The editors of the British newspaper *York Herald* excerpted and reprinted the following passage—one that

underscores the novel's similarity to a conduct manual on discipline and self-control—from *Southern Matron* in their May 1, 1847 issue ("MISCELLANEOUS"):

> How often have I blessed my needle for rescuing me from the temptations which assail the other sex! Bright and innocent little implement, whether plied over tasteful luxuries, or gaining the poor pittance of a day, thou art equally the friend of her whose visions tend to wander amid the regions of higher abstractions, and of her whose thoughts are pinned down to the tread-mill of thy minute progress. Quiet rescuer from clubs and midnight revels, amid the minor blessings of woman's lot, thou shalt not be forgotten! (*Southern Matron* 159)

Heretofore, scholarship has neglected discussing the influence *Southern Matron* played in advocating for women's independence via self-government to an audience of children and adults alike. Further, Gilman wrote *Southern Matron* to appeal to both Northern and Southern audiences, as well as British readers. The influence of Southern women writers in furthering women's rights movements in the nineteenth century has been often eclipsed by scholarly reluctance to give attention to slave-owning women.

However, authors like Gilman—contrary to stereotypes of Southern women that persist today—were vocal about women's rights concerns from a variety of vantage points and wrote domestic fiction that would strategically appeal to the certain prejudices of their audiences while challenging other social norms dictating women's lives. Furthermore, Bakker argues that, through their "their gentle feminism, the Rose magazines play a part in revealing that a degree of critical or divergent thinking did exist in an antebellum South so often erroneously thought to have been without self-criticism and monolithic" (Bakker 14). I argue against the idea that Gilman's protofeminist thinking emerges alongside her racist ideologies—not despite of it. Gilman's desire for her own rights anticipates white feminism—feminism that priorities women's rights and reinforces white supremacy. Gilman's desire for her own independence

seemingly requires preserving the capitalist hierarchy wherein the elite are enabled luxury and independence by a working class.

Gilman's writing reveals the intrinsic flaw in the nascent women's rights movements in the North insofar as the industrial revolution continued to exploit workers, encouraged mistreatment of servants, and perpetuated the capitalist status quo in America. Gilman rationalizes slavery to a divided America by presenting happy slaves who support their young mistress as she challenges marital norms and seeks self-government.

From the first chapter, this novel establishes what Cornelia later calls "mingled sympathies" that many scholars might locate as the dissonance between Gilman's desire for women's independence and her support of the Confederacy (*Southern Matron* 97). However, white women's independence, for Cornelia, relies on keeping slaves and enabling them to adopt the domestic labor relegated to plantation owners' wives. Cornelia imagines an ideal South, hoping for Southern slaveowners to always be kind, for goodness to be rewarded, and for marriages to be respectful. But this Cornelia's ideal takes for granted the narrative voice of the slaves, failing to question if anyone could be happy while enslaved. While I also argue that Cornelia should be understood as a separate narrative voice from Gilman, this novel is didactic in nature and hopes to teach young readers the consequences of Cornelia's choices.

What scholars have yet to note is that Cornelia's South Carolina isn't idyllic. While Bakker credits the feminist leanings of the Rose magazines, *Southern Matron* has yet to receive such a reading. I disagree with Moss that Gilman's reassurance that the "ideals of the Revolution permeated the aristocratic South and galvanized the southern community provided readers with comfort and security" (Moss 67-8). Rather, Cornelia often challenges Southern tradition and finds herself consistently destabilized as those close to her die. But Cornelia often has her hopes

destroyed. She witnesses cruelty towards slaves, and she sees several good people die too young. Further, she realizes her father's own cruelty toward Cornelia's mother—a woman who constantly sacrifices her time and energy to maintaining the domestic space.

Southern Matron is a bildungsroman narrated by Cornelia Wilton. In *Southern Matron*, the novel's theme of women's self-regulation develops across the course of Cornelia's coming of age. Cornelia devotes most of the novel to practicing control over herself. And as she says,

> This task of self-government was not easy. To repress a harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the midst of self-defence, in gentle submission, sometimes requires a struggle like life and death, but these three efforts are the golden threads with which domestic happiness is woven; once beam the fabric with this woof, and trials shall not break or sorrow tarnish it. (*Southern Matron* 256)

While also arguing for connection and sympathy between the North and South, the novel's narrator argues for women to seek independence and to question antiquated social norms through a focus on self-governance of the mind and body. For Cornelia, both self-regulation and self-governance mean struggling against vice and temptation with the knowledge that perfection is impossible; further, these terms entail a consistent focus on education.

Self-Regulation/Self-Government

Southern Matron's narrator Cornelia uses the term "self-government" rather than "self-control" or "self-discipline." This rhetorical choice underscores how nineteenth-century women were denied citizenship despite their integral role in preparing young men for becoming responsible citizens. White women were governed by their fathers and husbands, and women of color in the South were governed by their masters.

While Gilman penned *Southern Matron* in vol 3. no. 18 of *The Southern Rose-Bud*, Gilman also mentions self-government explicitly vol. 3, no. 18 (1835) when recommending Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* to her readers. Gilman writes, "We are glad to see a new

edition of 'Practical Education,' not because we believe it to be absolutely practical in this country, but because it brings out the thinking powers, is so admirable a model for composition, and furnishes so many hints not only to those who guide others, but to those who study self-government" (143). In this example, Gilman suggests that "self-government" is the task of improving and educating oneself—being guided by introspection.

Much of Edgeworth's *Practical Education* reflects the narrator's values in Gilman's *Southern Matron*. In *Practical Education,* Edgeworth frequently draws upon the reasoning of philosophers Rousseau and Locke to discuss children's education. Further, Edgeworth advocates for parents and teachers to encourage independent thinking and reasoning for children. Students should be taught to be rational, and corporal punishment is discouraged. Edgeworth says: "The idea that it is disgraceful to be governed by force should be kept alive in the minds of children; the dread of shame is a more powerful motive than the fear of bodily pain" (*Practical Education* 192). This statement suggests that governance by force is primarily an outside, physically violent force—evident by Edgeworth's emphasis on "bodily pain." But Edgeworth's sees self-governance as a gentle motivation for positive behavior. This is much like Gilman understands self-governance, though Gilman sees the trials of self-governance in holding oneself accountable. Self-governance is a lifelong pursuit—including Cornelia in *Southern Matron* having to work through her emotions about the death of her child while her husband remains asleep at the novel's conclusion.

In *Southern Matron*'s predecessor *New England Housekeeper*, Gilman's narrator also mentions a sort of self-control or self-governance but in a softer tone—calling it self-examination. Clarissa says of women wanting to disobey their husbands, "Oh, young and lovely bride, watch well the first moments when your will conflicts with his to whom God and society

have given the control. Reverence his wishes even when you do not his opinions." While this statement initially suggests that women should just mindlessly concede to their husbands, Clarissa then presents the idea that women should wait for the kairotic moment to best influence their husbands—a rational rather than an emotional decision. Clarissa continues, "Opportunities enough will arise for the expression of your independence, to which he will gladly accede, without a contest for trifles. The beautiful independence that soars over and conquers an irritable temper is higher than any other." This control over the temper resembles *Letters to Young Ladies'* and *Southern Matron's* treatment of self-government. But Clarissa names this behavior as self-examination, a less direct criticism of women's denied citizenship: "So surely as you believe faults of temper are beneath prayer and self-examination, you are on dangerous ground; a fountain will spring up on your household hearth, of bitter and troubled waters" (*New-England Housekeeper* 123).

In *Southern Matron*, Cornelia cannot successfully govern others until she learns how to govern her own behaviors appropriately. Further, she often fails to govern her emotions, but it seems that her efforts to control her emotions that help her navigate the obstacles in her life. However, one of the guiding questions of a Foucauldian reading of the text is: Is Cornelia merely disciplined and surveilled as a subject acted upon by a patriarchal system of power? Is she simply recreating norms of feminine behavior under the guise of a sort of empowerment for women?

For Lisa King, the search for the individual self is a key tool in controlling a subject and enacting discipline by a system of power. Writing of such governmentality, King says that the "mechanisms that produce an internal self are also the mechanisms of surveillance and discipline; the constant search for the truth of ourselves is thus the product of and the vehicle for

coercive and oppressive practices" (L. King 345-6). While this self-awareness could be a mere replication of the oppressive practices that characterized patriarchal early America, such awareness can also be transgressive and a tool for challenging norms. Sigourney says, "The first effectual step towards self government is self knowledge. The law-giver who would adapt his code to the happiness of a people, must inform himself of their history and habits, their dangers and resources" (Sigourney 170). But this pursuit of self-knowledge can have a variety of outcomes, especially if one believes in free will and self-construction.

In the novel, Cornelia sees Duncan as the harbinger of truth, writing, "My parents' sincere respect had been awakened by Duncan's character. How delightful is it to think that goodness multiplies itself, and that, in the ocean of wrong, one little point of truth may move circle on circle almost indefinitely!" (*Southern Matron* 68-9). And the effort in pursuing self-knowledge to self-govern can produce outcomes seemingly unavailable to the antebellum young woman. What makes Cornelia different from many other protagonists in domestic novels is that her truth is not in the love of her heart, but the love she feels in her spirit that leaves her closer to God. She separates her rational knowledge as a higher concern from her gut or physical instincts to prove that women are intellectually engaged and prepared for citizenship with the right influences.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the novel's plot and then discuss how Cornelia understands servitude via the slave/master dynamic. This will inform how slave labor enables Cornelia's conception of self-government Duncan's modeling of conscientious manhood as a way for Cornelia to understand herself as a similarly imperfect equal; this equality in her conscientious womanhood provides Cornelia a sense of independent thinking. Then, I will discuss how Cornelia troubles idealized romance and complicates expectations of antebellum

women by resisting marriage; and when she finally does marry, she expresses the tragic labor of womanhood as a grieving mother.

Cornelia's education, the central focus of the novel, begins with Cornelia and her brothers tormenting all their intended teachers. After Miss Susan Wheeler, Mr. Joseph Bates, and Cornelia's mother fail to instruct the children, Mr. Charles Duncan arrives and quickly becomes a dear friend and mentor to Cornelia. Unfortunately, Duncan arrives in a sickly physical state, hoping to improve with the South Carolina air, but his health begins deteriorating rapidly. Upon his death, Cornelia resolves to continue following his teachings regarding self-regulation. And in these efforts, Cornelia meets a stranger named Arthur Marion, whom she falls in love with. Cornelia struggles with self-government as her romantic feelings manifest and as her brother Richard struggles with governing himself. After another man embarrasses him, Richard challenges him to a duel, and Cornelia is unable to hide her feelings that Richard is unmanly if he does not go through with the duel. Richard is almost mortally wounded in a duel, and Cornelia and Richard both learn that they must govern their feelings for the benefit of themselves and others. Arthur and Cornelia eventually marry—despite Cornelia's reluctance regarding the institution of marriage. After a fire disfigures Cornelia and tests his morals, Cornelia and Arthur have a child together. This child dies, further testing Cornelia's commitment to self-government and her faith.

While this overview of the novel's plot resembles the typical nineteenth-century marriage plot, Cornelia's marriage occurs relatively late in the novel but early enough for trials and tragedies to occur after said marriage. Ask Cornelia narrates before reintroducing the romance arc: "Is Marion forgotten? asks some young girl, to whom love is the Alpha and Omega of a story. No, not forgotten; but I never proposed to write a love-story in these simple details, Whose

object is to show the habits of Southern domestic life" (*Southern Matron* 201). And although Gilman did not serve as a planter's wife, she dedicates the novel to outlining domestic life rather than serving as a traditional domestic novel.

Servitude

Gilman's conceptions of self-government, the government of others, and the concept of servitude are all interrelated, with Gilman's Unitarianism and Cornelia's stated religious beliefs informing the novel's stance on all three. As Sigourney writes in her *Letters for Young Ladies*, "I cannot feel, my dear friends, that self government is perfect without religion" (174). Likewise, I interpret Cornelia's perception of self-government as inseparable from her Unitarian-like beliefs simply because Cornelia merely states that her beliefs are Christian. Unitarian leaders in Britain and America in the early nineteenth-century state, much like Cornelia, that the key to morality is facing the obstacles in their lives, or as Thomas Belsham calls it: "imminent peril."

Belsham's statements on Unitarianism help readers better understand Cornelia's narration and her stance on slavery. To better understand the beliefs of Unitarian leaders, I call attention to Belsham's *A Review of Wilberforce's Treatis* (1798). Belsham, a British Unitarian leader, writes that "God cannot be unjust to any of his creatures. Having brought men into existence and placed them in circumstances of imminent peril, though in the nature of things misery is necessarily connected with vice, we may certainly conclude that none of the creatures of God in such, or in any circumstances will ever be made eternally miserable." Such a statement recalls *Southern Matron*'s emphasis on an individual's personal struggle toward self-government and that such an individual may be made miserable again and again in failure to control themselves, but in doing so, they become closer to a blissful eternity in Heaven. Further, Belsham writes that "it is plainly

repugnant to the justice of God, that the existence to any of his intelligent creatures, should be upon the whole a curse" [qtd. in *American Unitarianism* 3].

An abolitionist reader could interpret this passage as a statement that slaves' existence justifies basic human rights and self-government; however, if the reader does not consider slaves "intelligent," such subjects are incapable of self-government since the cannot understand their actions in relation to eternity. Also, viewed from another vantage point, a reader like Gilman could interpret this passage as a declaration that a slave's lot, much like a woman's lot, is ordained by God. Thus, whether a slave or servant is intelligent is a moot point.

Gilman's and Cornelia's shared attachment to the tenets of Unitarianism allow them to believe that God is always just—even if he is cruel—which helps to justify the lot of slaves and of planter's wives. The publishers of *American Unitarianism* agree with Belsham that "[t]hat God has placed man in circumstances of frailty and danger, the natural consequence of which is the contraction of a certain degree of moral pollution, which exposes them to a proportionate degree of misery here or hereafter" (*American Unitarianism* 6). Ultimately, the Unitarian ministers rely on the belief that individuals must be continually tested and be morally compromised, which virtue triumphing over vice in proportion. Learning governance, both of the self and of others, is a central theme of *Southern Matron* and of Unitarianism, and Cornelia's perception of servitude is shaped by early American individualism, expectations of women's conduct, and religious devotion.

While the novel begins with Cornelia describing the death of her grandfather, the centerpiece of the novel's introduction is Jacque, the Wiltons' beloved servant; and I argue that Jacque, as the earliest example of government, shows that slaves are capable of government and self-government, but ultimately, the slave is too valuable for the family to allow them their

freedom. Without Jacque, the caricature of the happy slave, the family dynamic would substantially shift, and there is no evidence from Jacque that he desires freedom. Cornelia explains that Jacque, though a slave, was entrusted to manage Roseland while his master was receiving his education in Europe (*Southern Matron* 11). I agree with Russ Castronovo's reading that Cornelia appropriates Jacque's narrative; however, just as Stowe's titular slave in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is more complex than the modern archetype by the same name, Jacque—in name and in performance—serves to produce tension between masters and slaves, between Europeans and Americans, and between Northern and Southern Americans ("Incidents in the Life of a White Woman" 254). Jacque, signifying a knowledge exchange that is racialized and nationalized, tells Henry: "Take care you no dishonour de family. Keep straight, my young maussa, walk close" to which there is a footnote from the author: "These expressions are very common among the negroes, and signify, be correct; be pious." (*Southern Matron* 11) With the narrator's grandfather dead and her father going away, it is a slave who advises to self-regulate. And this is while Jacque assumes his role of taking care of the home.

To position Jacque as the first source of the novel's wisdom about moral behavior is to perhaps combat northerner's assumptions about how Southerners viewed their slaves. Jacque continues: "Jacque can manage missis bery well, and notting an't gawing for trouble she; but who gawing for take care Maus Henry but God" (*Southern Matron* 18). Gilman's sympathy for the Confederacy has been called into question by scholars, and the novel continually demonstrates the "usefulness" of slaves without the violent realities of slavery. Cornelia foreshadows the novel's continued focus on self-management. And while Gilman presents a complicated view of slaves throughout the novel—in which some slaves are treated as less intelligent and as racist archetypes—Gilman also writes in a way that seeks to appeal to both

Northern and Southern white readers. Further, Jacque proves to be well-intended but ultimately unable to govern himself and others in the events that conclude the novel's first chapter.

Cornelia describes Jacque in a manner that makes him seem reliable, kind, and happy in his circumstances, skewing the image of slavery as a practice. But Jacque is not without moral corruption in his acquisition of control over his master's property. Cornelia writes, "Jacque had been intrusted with the entire control of his young master's household during the term of his education in Europe; and while the confidence placed in him had somewhat increased his self-conceit, it never induced him to take a liberty beyond those which his peculiar situation authorized." (*Southern Matron* 11). And it is this miniscule amount of self-conceit, the story suggests, that leads to the death of Cornelia's grandfather. Jacque's lack of introspection and self-government does not allow him to rectify his conceit prior to engaging in a battle with the British alongside his master. Cornelia explains, "In an engagement with the British, Jacque lost sight of his master, the enemy were victorious, and the Americans retreated, leaving their dead unprotected" (*Southern Matron* 12). Jacque's management of the house (as in property) and the house (as in family) prove less effective than initially assumed, but it his mistress' response to such a mistake that foreshadows the importance of a woman's ability to self-govern. While men's self-governance has consequences in *Southern Matron*, women's self-governance has more obvious consequences and provides a space for women to persuade and influence the men in their lives.

Cornelia's grandmother responds to Jacque in a calculated and calm manner, though her emotions are evident and necessary. Cornelia says, "She could only shade her eyes, as if to shut out too painful an object, and with one hand pressed closely on her heart, as though to hush its tumult" (*Southern Matron* 13). Here, Jacque's actions demonstrate the planter's wife's role as

the responder to obstacles. She must react in a manner that preserves the integrity of her home and the way that the plantation functions. Jacque is a loyal slave and is intrinsic to the plantation's health and happiness, despite his mistakes. Gilman echoes this sentiment of the slave as a tool for the growth of slaveowners and white Southerners generally when she reviews Harriet Martineau's preface to *Demerara* (1834), Gilman writes: "A celebrated authoress has asserted […] 'the jargon of slaves would be intolerable to writers and readers if carried through a volume.' For ourselves the language of the blacks is like that of the Scotch, or Irish, and conveys as much character. We were even tempted to smile in reading the grave, good English of *Demerara* negroes, and could not recognize the individuals whose peculiarities at the South have often moved or affected us. Cassius' prayer, in *Demarara*, would never be known as the prayer of a negro either in sentiment or expression…." (*Southern Rose-Bud* vol. 3. no. 19 151). Gilman suggests that slaves' expressions in their dialect are particularly influential in the sentiments and moral growth of white Southerners—that the white readers are more intended to gain from such dialect.

Jacque's role in introducing the concept of self-government further highlights seemingly more competent self-government practiced by Cornelia's grandmother. Thus, white women are positioned as more deserving of citizenship in their ability to self-govern and to govern others. She manages the household after the death of her husband with the help of her servants and eventually her son Henry—Cornelia's father.

Upon explaining the circumstances of her grandfather's death and her grandmother's self-government, Cornelia, reflecting on her childhood, outlines the planter's wife's role in the domestic space; this allows Cornelia to further argue for the unique obstacles planter's wives face and to show their capability for self-regulation and regulating others. Cornelia says, "One

would suppose that the retirement of a plantation was the most appropriate spot for a mother and her children to give and receive instruction. Not so; for instead of a limited household, her dependents are increased to a number which would constitute a village" (*Southern Matron* 47). While Cornelia outlines her mother's obligations on the plantation, she explains that slaves both sustain the plantation and inhibit the education of the children by their mother.

Through the voice of Cornelia, Gilman combats stereotypes of planters' wives, arguing that these women are adept at managing large groups of slaves while still maintaining the expectations of her class and pleasing her husband: "A planter's lady may seem indolent, because there are so many under her who perform trivial services" (*Southern Matron* 47-8). Essentially, it's easy to expect a planter's wife to be lazy since she has so many people helping with her tasks. However, Cornelia explains that "the very circumstance of keeping so many menials in order is an arduous one, and the keys of her establishment are a care of which a Northern housekeeper knows nothing, and include a very extensive class of duties." Cornelia suggests that Northerners should not judge the activities of Southern plantations without firsthand knowledge of what it takes to manage such a complex domestic space. Cornelia extends this argument further to say that Southern women are often underwritten for the responsibilities they have in the domestic space. Cornelia says "Many fair, and even aristocratic girls[…] who grace a ball-room, or loll in a liveried carriage, may be seen" possessing the "keys of their establishment." These aristocratic woman then may be seen "presiding over storehouses, and measuring, with the accuracy and conscientiousness of a shopman, the daily allowance of the family, or cutting homespun suits, for days together, for the young and the old negroes under their charge." In contrast, "matrons, who would ring a bell for their pocket-handkerchief to be brought to them, will act the part of a surgeon or physician with a promptitude and skill which would excite

astonishment in a stranger" (*Southern Matron* 47-8). In this passage, Cornelia prefaces her mother's approach to education, as well as the options available to Southern women in terms of the lives they can live when they possess so many responsibilities. Further Cornelia contrasts white women's roles based on class in the South.

Cornelia introduces her mother's role in overseeing slave labor and performing a sort of invisible labor for those unacquainted with the nuances of the plantation; however, Cornelia troubles the lack of agency her mother had in her children's education due to having to oversee slaves. Slaves make Cornelia's mother's life possible, but they also inhibit her independence in educating her children as she desires. Thus, Cornelia contemplates the double-edged sword slavery presents throughout her conversations about her mother's domestic space. Cornelia explains with an air of discontent, "Mamma never interfered with our education, and her passive virtues as a mother remind me of a tribute of praise I once heard given to a clergyman by one of his congregation. 'We have an excellent minister; he never meddles with religion, nor politics, nor none of these things'" (*Southern Matron* 32). In comparing her mother to the clergyman, Cornelia asserts that her mother is not performing her responsibility as a mother. How can a minister be excellent without meddling with religion? To be sure, such a minister would be less controversial. In the voice of Cornelia, Gilman reminds readers of the variety of choices teachers have to make in educating children. And if mothers are considered the finest of teachers, their role in overseeing the household compromises this responsibility in educating their children.

As Cornelia describes the mother's role as head of the domestic space, it becomes clear how Cornelia sees slaves as both a necessity for and a hindrance to the plantation owner's wife's independence. Cornelia continues, "The young, conscientious, ardent mother must be taught this by experience. She has a jealousy at first of any instruction that shall come between their

dawning minds and her own; and is only taught by the constantly thwarted recitation, that in this country, at least, good housekeeping and good teaching cannot be combined" (*Southern Matron* 48). In the novel, conscientiousness develops into a central theme of goodness for Cornelia. Further, Cornelia's logic regarding slavery comes into question for readers. If slavery were abolished, would her mother still need to oversee the servants? Can the plantation as Cordelia understands it exist without a workforce that needs tending to? Cornelia does not necessarily ask these questions, but she does resist marriage and the lot she sees her mother dealt as a planter's wife. While Cornelia perceives the slaves of her childhood to be happy and better off than Northern maids and servants, she also sees the independence her mother is denied while having to maintain such an expansive household. Such abundance at Roseland has its consequences.

Cornelia differentiates herself from her mother by living a more modest lifestyle with fewer servants to manage. Late in the novel, once Cornelia marries Arthur, she "resolve[s] to engage a white female housekeeper" rather than purchasing a plantation's worth of slaves. Cornelia explains, "[Lucille's] unfortunate circumstances decided us to take her to the South. Her parents were both intemperate, and appropriated to their sensual wants her daily earnings. Saddened and disheartened, unable to support, and without the hope of reclaiming them, she resolved to accompany us" (*Southern Matron* 236). Though she is a maid and the child of seeming villains, the woman is well-versed in literature, kind, and sociable.

Cornelia confronts the nuances between northern servants and Southern slaves in her meeting with Lucille but does not rectify her prejudice toward servants. Whereas Cornelia often complicates generalizations when applicable to the South, Cornelia resists confronting her own prejudices toward Lucille. Cornelia says, "Southerners must necessarily experience this awkwardness from the different mode in which servitude exists in other portions of the country.

Lucille's discretion and good sense soon, however, determined her level. She began superintending my baggage, and sat at that unobtrusive distance where she could be summoned without seeming to be a companion." Cornelia makes it seem as if Lucille is offensive to her, though their difference is merely in social status. It seems that having a white servant is—at the very least—uncomfortable for Cornelia, given that none of her slaves at Roseland could pass or perhaps ascend above her on the social ladder.

It is when Cornelia sees Lucille discussing a Sir Walter Scott novel—a signal of refined tastes—that she has a crisis in asking Lucille to serve her because servitude is associated with a task ordained by God for those who cannot think independently or self-govern. Cornelia continues, "The only attempt at refinement on board the vessel which did not sit gracefully on her, was a conversation with a passenger, which I accidentally heard, on Walter Scott's last novel! How can I ask her to bring me a glass of water? thought I; and my difficulty in placing her in the right position at home again occurred to me (*Southern Matron* 237). Cornelia expects servants to be uneducated, and seeing a woman so like herself in a subordinate position may suggest to Cornelia that her family's slaves could have, too, had independent thought. Although Lucilla is white, she is marked by a controversial family history where her drunkard parents may be viewed as animalistic and thus inhuman.

Throughout the novel, Cornelia is much more comfortable when servants are less educated than she is and of a different color of skin so that she can differentiate herself from them. Also, she understands that her privilege derives from the labor of the slaves that serve on her plantation while she argues that slaves are happier on the plantation than servants in the north are, readers are deprived of a first-person narration from an enslaved character. It is important to understand this dynamic between Cornelia and subordinated characters because self-government

is a form of independence that Cornelia seeks for white women and not slaves or servants because she knows that the independence she seeks is only possible if someone is beneath her in an economic and social hierarchy. The South and its reliance on slavery provides Cornelia with a way to advocate for race-based servitude. Lucille allows Cornelia to use an example of a white woman being capable of independent thought while also condemning intemperance.

Conscientious Manhood and Self-Government

Throughout *Southern Matron*, Cornelia provides Duncan as a model of conscientious manhood for teaching Cornelia how to how to practice self-government; and through self-governance, Cornelia can become a better Christian and a more independent woman. Again, this is specific to white women for Cornelia because this maintains a lower class that can undertake labor for her. Furthermore, Duncan is from the North and travels to the South in order to improve his death, but Cornelia and Duncan do not discuss the South's institution of slavery. Rather, the slaves are invisible in Duncan and Cornelia's exchanges. Their relationship seems to suggest that Northerners and Southerners can get along if they respect one another and just avoid discussing slavery. Duncan is a useful example for Cornelia in terms of being an attainable archetype for her to model because he is educated like she is, possesses faith in God, and becomes a martyr of sorts by succumbing to his illness only after giving Cornelia the vital advice she needs to live life in a Christian manner.

Southern Matron is a novel told in retrospect, and all of Cornelia's knowledge regarding self-regulation derives from her initial instruction from Duncan and the formative experiences Cornelia has regarding his lessons after Duncan's death. For Cornelia, conscious behavior is the height of morality, and as she develops in her education and approaches marrying age, she desires a self-governed man and speaks of self-reliant manhood as both the ideal for men but as

an ideal she seeks to achieve in herself. Cornelia writes, "There is no moral object so beautiful to me as a conscientious young man!" (*Southern Matron* 54). By stating that the man be conscientious, Cornelia suggests that this moral object think for himself instead of just following others' conceptions of morality.

Recalling the Unitarians' values on consistent religious struggle and moral pollution, as well as Sigourney's arguments regarding the value of a lifetime of controlling one's inevitable emotions,[4] Cornelia describes the conscientious young man, who, we later discover, is an ideal based on Duncan. Cornelia explains, "He resists temptation not without a struggle, for that is not virtue, but the does resist and conquer; he hears the sarcasm of the profligate, and it stings him, for that is the trial of virtue, but he heals the wound with his own pure touch; he heeds not the watchword of fashion if it leads to sin; the atheist who says, not only in his heart but with his lips, 'There is no God,' controls him not, for he sees the hand of a creating God, and reverences it; of a preserving God, and rejoices in it." Through Cornelia, Gilman challenges a version of manhood that is unfeeling and impenetrable to the obstacles before him. Further, this ideal manhood is nurturing and seemingly maternal—given the expectations of True Womanhood of the nineteenth century. A model of the Cult of Domesticity or True Womanhood is pure, pious, submissive, and domestic. And while the conscientious young man seems to be anything but domestic, Cornelia explains that the young man is the Christian ideal over a strong, grown man. The young man has yet to enter the public sphere and instead is domestic.

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[4] As Sigourney writes in *Letters to Young Ladies*: "To eradicate our passions,—to annihilate the strong perceptions of pleasure and pain, and to preserve apathy under severe afflictions, would be impossible, if it were desired, and not to be desired, if it were possible" (162-3).

If the epitome of morality is conscientious young man, and if the conscientious young man is so like a woman, the next question, for Cornelia, is how women can attain such morality for themselves. Cornelia argues that women are "sheltered by fond arms and guided by loving counsel" while "old age is protected by its experience, and manhood by its strength; but the young man stands amid the temptations of the world like a self-balanced tower. Happy he who seeks and gains the prop and shelter of Christianity" (*Southern Matron* 54). The young man is physically weaker than his adult counterpart, and that is what gives him strength through faith and resilience, but what is holding women back is the shelter and guidance—though such protection is given with love and concern.

Duncan, in his teachings of self-government, is an advocate for women's rights and independence, continually arguing for the intellectual gifts of dedicated women. Cornelia writes, "Papa was at first opposed to the full cultivation of my mind in the branches studied by my brothers. He laughed and said, 'The girl would consider herself more learned than her father'" (*Southern Matron* 56). Cornelia's father is more concerned about self-conceit and a woman rising above a station deemed inappropriate by her patriarchy institution. But Duncan argues that it is more rational to consider whether or not the daughter is truly more learned than her father—not whether she *should* be, but whether she *is*. Duncan responds, "'Why should she not […] if humility be so wrought in her as to make her feel her own inferiority to the true standard of mind? Fear not, Colonel Wilton! Intellectual women are the most modest inquirers after truth, and accomplished women often the most scrupulous observers of social duty'" (*Southern Matron* 56). To say that intellectual women are the "most modest inquirers after truth" suggests that they are entirely capable of rational thought despite circumstances working against them; furthermore, Duncan argues that women are more determined and moral in their pursuits.

Through Duncan's voice, Gilman advocates for women's ability to reason and perform the same responsibilities that men do. By having Duncan advocate for women's capabilities, Gilman is able to subvert the nineteenth-century trope of the Christian martyr character being a young girl since Duncan dies young of sickness. Also, Gilman is able to show a positive ideal of masculinity young male readers can aspire to.

But, using Duncan as Cornelia's mentor has its drawbacks; Duncan advising Cornelia may make it appear as just another man subordinating a woman and having her perform want he wants her to do. She could just be enacting his desires. And her respect for Duncan keeps her from romance until she eventually marries Duncan. After all, Duncan eventually falls in love with Cornelia before his passing, so this may seem like another way to keep her from other men. But, I interpret Duncan as a positive influence who is, more than anything, a product of his religious and nurturing upbringing. Further, Duncan has nothing to gain from—as a side effect—teaching her to be more independent and thus make more informed decisions about whom she marries, if she marries at all.

On his deathbed, Duncan discusses his lessons of self-control to Cordelia. He conveys that his religious calling is to educate her not as a woman, but as a child of God.

Even though he loves her, his priority is to prepare her for life and her afterlife in Heaven:

> "Be calm, Cornelia," he said. "I have done little if I have only educated you for life. My aim has been higher; but if some of my teachings have been lost on one so young, I hope that my death may be an impressive lesson. This composure of mine has not been attained without a struggle, without prayer, without the severance of ties that have bound me with a grasp of iron. But I am calm." (*Southern Matron* 64)

Duncan's reward for all his struggle over his emotions is facing death with a sense of calm. And it is in this moment that Duncan decides to ask Cornelia's mother for permission to tell Cornelia the details of his upbringing and struggle for self-government.

Duncan asks, "'Mrs. Wilton, may I tell Cornelia a story to teach her not to place her affections too strongly on earth, or, at least' (and he glanced upward), 'to give her a resource if earth should fail?'" (*Southern Matron* 64). Gilman, through the voice of Duncan, provides a voice approved by Cornelia's dutiful mother that guides the narrator's conduct. This is just further evidence that Duncan, for Cornelia, is an example of ideal manhood for whom the physical body is where "earth" has failed. Duncan's body is sick and a sort of failure, and likewise, the womanly body is failed by the prejudice placed upon it.

Duncan explains through the third person how he cultivated self-government in himself, describing himself as a "youth […] whose temperament led him to extremes." For example, "if he lost a bird or a flower that he had trained and loved, he wept passionate tears; and if thwarted, his will rose in angry defiance." Duncan demonstrates that young boys and young girls are both driven by extreme emotions and suggests that women's supposed weaknesses are either nurtured by their patriarchal cultural, not actually weaknesses but strengths, or entirely invented as convenient perspectives by norming discourses.

Duncan's mother's death and his father's nurturing seem to inform his respect for women and his disdain for violent, arrogant masculinity. Duncan says he "lost his mother just at the period when her control was most valuable to him." Duncan is vague about whether he means her self-control or her control over him is particularly valuable, and I would argue that Duncan means both are vital to his upbringing. Duncan says, "She died; it was his first sorrow, and it cut his soul as the strong axe of the woodman severs the sapling." Here, we see an example of

physical strength destroying the weak and vulnerable, an act of cruelty in Duncan's eyes that is directly critical of certain masculine norms.

But then Duncan describes his gentle father, a resource to inform Duncan's current values and disposition as a self-governed man. Modeling—an equalizing strategy that destabilizes power and, for some, a feminist practice, is a valuable teaching strategy for those like Duncan. And this practice is adopted by Cornelia. "A mind like this required gentle training, but it also required strong motives to virtue. His father guarded him with tender yet vigorous care, and watched him as we watch the pulse of fever, and administer to its wants or check its excitement" (*Southern Matron* 65). Duncan's narration challenges what he seems to observe as a cultural prioritization of bodily strength over intellectual and spiritual wellness. Duncan explains that conscientious manhood requires "a high and ennobling example [that] must be held up" alongside a "fair and glorious hope." And like antebellum Unitarian leaders and Sigourney, Duncan agrees that a dedicated, self-governed existence is such that "Earth […] affords no spot where such spirits can rest," and it "quenches not their thirst - they must drink at an inexhaustible fountain, or they die" (*Southern Matron* 65). Essentially, self-government is a constant struggle against one's own desires and impulses alongside the vibes of the physical world. And spiritual growth lies in such a struggle.

Duncan's teachings give Cornelia an "elevated standard of manly virtue," (*Southern Matron* 69) and deter her from loving Lewis, an impulsive man who is unconscious of how his emotions affect others. Further, this elevated standard of manly virtue helps Cornelia mentor her brother Richard. In this next section, I discuss how, after Duncan's death, Cornelia models Duncan's teaching, practices self-government, and finds herself confronting the sting of failure

as she struggles against norms of masculinity she has been inclined to respect in a patriarchal culture.

Cornelia's Independent Pursuit of Self-Possession and Self-Government

After Duncan's death, Cornelia is immediately confronted with examples of men whose emotions are seemingly unbridled and violent in their consequences. But Cornelia, after Duncan's influences, sees women as capable of influencing others and gives advice on how women can help themselves and others despite the circumstances of women's subordination and denied citizenship. Cornelia writes, "It is rarely that a girl of sixteen reproves seriously." Instead, she adds levity to disapproval with "pretty sullenness, a pettish retort, or a gay badinage"—what Cornelia calls rhetorical "weapons." But Cornelia expresses that she believes women's power lies in more direct resentment. She says that "when the light of a just indignation does dart from a youthful eye, when with an elevated form, a kindling glance, a crimson cheek, and a voice half tremulous, half authoritative, she denounces error, sages may bend before her" (*Southern Matron* 73).

For much of the novel after Duncan's death, Cornelia seeks to proves a woman's influence and power if she just governs her own emotions and knows the consequences of her rhetorical choices—choices that rely on rational thought rather than emotional response. Lewis, Duncan's foil in terms of her early romantic interests, confronts Cornelia after Duncan's death and provides her an opportunity to enact her rhetorical authority. Lewis insults Duncan and Cornelia's shared values with the deceased mentor, calls Duncan a "Puritanical Yankee," and then asks Cornelia: "You will not play what I wish you to?" (*Southern Matron* 73). Cornelia responds, "No, Lewis," I answered, effectually brought to self-possession by his sarcasm on one so dear to me" (*Southern Matron* 73). Lewis says that his heart is true but then does not question

whether his emotions are the result of love or jealousy, and it is clear that Cornelia sees love as an issue of abundance, not scarcity. She says: “Unkind Lewis, […] [s]uppose I make you the head of my system; ‘there is a glory of the sun’ as well as of the moon and stars.” She sees Duncan as the moon and stars, challenging the masculine competitiveness of courtship, and if Lewis loved her, he would recognize the happiness Duncan gave her as a gift. “I wished to tell you, that from the first moment of our childish frolics to the present time, you have been my heart's choice; and to offer you that heart in its truest devotion; but no; your form is near me, it is true; but, though you know that this is your last interview with me for months, perhaps for ever, you gaze on the stars and sigh for Charles Duncan.’” (*Southern Matron* 78). This emphasis on truth underscores the contrast between Duncan’s and Lewis’ understandings of truth. Further, Lewis is impetuous and shows himself to be the opposite of the ideal young man. Before defending herself to Lewis, Cornelia “laugh[s] outright,” which leads to Lewis calling her “coquettish, heartless, and many names that love should not even know how to spell” (*Southern Matron* 78). He does not learn from mistakes and does not treat a woman as his equal. He interrupts her and pays her thoughts little mind. Cornelia defends herself with a calm, rational retort, despite Lewis’ continued anger:

> “You have done well for me, Lewis, […] to repeat that name; it is a talisman. Mr. Duncan, who studied my temperament, often warned me never to connect myself either in friendship or love with one who knew not self-control. Stormy passions terrify me. Besides, I do not deserve the language you have used to me. I love Charles Duncan as I love my own brothers - no farther. (*Southern Matron* 79)

Again, self-government and self-control are used interchangeably, and Cornelia practices Duncan’s teachings with the help of hearing his name uttered. And as Duncan and Cornelia have previously noted, emotions are natural, and failure is inevitable. When Lewis responds with a “bitter gush of overwrought passion”, Cornelia “start[s] from his side with a scream of terror and

eventually th[rows] [her]self weeping into [her] mamma's arms. While this behavior could be seen to show her true weakness, as Duncan taught Cornelia, strength is only found when one struggles to continue pursuing a higher character (*Southern Matron* 79).

After her conflict and eventual friendly resolution with Lewis later in the novel, Cornelia's brother Richard is faced with the prospect of dueling a man who embarrassed him in public. Cornelia must then decide how to rhetorically respond in a way that controls her emotions and influences Richard to make the right decision and potentially save a life. Cornelia recalls Duncan's teachings to confront this obstacle.

According to Cornelia, Duncan "argued that the grievances between two private individuals ought not to be placed in the scale against the nuisance of throwing whole families and communities into terror, agitation, and unspeakable distress" (177-8). It is "full season for an enlightened age to put down one of the most savage and foolish relics of barbarous times; that a spurious and animal bravery is the very highest sentiment which the practice promotes, while a lofty moral courage is exercised in refusing, not in accepting a challenge" (177-8). Duncan says,

> [B]y a principle of false shame and the fear of reproach, it transforms the best of men into hypocrites and liars, and drives them out to murder the friends of their youth and their bosoms, […] that genuine honour lies in ourselves, not in the opinion of the world; that it is neither defended by sword nor buckler, but by a life of integrity and irreproachableness; and that this combat is more glorious than any other. (*Southern Matron* 177-8)

It is, again, convenient that Duncan spoke to Cornelia about the brutality of dueling but did not give an opinion on slavery, avoiding conflict between mentor and mentee. But Duncan remains resolute that these seemingly traditionally masculine practices are actually not so traditional and contradict long-held standards of morality. Using logic and reason, Duncan and Cornelia dismiss any honor in dueling.

Richard asks for Cornelia's advice, revealing that he lacks the self-governance to be unbothered by the opinions of others. He says, "I feel the sting of this insult rankling like a serpent's fang within me through the day, and at night I see it branded in burning characters, in waking darkness, and yet more hideous dreams. I see it in every man's face calling me coward, and women seem to me to shrink from one who cannot defend them." Embedded in this admission is Richard's insecurity regarding strong manhood and not measuring up to that societal standard. Further, this reveals Richard's investment in such a violent and toxic norm of behavior and leads men to committing murder—though many do not view dueling as murder the way Duncan does. This shows the power of norms. But Richard's inner turmoil shows that he knows what is right, but his inability to be guided by his own moral grounding impedes his decision. As Duncan taught Cornelia, genuine honour lies in ourselves, not in the opinion of the world" (*Southern Matron* 178). Further, Richard admits his inability to control his emotions, telling Cornelia, "I have tried to look all round this subject calmly, but it comes to me like a nightmare" (*Southern Matron* 178-9).

Cornelia confronts her own faults and the influence of social norms on her own perceptions of physical strength. She admits that, against her reason, her emotions see physical strength as ideal and moral behavior as cowardly and weak. As she says, "How little did it occur to me that I might have been a medium of reconciliation instead of a desperate adviser!" Instead, her emotions govern her instead of her mind and rhetorical prowess. And she acknowledges that she has the power to influence Richard in the way of moral goodness: "If the right string had been touched in my brother's mind, all would have been tuned to harmony, but my preconceived views of physical courage overbalanced the claim of high moral duty." Instead of guiding him toward calm, she does not advise him in self-governance. Instead, Richard, in the words of

Cornelia, “threw himself moodily on the sofa, buried his face in his hands, and, rising, poured out his feelings anew in words of burning anger” (*Southern Matron* 179).

With regret for her actions, Cornelia advises women that their responses influence men’s passions. She warns, “Oh, woman, beware how you aid in inflaming the passions of man! The courtesan of classic times won her judges by a display of her personal charms, let your manifestation be only of the bright and tender virtues; let not your influence, either of person or mind, swell the tempest of unlawful excitement” (*Southern Matron* 179-80). This cautionary statement recalls Wollstonecraft’s criticism that women are meant to lead men to their greatest potential. However, Cornelia must be wary of rhetorically challenging women’s traditional roles without couching some of her argument with reassuring statements that women’s independence will benefit both sexes. Further, Cornelia says that it is not her “object here to argue for or against quelling” since “that is the province of abler minds” (*Southern Matron* 180). This seems like a traditional expression of humility from Cornelia in which she shows her reader her own choices and how they potentially influence the circumstances of Richard’s anguish. And rather than discussing how women should be punished for allowing men to make mistakes, she advocates for a positive reinforcement of the ways women can rhetorically improve a situation; Cornelia decides to “venture to show how female influence may ‘ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm’ of masculine feeling for good or for evil,” and she argues “how the genius of Christianity, or even worldly philosophy, quietly exhibited in woman's gentle tones, may come with their enlightening power, not for the avoidance of mere physical pain, but with a serious regard to man’s true dignity and ultimate destiny” (*Southern Matron* 180). Cornelia argues that women should help men—not just so they can avoid violence, but also because it can help men

prepare for Heaven. This adds a greater significance to women's rhetorical influence and challenges any argument that focuses too closely on whether one should duel.

Richard is lucky enough to survive a wound he receives in the duel, so he can learn from his mistake. Cornelia and Richard speak together after he heals from the wound and discuss the afterlife. Speaking much like Duncan and Cornelia do regarding self-government, Richard says, "I would prefer annihilation […] to a forgetting of my individual self. The spirit must be able to look back, and compare, and judge; it must feel its growth, to be happy. Accession in knowledge is the only test of spirituality" (*Southern Matron* 186). This self-examination of the self and of passions reinforces that the search for truth and self-knowledge are interconnected, and individual truth can either replicate or challenge norms. In the case of Richard, he can challenge the social pressure to replicate violence as a man. With these struggles among the relationships with men in her life, in tandem with Cornelia's pursuit of self-governance is her conflict desires for spinsterhood and love and leads to the companionship of marriage.

Self-Government in Marriage

Because women in the nineteenth-century were unable to own property or vote, a woman's freedoms were incredibly limited unless they could marry well and hopefully marry someone influential whom she could persuade to act in the way she wished. Marriage was necessitated by women's denied citizenship. Cornelia's expressions of hesitation toward marriage may not lead to her remaining single and childless, but it does allow young female readers to examine their own choices for themselves and see the pressures placed upon them—as pressures, not as requirements.

Furthermore, as Cornelia says to Lewis when he asks her to swear to save herself for him, she says she will not reserve her heart for a man who is so temperamental and unconscientious:

"'I will not make such a vow,' said I, resolutely, withdrawing the hands he was clasping in his; 'my heart is not to be taken by storm; and as for swearing, I have been taught by too gentle a master'" (*Southern Matron* 79). Cornelia's use of "master" here is curious here, given her belief that slaves happily work for gentle masters under such an oppressive institution. However, it seems that Cornelia seems that she, too, could be happy serving a gentle—but metaphorical—master, given her ideas of who deserves institutionalized servitude.

When Lewis returns from his travels seemingly improved but still governed by his emotions, he says to Cornelia, "I hate a belle as I do a green persimmon. Calculating all night, and dressing all day, their hearts get beaten up by the world like grist in a mortar; and when a man marries a woman, he gets a body without a soul, and sometimes a dress without a body" (*Southern Matron* 116). Lewis suggests that the craft of securing a husband compromises the soul by requiring women to be calculating, but Lewis is not the most reliable speaker. He is continually denied by the woman he wants, revealing his bitter pessimism. While Cornelia does not respond to this statement, Lewis' comment suggests that women are disembodied through marriage and that women are unable to self-govern as wives.

Lewis' romantic interest Anna experiences an opportunity for self-government, but readers witness her reliance on Lewis as personally limiting. Cornelia says of Anna when she shows fear in the face of a fortuneteller: "How beautiful she was at that moment in the struggle to conquer her reluctance! Perhaps the contrast of the tall commonplace figure of the fortune-teller made her spiritual loveliness more striking. She grasped her little fan almost convulsively; her eyes shunned the dark orbs that were fixed upon her; and as the lips of the fortuneteller uttered a sound, she caught Lewis's hand, and looked up to him beseechingly, while tears started to her eyes" (*Southern Matron* 129). While self-government is supposed to be difficult, and

mistakes are inevitable, it is unclear whether Anna learns from her reluctance during this experience. But we do see her use Lewis as a support rather than trying to calm herself down. As Caroline says later in the novel,

> Let young men be careful of woman's highest interests. In those moments of prepossession when her heart and mind instinctively turn to model themselves on his, whom God has made of stronger fabric, let him not sap those foundations of religious trust which may hereafter be dearer to him than her young loveliness, and which, when that loveliness has faded in the dust, will bloom and ripen in a better world. (*Southern Matron* 158)

Essentially, even though Cornelia says that men are made of stronger fabric, Cornelia places greater value on women's strength gained through success over weakness. Women are more emotionally resilient through greater practice. And she tells young men to avoid encouraging women to rely on them. Self-government is of higher interest than defaulting to one's husband.

Cornelia's reluctance to marry is seemingly justified by a seeming romanticization of dependent, needy damsels who require heroic men to protect them. And the trope stands in this narrative. Marion first meets Cornelia who, after an accident in the woods, is covered in mud. Marion then searches for Cornelia, convinced he will recognize her when he sees her. When he meets Cornelia again, he doesn't know she is the woman he was searching for. Cornelia says of herself: "[…] your heroine was not in a very interesting predicament," to which Marion responds: "Every woman is interesting to me who requires my protection." Marion seems to invest in the cultural norm that it is a man's responsibility to coddle his romantic interest, and just as he is wrong in that sense, he is wrong about his heroine's identity.

Marion romanticizes who he thinks Cornelia is, even though his heroine is speaking right to him. Cornelia asks: "Should you know your heroine again?" Marion responds:

> "I am confident that I should know her person anywhere [….] Her face was concealed by her bent hat and soiled veil; but her figure, which I gazed on until she was out of sight, I think I should recognise in a crowd; and on horseback I could not be mistaken in her. I

> have seldom seen so symmetrical a form, at least not until very recently," and he bowed and smiled. (*Southern Matron* 145)

Marion romanticizes an imagined Cornelia, not the Cornelia in front of him. But eventually, Marion recognizes Cornelia, and they begin a courtship. But even in this courtship, Cornelia is careful to self-govern and control herself, despite her love intensifying for Marion. She maintains her responsibilities without letting her emotions compromise her duties: "Let me receive all praise that I committed none of the alleged crimes of lovers at the breakfast-table. No spilled coffee can be laid to my charge. I did not put butter instead of sugar into papa's tea, or say yes, madam, when I should have said no, sir" (*Southern Matron* 216-7). These are all domestic tasks that Cornelia prides herself in achieving. While Cornelia's courtship and marriage begin auspiciously, the marriage plot continues past the wedding and includes conflict, allowing Cornelia to dispense knowledge of how to self-govern as a wife.

Cornelia seems to sympathize with men as ignorant offenders; she explains that men can be reasoned with but struggle with misunderstanding "the moral and physical structure of [women] and "often wound through ignorance, and are surprised at having offended." But she clarifies that women who succumb to "petulance and recrimination" should practice self-control even in the face of such ignorance:

> Her first study must be self-control, almost to hypocrisy. A good wife must smile amid a thousand perplexities, and clear her voice to tones of cheerfulness when her frame is drooping with disease, or else languish alone. Man, on the contrary, when trials beset him, expects to find her ear and heart a ready receptacle, and, when sickness assails him, her soft hand must nurse and sustain him" (*Southern Matron* 256-7).

Cornelia's understanding of self-regulation is complicated by her response to grief. Her husband sleeps as she mourns, which suggests that it is more difficult for women to regulate their emotions due to their attachment to domestic loss and their level of responsibility. And yet, this struggle to self-regulate makes women closer to God.

Further, it is a husband's responsibility to encourage his wife's independence and self-confidence. Cornelia says after Marion laughs at her: "A man who differs from his wife and reasons with her, rather elevates her self-love; but, the moment he laughs at her, she feels that the golden bowl of married sympathy is broken" (*Southern Matron* 259).

Cornelia writes of the domestic responsibilities and traumas women undergo that are undervalued and underrepresented even in Marion and Cornelia's marriage as they strive to treat each other as equals. When Cornelia and Marion's son dies, Cornelia is left with shrouding the body and grieving alone:

> The waters gushed not forth. Arthur still slept; men can sleep. I went hurriedly and sought the materials for a shroud, and sat down by my boy, and some wild association made me bind the white ribands from my bridal dress on his last garment. I could not look at him, and yet his image was indefinitely multiplied; wherever I turned then, and for weeks after, amid sunshine or darkness, by the social hearth or in the solitude of my chamber, all was darkness, except where luminous points shone on a dead child. (*Southern Matron* 266)

By saying that "men can sleep," Cornelia interrogates the responsibilities she has on her own, without the help of her husband, even though in her seemingly patriarchal culture, her husband is supposed to protect her. And even now, he won't even assist with these necessary tasks as an equal. There are particular traumas allotted to women—though men are taught that women are fragile.

Cornelia, before concluding her narrative, reflects on the pain almost unique to women and recommits herself to self-regulation to prepare for Heaven to be with her child. She says, "What an education poor humanity requires to train it for Heaven! I had thought myself religious, and yet, when God took back the gift he had bestowed, a gift that had brightened my being for three happy years, I could not bless him for the past joy. My rebellious spirit charged even Heaven with injustice" (*Recollections of a Southern Matron* 267). But even in this religious

conflict and bitter sorrow, Cornelia returns to self-government, saying, "[b]but still I feel that, from time to time, after the self-examination of those holy hours, a truer zest is given to social happiness, a juster feeling of duty, and a clearer sense of our relations as immortals" (*Southern Matron* 268). Ultimately, Cornelia reflects in the larger goal of immortal bliss given after a lifetime of personal growth and continued struggle—showing how women, through struggle, find themselves more capable than anticipated by their contemporary, patriarchal culture. While this struggle is conflicted with the novel's depiction of slavery and servitude, Cornelia reinforces efforts to increase women's independence in a culture denying women property and the right to vote.

This reading of Gilman's *Southern Matron* offers the first close reading of the text with a focus on self-governance, a component of American individualism and a contemporary discussion important to woman influencers like Lydia Sigourney. I have argued that Gilman's *Southern Matron*—guided by principles of self-government—argues for white women's capabilities as regulators of the home, surveillers of the home, and thus capable citizens. What Gilman misses is the logic of the most subservient being the most likely to regulate themselves insofar; by such logic, slaves should be most capable of regulating others if subservience teaches such a skill. Much of what the white women in this novel accomplish is made possible through slave labor, reinforcing white supremacy's intermingling with women's rights efforts in the antebellum South.

CHAPTER III: SLAVES TO HONORABLE SATISFACTION IN AUGUSTA JANE EVANS WILSON'S *ST. ELMO*

In a letter dated July 15th, 1863 to Confederate congressman J. L. M. Curry, author Augusta Jane Evans addresses the question of whether the "character of Southern women [are] prejudicially affected by Slavery." Evans argues that Southern women are "enervated, lethargic, incapable of enduring fatigue, and as a class, afflicted with chronic lassitude." This is, in her reasoning, because Southern women have slaves to perform all their household tasks; and due to the Southern climate, white women cannot exercise outdoors (*Correspondence* 65). In this letter to Curry, Evans positions herself as conflicted woman; in this image, she sees slavery as detracting from Southern women's lives not because the system of labor is immoral, but because it discourages white women from indoor exercise. Furthermore, Evans writes that, while slavery should allow Southern women "more leisure of the cultivation of their intellects, and the perfection of womanly accomplishments," Southern women do not take advantage of this time to cultivate Southern white women's literary voices (Sexton 66). Just two years later and after the Civil War, Evans laments to Curry that she now must write to provide for herself: "[A]s I have lost my property (negroes and Confederate bonds) during that revolution, I must attend to 'the question of bread and butter' and am trying to write out a novel" (107). This novel would become *St. Elmo* (1866).

In this letter to Curry, Evans articulates the ways she benefitted from slavery, avoiding the moral implications of slave labor. But Evans knew the variety of rhetorical approaches she could take to sell the novel to both Northern and Southern audiences. Melissa Homestead challenges the almost entirely unquestioned account by J.C. Derby regarding the publication of

Evans' novel *Macaria*. Derby, in the words of Homestead, portrays Wilson as a "passive victim in Northern publication of her novel" (Homestead 667). Homestead writes that Evans, while "presenting herself to both Curry and Derby as fiercely loyal to the recently Lost Cause," sought to preserve her "authorial interests in the newly reunited nation" (Homestead 693). While some may see Evans as manipulative, betraying her beliefs to sell books, she was able to advocate for herself and other white women by telling certain men what they wanted to hear.

In many ways, Evans was a complex and often contradictory woman, but her contradictions allowed for her family to be fed and for her ideas to be read widely and often. As Brenda Ayres writes, Evans "adamantly opposed the vote for women and any other form of political activism" while she also "consistently subverted gender constraints in her life and worked by publicly espousing her own opinions and political views" (Ayres 5). This stance is unsurprising given Edna's disapproval of women's suffrage efforts in *St. Elmo* alongside advocacy of women's self-reliance.

Evans's *St. Elmo* was wildly successful among the author's contemporaries above and below the Mason Dixon line. Evans was engaging in political and sociological debate via the domestic novel genre. Her novels were sensational and controversial while engaging with contemporary socio-political discussions. Throughout *St. Elmo,* Evans explores the concept of "honorable satisfaction" to provide an alternative redemption arch for American men like the titular Byronic hero St. Elmo. Further, the novel provides a manual of sorts for young women to craft their own honorable satisfaction; Evans suggests that women can both enter literary circles and marry for love rather than having to choose one or the other. In *St. Elmo*, Edna Earl's character arc argues that women can provide for themselves and encourages both self-possession and self-regulation as a means of empowering young women.

But enveloped in this narrative is Evans's limited explicit engagement with the topic of chattel slavery. In this chapter, I argue that Evans consistently uses the language of slavery to describe the passions of her white main characters: Edna and St. Elmo. Given the novel's setting in antebellum Georgia and that it was written during Reconstruction, this begs for an analysis of how material and political realities for African Americans during slavery and Reconstruction are displaced and reconfigured as white Americans' struggles within the world of affect. For Edna, this is also reconfigured as an increasingly familiar personal conflict: personal fulfillment, vocation, and attainment embedded in religious comfort or a traditional white women's script of marriage and motherhood. Edna's literary pursuits as a "lettered slave" and St. Elmo's reformation emphasize a conflicted stance on slavery that urges abolitionist readers to sympathize with the lost Confederacy.

Descended from wealthy South Carolina families, Evans was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1835. Evans was the oldest of eight children raised by her parents—Matt Ryan Evans and Sarah Skrine Howard Evans. With so many siblings and the family losing much wealth during the depression of the 1840s, Evans was rightfully fearful of poverty throughout her life. With hopes to regain what they had lost, Evans' family moved to Texas and eventually settled in Mobile, Alabama (Faust x).

Evans was primarily educated by her mother—a devoted woman of faith. But the secular education that Evans received at a primary school in Mobile, alongside her own independent studies, led to religious doubt and existential questioning. In her novels, Evans writes characters who circumvent these religious doubts while still maintaining keen and diverse educations—a gift Evans wanted for others but could not manage for herself. At fifteen, Evans published her first novel: *Inez, A Tale of the Alamo* (1855). The novel, with its anti-Catholic sentiments and

direct attention to the current events of the American landscape, namely the Mexican War, anticipated the thematic template with which Evans would write the rest of her novels (Faust ix).

Evans published her second novel *Beulah* in 1859. The novel's titular heroine puts her marriage prospects at risk by pursuing a literary career and "shelves her Bible for an agonizing study of morals and metaphysics"—in the words of G.M. Goshgarian (12). Throughout Evans's fiction, there are clear unifying themes exploring how women can find independence without sacrificing their religious convictions or opportunities afforded through marriage. And Evans was not without her own personal conflicting feelings about marriage. In 1860, Evans broke her engagement to James Reed Spaulding, a New York journalist, due to his loyalty to the Union.

Despite Evans's vocal support for the Confederacy and dedication to the South, Evans still managed to appeal to Northern readers. She could not just write to an echo chamber in the South. Of course, people in the North and South held a wide variety of attitudes regarding the Civil War, secession, and national values. And in 1864, West & Johnson of Richmond, Virginia published Evans's novel *Macaria*—a work that was enjoyed by Northern and Southern readers alike, despite Wilson's devotion to the Confederacy. In the words of Drew Gilpin Faust, the novel was "smuggled through the blockade and reprinted in New York" (Faust x). Azelina Flint writes that *Macaria* is "premised upon a central paradox": "Although written in defense of the Confederacy, the novel simultaneously contests one of its most fundamental values: the subordination of women to paternal authority" (Flint 457). Evans's works indirectly question whether the Bible is such a paternal authority—extending the question of whether a woman should submit to the confines of marriage or the domestic sphere in which she is often confined.

Following the success of *Macaria*, Evans published *St. Elmo* in 1866. Elizabeth Fox-Genevese notes how the novel seemingly demonstrates the consequences of judgment and—

unsurprisingly—the tension between religious devotion and self-governance: “Have individualism and pride taken hold of her faith, leading her to set herself up as a judge of the hearts and motives of others?” (Fox-Genevese 26). This novel concludes with Edna, the novel’s protagonist, witnessing the reformation of her love interest and seemingly forsaking her own judgmental attitude.

Like her protagonist in *St. Elmo*, Evans soon married. In 1868, Evans married Lorenzo Madison Wilson but continued to publish. Evans published *Vashti* in 1869, *Infelice* in 1875, *At the Mercy of Tiberius* in 1887, and *A Speckled Bird* in 1902, and *Devota* in 1907. Brenda Ayres’ sources—including Diane Roberts, Bernadette Loftin, F. Clason Kyle, and *The American Bookseller*—confirm that Evans was the first woman writer to earn 100,000 through her own writing. Though some scholars may refer to Evans as a writer of propaganda, she understood authorship as a business, a way of influencing others, and an art (Ayres 1).

Evans’s *St. Elmo* follows the life of Edna Earl, an orphan raised by her maternal grandfather in the American South. Edna, as a child, witnesses a duel resulting in a young man’s death. Young Edna asks a nearby surgeon, “To take a man’s life is murder. Is there no law to punish ‘a duel’?” The surgeon responds, “None strong enough to prohibit the practice. It is regarded as the only method of honorable satisfaction open to gentlemen” (*St. Elmo* 5). From this point, Evans establishes one of the goals of *St. Elmo*—to provide an alternative way for gentlemen to settle conflict in honorable manners.

When her grandfather dies, Edna travels by train to work for a factory. The train crashes, resulting in many of the train passengers’ deaths. Edna survives and is taken in by Mrs. Ellen Murray. Then, Mrs. Murray’s son St. Elmo returns from his travels abroad, which begins the novel’s troubled romance plot. Evans’s early use of “honorable satisfaction” through duelling

extends to speculate how men and women can satisfy their desires while maintaining their honor. Much like in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Evans's young female protagonist initially dislikes her male counterpart, finding him cruel and disrespectful of women. St. Elmo is a proud misogynist, stemming from a betrayal in his youth. When St. Elmo ponders a utopia without women, St. Elmo's cousin responds: "St. Elmo, you are the most abominable misogamist I ever met" (*St. Elmo* 164). But after learning of his past and demanding that he atone for his sins, Edna finds that she can love and marry St. Elmo. Embedded in this marriage plot is Edna's pursuit of education and fame as she seeks to join the literati. As Edna rejects a variety of suitors whom she does not love, she instead seeks fulfillment via her studies.

St. Elmo was extraordinarily successful, and Evans received a wide variety of acclaim and criticism—particularly for a perceived fetishization of abusive men. Charles Webb parodied Evans's novel with the 1867 novella *St. Twel'Mo*. *St. Twel'Mo* critiques women authors for pairing adoring female protagonists with men who treat them poorly. As Webb concludes the parody: "My story is done. I am not aware that it has any moral [...] beyond indicating the danger of leaving dictionaries in the way of children, and pointing that peculiarity in woman's nature which inspires them to love those who beat and bite them" (59). That same year, The *DeBow's Review* editors R.G. Barnwell and Edwin Q. Bell wrote of Evans's noble subject matter but poor execution, most notably underscoring the failings of Evans's "ill-regulated and heated fancy." This notion becomes especially intriguing because, in the novel, when Edna is writing her *magnum opus*, she struggles with her health and with self-regulation, combatting the limitations of her body while her mind is enthused and impassioned.

Evans's critics note her "high place among the literati of the South but acknowledge the "flaws in the rhetoric as well as the creations of her overstocked brain"—a criticism that the novel's protagonist Edna often receives from her editors. *St. Elmo*'s narrator explains, "Newspapers pronounced the book a failure. Some sneered in a gentlemanly manner, employing polite phraseology; others coarsely caricatured it. Many were insulted by its incomprehensible erudition; a few growled at its shallowness. To-day there was a hint at plagiarism; to-morrow an outright, wholesale theft was asserted" (*St. Elmo* 331). Edna's writing turns *St. Elmo* into a meta-critique since Edna receives the same criticisms of her writing as Evans anticipates the criticism she received for *St. Elmo*.

While Evans's writing of Edna's literary career could have been an effort to protect herself from similar critiques of St. Elmo, this effort would be in vain. Barnwell and Bell seem to find the greatest fault in Evans's education, viewing her allusions to classical philosophy as obscuring Evans's original ideas: "Thereupon, we are overwhelmed with an avalanche of ancient and modern lore, the few original ideas in the book losing their identity in a sea of classical quotations" (269). While criticizing Evans for a perceived lack of originality, Barnwell and Bell recognize how Evans challenges contemporary "honorable satisfaction" and for promoting white women's self-reliance: "The purity of thought, the elevation of purpose, displayed in her writing is excellent, the purport of the book being to show the sin of duelling as a means of 'honorable satisfaction;' also the achievements of an educated, self-reliant Christian woman (269). But despite Evans's influence among her contemporaries, Evans's work is not often anthologized in the American Literature canon alongside Nathanial Hawthorne and Herman Melville, though her works outsold these male authors' respective works.

While Evans, as a pro-Confederacy Southern writer, erases slave labor and espouses proto-white-feminism in *St. Elmo,* I argue that *St. Elmo* demonstrates white Southern women's rhetorical participation—both real and fictionally imagined—in antebellum and postbellum politics. Failing to recognize Evans's novel's influence in nineteenth-century literary culture takes for granted how engaged Southern women writers were in the literature surrounding the Civil War. But Evans is, as Nina Baym writes, "ambivalent and self-contradictory" (*Woman's Fiction* 278) and provides a more complex portrayal of Southern Women writers than the assumption that Southern women simply lazed about their plantations, subjected to their husbands' wishes.

A closer examination of *St. Elmo* reveals the novel's emphasis on women's temptations and efforts at self-regulation. Edna struggles to control both her body and mind, as she understands them both separately. She sees her thoughts and her heart at odds as she pursues a man that is sinful while rejecting men who seem better suited for her. And the novel's focus on bodily autonomy is inextricable from contemporary dialogues regarding slavery, emancipation, and the Confederacy that Augusta Jane Evans supported. St. Elmo is presented as a slave to contemporary expectations of upper-class masculinity, with duelling and St. Elmo's resulting self-hatred governing him. His actions lead him to look "dark," and he must keep his body in motion, seeking redemption. Likewise, Edna is presented as a slave to her thirst for education and literary acclaim. But throughout the novel, she blushes and cries, her body often betraying her. And her heart acts against her interests as she falls in love with a man she hates.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing Edna's portrayal as a "lettered slave." Edna is subjected to ambition that challenges her mind but compromises her body. The protagonist becomes physically ill while writing a novel that is meant to teach and empower women. Then, I

discuss the racial implications of duelling in the novel, as well as St. Elmo's "enslavement" to the practice. Then, I explain how St. Elmo describes himself as a slave to masculine norms, such as duelling, while the narrative continually supports this self-identification. I then discuss how Edna's disposition towards both marriage and St. Elmo seeks to rhetorically influence the novel's audience in favor of the Confederacy.

Edna as "Lettered Slave"

While St. Elmo is characterized as a slave to duelling and his licentious ways, Edna is characterized as a slave to her extreme commitments to both morality and education. And morality and education are intertwined—since Republican Motherhood relied on educating children, and for a single woman, writing to educate the public was, for Augusta Jane Evans, a way to argue for single women's independent pursuit of literary fame. These single women would be doing society a favor by educating the masses. Like Caroline Gilman's *Southern Matron* (1838), Evans's St. *Elmo* encourages white women's education and independence—a privilege seemingly afforded by servant labor in the North and slavery in the South. Early in the novel, the miller Peter Wood says to young Edna, "The less book-learning you women have the better" (*St. Elmo* 23). Mrs. Wood responds, "Now, it's of no earthly use to cut at us women over that child's shoulders; if she wants an education she has as much right to it as anybody, if she can pay for it. My doctrine is, everybody has a right to whatever they can pay for, whether it is schooling or a satin frock!" Mrs. Wood argues that women should have the right to education if they can pay for it, which indirectly addresses the education of slaves as inappropriate. But she also argues that women should be able to take care of themselves and their families if their husband is barred from working—an argument emerging from many nineteenth-century women writers including Fanny Fern.

And while Edna's education affords her many opportunities, Edna is often depicted as victimized by her pursuit of knowledge and her eagerness to publish. She undergoes verbal abuse and public ridicule and even suffers from physical illness to achieve her literary goals. Edna's greatest struggle is her education; and while she can understand concepts of morality, but she struggles to contextualize moral decisions and deal with decisions on a case-by-case basis. She is too rigid, some criticize, in her moral leanings. As the narrator points out early in the novel,

> Love of nature, love of books, an earnest piety and deep religious enthusiasm were the characteristics of a noble young soul, left to stray through the devious, checkered paths of life without other guidance than that which she received from communion with Greek sages and Hebrew prophets. An utter stranger to fashionable conventionality and latitudinarian ethics, it was no marvel that the child stared and shivered when she saw the laws of God vetoed, and was blandly introduced to murder as Honorable Satisfaction. (*St. Elmo* 11)

This passage underscores Edna's difficulty understanding how her moral teachings translate to her daily life and are contextualized. Edna practices a level of extreme moral devotion, according to the narrator, because she was not raised conventionally and in a society that loosely practices moral maxims.

When Edna starts studying with Mr. Hammond, her public education leads to some scrutiny of Edna's behavior. This scrutiny raises the false dichotomy that women can either be single, educated, and miserable or married, uneducated, and respected. When Mrs. Murray asks Mr. Hammond not to make Edna a "blue-stocking" (St. Elmo 59). When Edna asks what a blue-stocking is, Mr. Hammond explains:

> A 'blue-stocking,' my dear, is generally supposed to be a lady, neither young, pleasant, nor pretty (and in most instances unmarried); who is unamiable, ungraceful, and untidy; ignorant of all domestic accomplishments and truly feminine acquirements, and ambitious of appearing very learned; a woman whose fingers are more frequently adorned with ink-spots than thimble; who holds housekeeping in detestation, and talks loudly about politics, science, and philosophy; who

> is ugly, and learned, and cross; whose hair is never smooth and whose ruffles are never fluted. (*St. Elmo* 59-61)

This description of the blue-stocking models Edna's own bifurcated thinking patterns. Edna does not see the myriad of options available to her, and she does not see the nuances of peoples' actions when available their moral leanings. This lesson, while potentially empowering for white women, can also be seen as a way for Evans to persuade Northern readers to envision a more complex understanding of the antebellum South that sympathizes with the confederacy.

Edna's struggle with her bifurcated thinking is continually tested by St. Elmo—a man who tries to manipulate her physically and emotionally. Meanwhile, Edna struggles with a desire for independence, perhaps its own allusion to a desired separation between the Union and the Confederacy. In a scene where St. Elmo struggles for mastery over Edna's body, he says:

> You are piqued and jealous, just as I intended you should be; but, darling, I am not a patient man, and it frets me to feel you struggling so desperately in the arms that henceforth will always enfold you. […] Don't turn your face away from mine, your lips belong to me. (*St. Elmo* 232)

St. Elmo tries to exert control over Edna, testing her physical and emotional strength that would render him her equal. And while he says her body belongs to him, she quickly refutes his claim to her, saying, "Your touch is profanation. I would sooner go down into my grave, out there in the churchyard, under the granite slabs, than become the wife of a man so unprincipled. I am neither piqued nor jealous, for your affairs cannot affect my life; I am only astonished and mortified and grieved" (*St. Elmo* 232). By saying that he cannot influence her, Edna shapes her relationship with St. Elmo, but she acts on her principles—denying her feelings. At the same time as Edna is enslaved by her unwanted emotions for St. Elmo, Edna is confronted by Mrs. Murray and Mr. Hammond separately; both Mrs. Murray and Mr. Hammond want Edna to

reform St. Elmo, showing that her unwanted devotion for St. Elmo and her societal expectations of True Womanhood obligate her to marry and reform the dissipated man.

Edna fears that her temptations and the inability to control her mind and body make her unwomanly, reinforcing her role as a sort of slave. Women held captive and enslaved in the antebellum South were deprived of bodily agency and thought to have no identity, intellectual nuance, or refinement to be called a woman. And Edna insists that St. Elmo possesses an exotic, mystical influence over her, depriving her of the control that seemingly characterizes her goodness and thus her whiteness (*St. Elmo* 249). As Edna pleads to her late grandfather regarding St. Elmo, "God help me to resist that man's wicked magnetism! Oh, Grandpa! are you looking down on your poor little Pearl? [...] Ah, Grandpa! I will crush it—I will conquer it!" (*St. Elmo* 166).

St. Elmo seeks to reconcile his own metaphorical enslavement by exercising control over Edna, especially when discussing her dedication to writing. And to convince her to entrap herself in a marriage to him, St. Elmo tries to make a matrimonial enslavement seem better than an enslavement to literary ambition. He says:

> My darling, you are not strong enough to wrestle with the world; you will be trodden down by the masses in this conflict, upon which you enter so eagerly. Do you not know that "literati" means literally the branded? The lettered slave! Oh! if not for my sake, at least for your own, reconsider before the hot irons sear your brow; and hide it here, my love; keep it white and pure and unfurrowed here, in the arms that will never weary of sheltering and clasping you close and safe from the burning brand of fame. Literati! A bondage worse than Roman slavery! (*St. Elmo* 254)

Emphasizing Edna's weakness, St. Elmo depicts literary fame as chattel slavery, underscoring branding and positioning Edna as an educated slave. St. Elmo further depicts gathering fame as tarnishing her whiteness and purity. This speech, from Evans's perspective, emphasized St. Elmo's continued temptation of Edna and the novel's frequent yet indirect confrontations with

chattel slavery. St. Elmo keeps Edna from moral behavior, and while Edna's pursuit of fame is extreme, he does not suggest balance. Instead, he offers an opposite, but not better, extreme.

Edna continues in her pursuit of literary fame, feeling obligated to represent her country as a good woman. And for Edna, good women educate the public on good morals. While St. Elmo tries to ensnare her, Edna is characterized as self-possessed and able to advocate for herself. However, Edna's ambition and desire to establish herself compromise this self-possession. As the narrator says, the "darling scheme of authorship had seized upon Edna's mind with a tenacity that conquered and expelled all other purposes" (*St. Elmo* 122). Just as Edna has rigid expectations for moral behavior, Edna has a "high standard demand[ing] that all books should be to a certain extent didactic" (*St. Elmo* 122). Edna's devotion to literary fame is not entirely selfish, however. The narrator says that Edna's desire is to "to be an instrument of some good to her race," and that teaching others to live good lives could be best accomplished via popular writing (*St. Elmo* 175-6). Edna's fervid desire to write for others is constantly put at odds with the social pressure to marry.

Edna's attitude towards marriage seemingly contradicts her logical, rational attitude. While it may seem empowering for single women when Edna says "I am able to earn a home; I do not intend to marry for one," Edna then says that "[n]o woman should marry a man whose affection and society are not absolutely essential to her peace of mind and heart" (*St. Elmo* 136). Edna suggests that marriage should be absolutely essential to one's emotional welfare, rather than understanding marriage as a means for economic survival or political influence. Thus, the married couple would be emotionally dependent, forsaking the self-governance that Edna advocated as an unmarried woman.

As mentioned previously, Evans's narrative positions marriage as a form of enslavement for women, during which women are confined to the domestic sphere and unable to provide for themselves. Reinforcing the vernacular of slavery, St. Elmo says of Edna turning down a proposal, "[…] And she absolutely, positively declines to sell herself?" as marriage is posited as a sort of bondage (*St. Elmo* 147).

Mr. Hammond supports that Edna's ideal of marriage is a sort of slavery when he says: "If she ever marries, it will not be from gratitude or devotion, but because she learned to love, almost against her will, some strong, vigorous thinker, some man whose will and intellect masters hers, who compels her heart's homage, and without whose society she can not persuade herself to live" (*St. Elmo* 140). Mr. Hammond underscores just how far Edna's bifurcated thinking goes; she either must be entirely alone and independent or entirely mastered by a husband that cannot she extricate herself from if she tried. And Edna is so subjected to societal conventions of marriage that she most desires to be intellectually subordinated by her husband. As Mr. Hammond points out, "To rule the man she married would make her miserable, and she could only find happiness in being ruled by an intellect to which she looked up admiringly. I know that many very gifted women have married their inferiors, but Edna is peculiar, and in some respects totally unlike any other woman whose character I have carefully studied" […] (*St. Elmo* 141). When Mr. Hammond mentions these "gifted women," it seems that he is alluding to progressive inclinations of talented women writers—that these women writers would resist a traditional marriage in which a wife would submit to her husband. But Edna is peculiar in that she advocates for women's ability to financially support themselves but holds to a view of marriage that seemingly contradicts the foundational ideals of independence and self-governance.

Edna, like Augusta Jane Evans, is often contradictory, but Edna's bildungsroman is one that manifests in the female protagonist learning to be less rigid in her morals while trying to advocate for her own race—white women. While Edna is on this journey of self-discovery, she is brutally critical of herself, unforgiving of her contradictory feelings about St. Elmo. The narrator explains, "Hitherto she had fancied that she thoroughly understood and sternly governed her heart—that conscience and reason ruled it; but within the past hour it had suddenly risen in dangerous rebellion, thrown off its allegiance to all things else, and insolently proclaimed St. Elmo Murray its king" (*St. Elmo* 158-9). Even with an education thoroughly focused on logic and reason, Edna has to confront the realization that she cannot ignore her emotions. And while self-governance is a way for Evans to argue that women can fend for themselves, Evans also makes space for her protagonist to experience inner-turmoil and sympathize with a wide variety of her readers. Whether her women readers are mothers, single women, or married without children, Edna appeals to a wide audience, struggling to take firm stances that are not based in philosophy. Further, by saying that Edna's "heart [...] proclaimed St. Elmo Murray its king" (*St. Elm*o 159), the narrator refutes the interpretation that Edna is St. Elmo's victim and argues that, to some degree, that this is Edna's choice. How can Edna be both the agent of her fate and subordinated to a man by her own heart—especially while her mind resists?

Edna's disdain for her feelings, which she attributes to her heart and her body, derives from, as Nina Baym argues, Edna's distrust of sexual desire. Baym writes that Evans "taboos the woman's body because she associates it with physical weakness compared to men because she associates it with urgent sexual need. It is very clear that her protagonists, in resisting the heroes as long as they can, are mainly resisting themselves" ("Women's Novels" 348).

When Edna realizes she is in love with St. Elmo, she demonstrates the lack of trust she has in her own body, giving her an obstacle—her own embodied existence—to overcome. And overcoming this obstacle ultimately shows how Edna can rationalize her own desire for independence without advocating for the emancipation of slaves. The narrators says that, up until this point, Edna "shunned him from dislike; now she wished to avoid him because she began to feel that she loved him, and because she dreaded that his inquisitorial eyes would discover the contemptible, and, in her estimation, unwomanly weakness" (*St. Elmo* 160). Edna feels that St. Elmo can see on her visage the very traits she despises in herself. Also, as has been the case up until this point, Edna is very strict in her expectations of herself and of others. And she decidedly feels that it is unwomanly to be weak and lustful of a man who is morally beneath her.

Duelling as Enslavement to Masculine Social Norms

Duelling serves as a prominent motif in *St. Elmo*, and I argue Evans uses duelling to represent—in part—slavery and other unseemly practices in the South. Although St. Elmo was written after the Civil War, it is primarily set in the antebellum South, allowing Evans to critique and defend the Confederacy before the Civil War. Just as Barnell and Bell said showing "the sin of the duelling" was St. Elmo's purpose (269), the novel's protagonist Edna writes a short story for the same goal. Evans's narrator explains: "The principal aim of the little tale was to portray the horrors and sin of duelling, and she [Edna] had written it with great care; but well aware of the vast, powerful current of popular opinion that she was bravely striving to stem, and fully conscious that it would subject her to severe animadversion from those who defended the custom, she could not divest herself of apprehension lest the article should be rejected" (*St. Elmo* 273). In this passage, Edna's and Evans's shared goal of condemning duelling demonstrates Evans's understanding that how she has to rhetorically strategize in order to have her work

received positively. If duelling is discussed in metaphorical or sensational ways, the audience may be more receptive to the author's work.

In "Dueling Sentiments" (2001), Bradley Johnson argues "Evans uses the rhetoric of the sentimental mode to criticize the complicity of men in power structures, such as the formalized violence of the duel, which threatened the domestic sphere" (14). And while Johnson mentions race and duelling together, Johnson does not argue that slavery is a repressive power structure. I agree with Johnson that Evans "completely ignores the duel's racial implications, even as she attacks it as a threat to women" (17). However, I question why Evans almost completely ignores race altogether in the novel.

Edna seems to address duelling so directly in St. Elmo in order for slavery to be a glaring omission from the text, even more present from its absence as eager abolitionist readers search the novel for pro-slavery or anti-slavery sentiments. Furthermore, Evans does not have to claim any opinions about slavery in the novel that would alienate readers with oppositional stances. When Edna meets Clinton, St. Elmo's cousin, Edna says of the power structures supporting duelling: "I know, sir, that custom, public opinion, sanctions—at least tolerates that relic of barbarous ages—that blot upon Christian civilization which, under the name of 'duelling,' I recognize as a crime, a heinous crime, which I abhor and detest above all other crimes!" (*St. Elmo* 157). Edna's use of "barbarous" here emphasizes the purity and civility of Christian, white men and women without questioning slavery as a crime against humanity. Further, Edna does not challenge the belief that slavery is sanctioned by God. Instead of questioning slavery as a power structure rivaling duelling in terms of cruelty, Edna remains traumatized by her early exposure to duelling. It was Clinton that killed a man in front of young Edna in a duel, and Edna later learns that St. Elmo, too, has dueled.

Edna shows that she does have opinions not informed by the teachings of Mr. Hammond. But as I have suggested, Mr. Hammond also does not challenge or question her on the issue of slavery. Because St. Elmo killed Mr. Hammond's son Murray in a duel, which Edna and the reader only learn much later in the novel, St. Elmo asks Edna if Mr. Hammond had mentioned duelling to her. Edna is puzzled by the question and says, "I tell you solemnly that he has never even indirectly alluded to the question of 'duelling' since I have known him" (*St. Elmo* 158). This dialogue on educational omission lends itself to a line of questioning for readers. Why do none of these characters seem to directly discuss slavery? Mrs. Murray has servants that may as well be called slaves, and certainly there would be an abundance of slaves in antebellum Georgia among the aristocracy with whom Mrs. Murray associates.

When Evans most directly addresses Edna's position on race-related issues, Edna claims ignorance. This moment in the novel shows that Edna only concerns herself with issues of which she has experiential knowledge. Edna does not connect what Gordon Leigh calls "diversity of origin" to antebellum slavery. With all her education, Edna does not connect her early education to lived experience. In this scene, Edna's study partner Gordon Leigh says to Edna that he wants to "establish [his] position of diversity of origin," and he asks Edna her side on unity of origin (the idea that God created all men from a single origin point) versus the diversity of origin (the "declaration, that 'God originally created men red, white and black'") (*St. Elmo* 87). Edna begins by stating that she does not understand the nuances of the argument, and the "idea of my 'taking sides' on a subject which gray-haired savants have spent their laborious lives in striving to elucidate seems extremely ludicrous" (*St. Elmo* 88). Since Edna has, until this point, studied ancient philosophy with eagerness, it is not the antiquity of the argument that bothers her; it is the simplicity of the notion of taking sides. Further, Edna says, "I have an idea that neither you

nor I know anything about the matter; and the per saltum plan of 'taking sides' will only add the prop of prejudice to my ignorance" (*St. Elmo* 88). This statement raises several questions. Why are Edna and Gordon so ignorant of the subject of race? It is due to their lack of investment in the answer of whether all races originated from the same ancestry? Would slavery and their way of life then be compromised with this realization. This seems likely, and Edna and Gordon would benefit from avoiding discussing point of origin. Also, why is Edna concerned with seeming prejudiced about race when she is clearly prejudiced about duelling. She witnessed the act as a child and experienced mental and physical trauma from such early exposure to violence. Edna seems afraid to be called prejudiced for her willful ignorance about race and slavery.

While Edna is able to critically argue about the brutality of duelling without the help of Mr. Hammond informing her opinion, Edna notes that Mr. Hammond avoids "dogmatizing" on duelling, though she should also recognize that he avoids the subject with purpose. Edna notes, "If, with all his erudition, Mr. Hammond still abstains from dogmatizing on this subject, I can well afford to hold my crude opinions in abeyance" (*St. Elmo* 88). It is too painful for Mr. Hammond to discuss duelling because St. Elmo killed Mr. Hammond's son in a duel. Edna does not know this fact this early in the novel, but she does not consider in this argument that one's intellectual beliefs can be overshadowed by feeling. The conviction that something is wrong is not enough to convince someone to speak on a contentious issue. Perhaps Edna avoids learning about race because doing so does not benefit her, and she physically distances herself from witnesses the cruelties of slavery because doing so would commit her to compromising her way of life and the independence white women gain by taking advantage of slave labor.

As I mentioned earlier, I argue that St. Elmo understands himself to "honorable satisfaction" via duelling. Early in the novel, Mr. Hammond tells Edna that St. Elmo has

degraded from a noble man into a “repulsive,” “dissipated,” and “unprincipled” shell of his former self (*St. Elmo* 70-1) It is not until later in the novel that we know that St. Elmo changed after duelling and killing Murray Hammond, his best friend. St. Elmo’s love Agnes flirted with Murray and mocked St. Elmo, inspiring the duel.

As he recalls the duel to Edna, St. Elmo suggests that he re-enacts the anger he felt during the duel in his romantic pursuits. This trauma controls St. Elmo and furthers his dissipation. St. Elmo explains, “Of all that passed I only know that I cursed and insulted and maddened him till he accepted the pistol, which I thrust into his hand” (*St. Elmo* 235-6). St. Elmo belittled Murray, much like he did with young Edna. St. Elmo craves conflict, and it seems like his pursuit of Edna is a way of testing whether or not she will replicate Murray’s betrayal—or if she will prove that she is actually St. Elmo’s devoted yet equally-skilled lover. St. Elmo continues that he and Murray “fired simultaneously” and that the “ball entered Murray's heart, and he fell dead without a word” while St. Elmo was “severely wounded in the chest” and still has the bullet in his side (*St. Elmo* 235-6). Both men were wounded near the heart, signifying their love, but they were not equals who destroyed one another. Rather, St. Elmo survived, while Murray is portrayed as weaker and at fault for betraying his friend.

But this revenge plot dooms St. Elmo to repeat his offenses via his misogynistic demeanor and vocal distaste for women. St. Elmo repeats to Edna “the favorite proverb that often crossed his lips, ‘Bithus contra Bacchium!’” (*St. Elmo* 121-2). According to John Lempriere's 1831 *Bibliotheca Classica: Or, A Classical Dictionary*, the proverb “Bithus contra Bacchium” derives from the tale of two gladiators of “equal age and strength” who both succumbed to mutual wounds in battle (267). Therefore, the proverb is meant to express equality amongst combatants. St. Elmo looks for a romantic partner who, unlike Murray, can match St.

Elmo's intellect and metaphorically defeat him. But in order to defeat St. Elmo, the partner must cause their mutual destruction by enabling his dissipation or restore his nobility to benefit them both. As I continue to argue, St. Elmo and Edna are both posited as slaves to cultural expectations and modicums of behavior. St. Elmo is a slave to the pursuit of honorable satisfaction via duelling, and Edna is a slave to the pursuit of her vision of honorable womanhood—one in which she is able to provide for herself as an author without compromising any of her morals.

St. Elmo speaks of his past duelling as a sort of "bondange," alluding to his slavery to a masculine tradition. St. Elmo says, "You have read in the Scriptures of persons possessed of devils? A savage, mocking, tearing devil held me in bondage. I sold myself to my Mephistopheles on condition that my revenge might be complete. I hated the whole world with an intolerable, murderous hate; and to mock and make my race suffer was the only real pleasure I found" (*St. Elmo* 236). This language of possession, savagery, bondage, and selling himself only furthers the novel's treatment of slavery heretofore, with characters using the language of enslavement without directly addressing the topic. St. Elmo suggests that he is the victim of traditional and a set of ideals preceding him, also suggesting that he could represent the antebellum South itself, a victim to its traditions but ultimately able to be redeemed and forgiven by Edna, the orphan who represents those who feel lost and abandoned in the conflict between the North and the South. These people would, like Edna, feel confused about their love for the South, despite its reputation for cruelty via enslavement.

Edna only further establishes her conflicted attitude toward St. Elmo as a metaphor for Southern culture when Mrs. Murray visits her. Mrs. Murray tries to convince Edna that the sins of her son (and the American South) are in the past, and redemption is possible. Further, Mrs.

Murray focuses on the role of custom and how propriety is subjective. By doing so, she suggests that St. Elmo and Edna are both victims to their own senses of what constitutes propriety and what gives them satisfaction amongst their peers. As Mrs. Murray tells Edna: "The world sanctions duelling and flirting, and you have no right to set your extremely rigid notions of propriety above the verdict of modern society. Custom justifies many things which you seem to hold in utter abhorrence" (*St. Elmo* 356). Mrs. Murray's criticism foreshadows a later comment made about Edna. In response to Edna's public writings, a member of Edna's employer's club says , "I can trust my girls' characters to her training, for she is a true woman; and if she errs at all in any direction, it is the right one, only a little too rigidly followed" (St. Elmo 390-1). Mrs. Murray and this club member both underscore Edna's rigidity in her ideals to be a potential pitfall. And Edna's extremism in morality brings forth questions about why her extremism does not also extend to issues of race and chattel slavery. And this extreme view of moral behavior is quickly dismantled when Edna confesses her feelings about St. Elmo.

Mrs. Murray does not explicitly mention the sanctified practice of slavery in the antebellum South, again raising questions of where Evans stands on the subject; but the lack of the explicit mention of chattel slavery anywhere in the text, especially in this conversation about custom and abhorred practices, only increases the reader's awareness of the practice. The unspeakable thing just becomes more obvious. But Edna and St. Elmo are both positioned as enslaved but ultimately redeemable due to their whiteness and intrinsic purity that can be capable of independent thought.

Edna is quick to respond to Mrs. Murray by holding to her total repudiation of duelling and St. Elmo's other offenses, maintaining vagueness about which other customs she disavows; however, when Mrs. Murray responds to Edna by asking her if she loves St. Elmo, Edna's ability

to maintain such strong opinions crumbles—somewhat suggesting that Edna's morals are excessively rigid and do not match her actual thoughts toward St. Elmo. Edna says to Mrs. Murray, "Offences against God's law, which you consider pardonable—and which the world winks at and permits, and even defends—I regard as grievous sins. I believe that every man who kills another in a duel deserves the curse of Cain, and should be shunned as a murderer" St. Elmo 357). This ideal shuns any prospect of forgiveness and even calls to mind Evans's writing of the text after the Civil War. Would any soldier who killed another be considered a murderer? Perhaps this sentiment shows the extremism that Edna practices that, morally, may not be wrong but takes human fallibility for granted.

These thought patterns cause Edna distress since she cannot forgive herself for any personal shortcomings. As Edna continues, "My conscience assures me that a man who can deliberately seek to gain a woman's heart merely to gratify his vanity, or to wreak his hate by holding her up to scorn, or trifling with the love which he has won, is unprincipled, and should be ostracized by every true woman" (*St. Elmo* 357). By loving St. Elmo, Edna—in her own mind—cannot be a true woman if she fails to ostracize him. When then asked by Mrs. Murray, who ignores all these points in Edna's argument, Edna immediately says, "Do I love him? Oh! none but God can ever know how entirely my heart is his! I have struggled against his fascination—oh! indeed I have wrestled and prayed against it! But to-day—I do not deceive myself—I feel that I love him as I can never love any other human being" (*St. Elmo* 357-8). By saying that she cannot continue to deceive herself, Edna seems to quickly shirk the extreme views she just espoused. She admits her weakness and temptation to Mrs. Murray.

Because Edna quickly shifts tones with Mrs. Murray while staunchly defending her extreme view of duelling, a reader today could assume that Edna would do the same if she

believed that chattel slavery in the South was immoral. In this absence-as-presence, Evans's writing suggests that those with such extreme views of the South should become acquainted with the Southern landscape and see that customs like chattel slavery are sanctioned and, while immoral, are tempting and alluring like Southern gentility and hospitality. St. Elmo is likened to the South in terms of being, ultimately, redeemable from Edna's perspective, but also, St. Elmo is compared to a slave but shows that he, as a white man, can sink to such a low state of degradation—as a slave in bondage to his sins—and master/free himself. In this sense, Evans's narrative suggests that chattel slaves are responsible for their own freedom and that white citizens should not advocate for them. Just as Edna refuses to save St. Elmo, Evans suggests that slaves and/or Southerners should handle their own affairs and seek redemption for themselves. Edna continues this theme for the narrative as she struggles with a sort of personal enslavement to her pursuit of literary fame.

Unwomanly Weakness and Reforming St. Elmo

By refusing to marry St. Elmo, with all the temptation she experiences, Edna advocates for women's ability to make decisions for themselves and to regulate their own bodies. Edna, by telling herself "I know what my duty is, and I am strong enough to conquer, and if necessary to crush my foolish heart," she communicates an extreme sort of women's independence, especially in a time where women were considered weak and vulnerable to ailments caused by extreme emotions. But Edna continues her mission to conquer her desire for an immoral man: "Oh! I know you, Mr. Murray, and I can defy you. To-day, shortsighted as I have been, I look down on you. You are beneath me, and the time will come when I shall look back to this hour and wonder if I were temporarily bewitched or insane. Wake up! wake up! come to your senses, Edna Earl! Put an end to this sinful folly; blush for your unwomanly weakness!" (*St. Elmo* 206). In all these

"I" statements, Edna attempts to show a strong sense of identity, even while grappling with this inner conflict. And this self-possession relies on identity. To know oneself is to control oneself. And to say that she knows St. Elmo is to say that she, too, can possess him.

Edna later finds out that St. Elmo is not so immoral as she had initially thought, but he continues to try to control Edna and espouse misogynistic beliefs; while St. Elmo commits charitable acts when no one is looking, helping the blind child and her father dying of consumption who live nearby Edna is not satisfied with this realization. She says, "I wish I had never known the good that he has done. Oh, Edna Earl! has it come to this? How I despise—how I hate myself!" (*St. Elmo* 227). Even though St. Elmo has redeemable qualities, he is still not good enough for Edna, and Edna hates herself for desiring him. Also, she does not explicitly say so, it seems that she wants to achieve literary acclaim before she can submit herself to a domestic life—wherein she can write if the need arises. But she feels that she can only have one or the other: personal achievement or honorable living by being a domestic wife.

Edna rejects St. Elmo, traveling to the North to pursue a career in writing and to assume a job as a governess for two children, her favorite of which being the young Felix. And even in the North, Edna faces the language of slavery as a governess. When Felix demands Edna's attention, his mother says, "Really, Felix! who gave you a bill of sale to Miss Earl? She should consider herself exceedingly fortunate, as she is the first of all your teachers with whom you have not quarrelled most shamefully, even fought and scratched" (*St. Elmo* 280). Here, the "bill of slave" recalls the transactional, objectifying nature of chattel slavery. Further, as Felix's mother points out, teachers under her supervision were "fought and scratched"—underscoring how servants in the North faced physical harm like the slaves in the South. Even though the North would fight for abolition in the Civil War, it is true that servants were still mistreated.

Edna also has to confront the topic of slavery again when she talks with Sir Roger, a gentleman from England who asks Edna about women's education. Sir Roger says, "Even my brief sojourn in America has taught me the demoralizing tendency of the doctrine of 'equality of races and of sexes,' and you must admit, Miss Earl, that your countrywomen are growing dangerously learned" (*St. Elmo* 295). Because the word race could refer to the physical color of skin and/or one's gender, Edna is able to speak generally. And neither Sir Roger not Edna mention abolition or slavery explicitly. Instead, Edna answers by saying of her countrywomen that "it is rather the quality than the quantity of their learning that makes them troublesome" (*St. Elmo* 295). Just after, however, Edna mentions race briefly in a citation of John Ruskin's "Of Queen's Gardens," but it is still unclear whether or not she uses "race" and "sex" interchangeably. She says to Sir Roger: "One of your own noble seers"—Ruskin—"has most gracefully declared: 'A woman may always help her husband,' (or race,) 'by what she knows, however little; by what she half knows or misknows, she will only tease him'" (*St. Elmo* 295-6). By adding "(or race)" to this quotation, Edna could mean that white women can only speak on white causes, reinforcing her suggested belief that she is not responsible for understanding racial issues or advocating for abolition. Or, Edna could be saying that women should only help her husband or other women by firm, accurate knowledge. While Sir Roger mentions race and sex as separate, conjuring associations with slavery and suffrage, Edna speaks vaguely, only supporting the novel's resistance to addressing slavery.

While Edna refuses to discuss slavery from the perspective of chattel slaves, she continues to experience enslavement to her own need for literary fame. Edna is seen by a doctor, who tells the authoress: "Refrain from study, avoid all excitement, exercise moderately but regularly in the open air; and, above all things, do not tax your brain" (*St. Elmo* 326-7). This

labor, for Edna, is worth the benefit her novel will present for white women. As the narrator continues, Edna continues "tossing helplessly on her pillow; haunted by precious recollections of days gone by forever. Her name was known in the world of letters, her reputation was already enviable; extravagant expectations were entertained concerning her future; and to maintain her hold on public esteem, to climb higher, had become necessary for her happiness" (*St. Elmo* 329). Much like Edna believes that one's husband should be necessary for one's happiness, literary acclaim is necessary, in this moment, for her.

Edna's devotion to writing, in part, derives from her belief that "the intelligent, refined, modest Christian women of the United States were the real custodians of national purity" (*St. Elmo* 349). But to be more specific, it seems that Edna sees married women as the custodians of national purity. Edna addresses her novel *SHINING THORNS ON THE HEARTH* to the "sole agents who could successfully arrest the tide of demoralization breaking over the land": the "wives, mothers, and daughters of America" Importantly, the author notes that Edna writes to these women with envy: "Jealously she contended for every woman's right which God and nature had decreed the sex" (*St. Elmo* 349). Essentially, with this key detail of jealousy foregrounding Edna's attitude toward these women, as a single authoress, Edna views herself as possessing less influence than these women. These daughters still have potential to marry and have children, while the mothers and wives are already set to influence their children and husbands. But the national "purity"—i.e. whiteness and refinement—derive from the institution of marriage and the legitimate children that derive from it. Thereby, Edna continues to subordinate slaves and their rights, focusing on white supremacy and the Confederacy that benefits from the system of slave labor.

After Edna writes her novel supporting white women's role in purifying the nation, many characters emphasize Edna's whiteness. When St. Elmo sees Edna for the first time after she achieves literary fame, the narrator explains St. Elmo's eyes "rested on the beautiful white face of the woman "rested on the beautiful white face of the woman he loved so well, whose calm, holy eyes shone like those of an angel, as they looked sadly down at his" (*St. Elmo* 381). The narrator centers on Edna's whiteness, underscoring physical purity as insight into her internal values. Similarly, after Edna's novel goes through "ten editions, and [her] praises are chanted" across America (*St. Elmo* 414), St. Elmo calls Edna a "queen"—Edna's term for a pure woman capable of influencing the political landscape through her male counterparts. Again, associating whiteness—through her soft, unlaboring hand—with "purity" and governmental power, St. Elmo says to Agnes,

> The only queen it has known since that awful night twenty-three years ago, when my faith, hope, charity were all strangled in an instant by the velvet hand I had kissed in my doting fondness—the only queen my heart has acknowledged since then, is one who, in her purity soars like an angel above you and me, and her dear name is—Edna Earl. (*St. Elmo* 402-3)

Agnes' hand is described as "velvet"—soft and unlabored, which somewhat brings to mind Evans's critique of the hand of one who owns slaves. However, Edna is described as one whose "purity"—whiteness—reigns over both St. Elmo and Agnes.

After Edna can achieve a sort of purity by writing a resource for American mothers, wives, and daughters, she achieves true "honorable satisfaction"—being able to abandon a personal grievance or entrapment—her desire for fame. While "honorable satisfaction" is posited as dueling early in the novel, duelling satisfies none of the male characters. But satisfaction in St. Elmo is helping one's own race/gender and avoiding institutions with which one has only indirect knowledge or half-knowledge. However, this satisfaction of her literary pursuits finds

Edna—somehow—seeking another form of womanly fulfillment. The narrator points out Edna's inner conflict:

> What was the praise and admiration of all the world in comparison with the loving light in that child's eyes, and the tender pressure of his lips? The woman's ambition had long been fully satisfied, and even exacting conscience, jealously guarding its shrine, saw daily sacrifices laid thereon, and smiled approvingly upon her; but the woman's hungry heart cried out, and fought fiercely, famine-goaded, for its last vanishing morsel of human love and sympathy (*St. Elmo* 409-10).

Edna's self-denial and true feelings are revealed, during which her heart admits that literary success and providing for others is not satisfying to her. Independence does not give her the satisfaction she wants. Her heart cries out for St. Elmo—against Edna's will.

Edna returns to St. Elmo, who is now, as he proclaims, "purified" by the "blood of Christ": "Edna, have you a right to refuse me forgiveness, when the blood of Christ has purified me from the guilt of other years?" (*St. Elmo* 421) Both oriented as purified and thereby whitened—freed from their enslavements—one could interpret this as the only way that St. Elmo and Edna could be satisfied. They assimilate into pure, white society by advocating for their own race/sex and denying slavery's presence, forcing them to labor for their reformation.

Edna agrees to marry St. Elmo at last, which I see as a way for St. Elmo and Edna to free themselves from their bondages to past guilt (for St. Elmo) and Edna (to her literary career). While Elizabeth Fekete Trubey agrees with my assessment that Edna is characterized as "a slave who enlists our sympathy" throughout the novel, Trubey argues that Edna "seeks to remain enslaved, with freedom gained through a stifling and silencing union" to St. Elmo (Trubey 143). Considering how Edna describes her desire to publish and help other women, it seems that Edna does not consider herself silenced by this union; rather it opens an opportunity for Edna to shape the socio-political landscape of America through the reformed voice of St. Elmo. She can have her fame seemingly contained to single women while also marrying a man whom she desires; all

the while, St. Elmo does not require Edna to compromise her morals at the end by marrying a man who is not purified. As St. Elmo says to Edna:

> To-day I snap the fetters of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written! No more study, no more toil, no more anxiety, no more heartaches! And that dear public you love so well, must even help itself, and whistle for a new pet. You belong solely to me now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition. Come, the fresh air will revive you. (*St. Elmo* 424)

As much as I resent St. Elmo telling Edna "You belong solely to me now," he does raise the important point that, as an author, Edna belonged to the public. Her body and mind were a resource for the public good. Writing made Edna unwell in a variety of ways, but it was the only manner for her voice to be taken seriously without being a married woman or a mother. Furthermore, although St. Elmo positions himself as Edna's master during his proposal, Edna can use the bodies, voices, and privileges of both her husband and future children. Just as the Southern matron can order slaves around the plantation, the Southern wife and mother can direct the rhetorical and political influence of her family.

While I seek to complicate a reading of Edna as a silenced victim by the novel's conclusion, Trubey offers a useful reading of how Evans does not explicitly commit to comparing Edna to the Confederate South; but the reading is possible and even likely in portions of the novel:

> Yet in a move that speaks to the very problem of analogizing wives and slaves, Evans also represents Edna as the white woman who, like the figure of the belle, embodies the disempowered slave-owning South, suffering the burden of acts of emancipation and union she did not fully seek or desire. As St. Elmo frees her, Edna is silenced—her masochistic forays into literature ended, her voice denied. And as Reconstruction-era hindsight would indicate, her humiliating defeat is imminent. She is married to her conqueror in this final act of affection and masochism. Like the defeated Confederacy, she must once more be subject to his authority. (Trubey 143)

Trubey certainly offers a convincing interpretation as to why Evans's comparison of wives and slaves affects how we understand Edna as a "defeated Confederacy" (Trubey 143). But another possible interpretation of Edna's union to St. Elmo is that Edna represents, in the end, the slave who attempts to ascend social, cultural, financial, and intellectual expectation.

St. Elmo and Edna, unlike the chattel slave, are raised with a level of privilege guaranteed by their birth. St. Elmo is born wealthy and white, and Edna is a white woman born into a family that encourages her to educate herself and think independently. Further, Edna's precocious attitude and whiteness likely secure her home at La Bocage with Mrs. Murray and St. Elmo. Thus, Evans's comparisons between marriage, masculine traditions, and slavery underscore that St. Elmo and Edna are able to overcome their enslavements because they are white. And their enslavements are a cause for sympathy in the reader, which Evans can use to argue for sympathetic, intelligent Southerners. This sympathy is also made possible because Evans erases chattel slavery from the minds of her protagonists. St. Elmo and Edna avoid the topic of slavery, and do not observe servants as what they are: real victims to slavery incomparable to the metaphorical slavery St. Elmo and Edna claim to experience.

In *St. Elmo*, Evans underscores the possibility for women to pursue a literary career and to marry happily. But Edna and St. Elmo must free themselves from their own personal enslavements via embodied self-realization and self-regulation. Edna must compromise her rigid understanding of morality and accept the possibility for St. Elmo to redeem himself. Further, Edna pursues and realizes her desire for literary fame before eventually marrying St. Elmo. St. Elmo, by comparison, independently pursues redemption without the help of Edna—reinforcing the textual theme that women should not be held responsible for the reformation of their husbands. While Edna's character development challenges contemporary understandings of

women's domestic roles, Edna is portrayed as a unique woman whose education is largely governed by male philosophers and masculine instruction. Further, the latter end of Evans's novel continues to allude to chattel slavery without directly addressing its influence on the Southern landscape.

This reading of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson's *St. Elmo* offers a new perspective on the intersections of white women's agency, slavery, and women's rights efforts after the Civil War. My hope is that this interpretation continues to complicate how Southern understood their obligations to their fellow citizens. just because a woman believes in women's independence does not mean that she intrinsically is motivated to liberate the working classes and the oppressed peoples who enable her success.

Furthermore, this chapter seeks to challenge ongoing assessment of women's contributions to social discourse—especially writings that assess whether an author espoused protofeminist beliefs. Drew Gilpin Faust confidently argues, "Augusta Jane Evans regarded herself as anything but a feminist," as if the identification of "feminist" existed among Evans's contemporaries. Moreover, "feminism" is not a singular or stable movement filled with homogenous practitioners. Faust follows this assessment by saying that if Evans's *Macaria* "raised questions and destabilized certainties about the nature of female and male identity, it fell short of providing answers or resolving the conflicts it provoked" (177). This chapter has explored the variety of conflicts and contradictions in Evans's writing. To say that the writing does not challenge social norms because it doesn't oversimplify these complex dynamics of power, race, gender, class, and other markers of identity seeks to diminish most contributions to social discourse in nineteenth-century American discourse is often conflicted—and necessarily so. Much like Faust, Jennifer Gross writes of Evans' rendering of single women in *Macaria*,

ultimately concluding, “Though Evans was not a feminist visionary, she was a social visionary. Recognizing the plight the war had created for countless Southern women, she suggested a solution — an expansion of the definition of true womanhood to allow those women who could never marry to find usefulness and social acceptance in their lives as manless women” (Gross 48). While I agree with Gross that Evans was mostly traditional in her views and often worked to maintain the status quo in the antebellum and postbellum South, to say that Evans was “not a feminist visionary” removes white feminism’s role in maintaining racist and classist power structures. Evans practiced an iteration of feminism that served white women’s interests; and while this may not be the ideal of fourth wave, intersectional feminism, scholars should not deny the racist foundations of early feminist efforts to promote white women’s education and independence.

CHAPTER IV: SENTIMENTAL RHETORIC AND THE SOUTHERN BODY IN FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER'S *IOLA LEROY*

The *fin de siècle* of nineteenth-century American history is known for its calls for equal rights for women and people of color, as well as its emphasis on bodily autonomy and pleasure. And many scholars have noted that these social and political movements led to the depopularization of the domestic novel—also referred to as the sentimental novel. Ann Douglas' *Feminization of American Culture*, Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction*, and many other foundational feminist texts argue that sentimental writing dwindled in popularity during and after the Reconstruction era. But sentimental rhetoric embedded in fiction was especially useful for some authors throughout the long nineteenth-century and into the twentieth century.

This chapter explores Frances E.W. Harper's treatment of self-denial and embodiment through sentimental rhetoric. Through her use of sentimental rhetoric in *Iola Leroy* (1892), Harper challenges overgeneralized commentaries of nineteenth-century women's writing. Further, her writing emphasizes the exclusion of Black women authors in discussions of Southern women writers and the myriad of rhetorical strategies they used to discuss temptation, morality, injustice, and reform. Harper illuminates the rhetorical effectiveness of sentimental rhetoric for African American women writers in a rhetorical space long exclusive to white women. Further, Harper uses the novel as a space for activists to utilize characters with varied markers of race, gender, and class. Through these characters, authors can utilize the same speeches in the bodies of characters unlike themselves.

Harper was born free in Baltimore, Maryland on September 25, 1825. Maryland was then a slave state. While Harper did face many prejudices throughout her life as a light-skinned Black

woman, she was exceptionally educated. Harper was raised by her uncle, the respected Reverend William Watkins who assisted in founding the Mental and Moral Improved Society. As Francis Smith Foster writes, it is likely her uncle encouraged Harper's commitment to abolitionism, social welfare, and education (*A Brighter Coming Day* 7). Delivering her first presentation supporting abolition at the age of 28, Harper spent her life delivering speeches to a wide variety of audiences. Harper traveled across the United States and even abroad to deliver her powerful messages in person. Harper—along with many others—advocated for women's suffrage, temperance, and equal rights for all.

Although Harper remained free throughout her life, she sought out first-hand accounts from enslaved persons, fugitives from slavery, and those who managed to escape from slavery. In 1854, the year Harper delivered her first lecture in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Harper was living at an Underground Railroad Station in Philadelphia (Mitchell "Introduction" 15). While Harper was likely best known for being a successful orator and activist, she was also a celebrated writer. Further, Watkins included many of the same sentiments in her poetry and prose as she did in her speeches, believing that advocacy in fiction would lead to real-world political influence. Addressing the Brooklyn Literary Society on November 15, 1892, Harper begins her speech "Enlightened Motherhood" by pointing out that it has been "nearly thirty years since an emancipated people stood on the threshold of a new era, facing an uncertain future" ("Enlightened Motherhood"). Harper points out the variety of expectations of Black Americans despite being denied education in these areas by slaveholders. She underscores the work to be done to morally instruct "a legally unmarried race" how "sacredness of the marriage relations." And Harper emphasizes the necessity of teaching a "homeless race" to locate "homes of peaceful security" and cultivate "around their firesides the strongest batteries against sins that degrade and

the race vices that demoralize" ("Enlightened Motherhood"). Adapting a language of domestic motherhood popularized by authors like Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harper locates the home as a site for moral good and instruction against degradation.[5]

Prior to her first public speaking engagement in 1854, Harper published her poetry collection *Forest Leaves* (c.1846). And even as she became a successful lecturer, Harper would continue to publish poetry and prose. In his introduction to *Iola Leroy,* William Still writes*:* "I know of no other women, white or colored, anywhere who has come so intimately in contact with the colored people in the South as Mrs. Harper" (61). In addition to her direct accounts of her travels in the South, in 1872, Harper published *Sketches of Southern Life*—a collection of poems largely focused on temperance. Temperance was commonplace in sentimental literature and essential for authors interested in moral reform. Carole Lynn Stewart writes that "Indeed, temperance was a larger societal problem and, like slavery, it would not be solved by individual moral responsibility alone. A public civil society, one committed to freedom and justice, was needed to shape an individual sense of responsibility in the first place" (Stewart 113). Carol Mattingly points out that "anxieties about alcohol's use and abuse, and consensus about its detrimental ramifications for women, were so pervasive that scarcely a popular nineteenth-century woman's novel exists that does not refer to intemperance, attesting to its inherent dangers" ("Well-Tempered Women" 143). In the 1886 edition of *Sketches of Southern Life*, Harper includes the story "Shalmanezer, Prince of Cosman," which demonstrates that temperance was not just a desire of drinking—but a failure to deny oneself of any temptation.

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[5] See Beecher's 1869 domestic manual The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes.

Upon the death of his father, Shalmanezer must decide how to spend his inheritance, and the prince is approached by Desire and his companions Pleasure, Wealth, and Fame. Further, Shalmanezer meets the kind and plainly-dressed woman Peace, who is followed by a young man named Self-Denial—who possesses the "aspect of one who had passed through suffering unto Peace" (36). Harper's narrator describes Pleasure as a beautiful woman who enchants Shalmanezer with her charm and a "richly wrought chalice in which sparkled and effervesced a ruby-colored liquid" (35): wine. Peace warns Shalmanezer not to drink from Pleasure's cup. Although Shalmanezer does not literally drink the liquid to our knowledge, he defiantly chooses to travel with Pleasure and her companions while rejecting Peace and Self-Denial. This story is an allegory for temperance, and the symbol of the drink can stand for wine or other temptations. But after experiencing the delightful but short-lived joys of Pleasure, Shalmanezer leaves Pleasure for Wealth.

Wealth's domain is a critique of Southern exploitation of slaves—with slaveowners living in luxury and slaves suffering. Shalmanezer sadly gazes upon "colossal piles of brick and mortar"—"castles of industry" populated by "sad-looking women," "weary-looking men" and "young children [...] touched with premature decay" (40). Wealth lives in a beautiful, luxurious home filled with pampered children, but the tortured servants in Wealth's factories make such luxury possible.

While the collection is Sketches of Southern Life, this depiction of industrial exploitation of labor recalls Northern factories and exploitation of servants above the Mason-Dixon line. After witnessing the horrors of Wealth, Shalmanezer leaves Wealth but still refuses to consider leaving Pleasure's companions altogether. This is because joining Peace would mean aligning himself with Self-Denial. As Shalmanezer says, "I do wish Peace would come without her

unwelcome companion—Self-Denial I do utterly and bitterly hate" (43). It is not that Shalmanezer does not want to accompany peace, but it is the necessity of denying himself of pleasures by joining Self-Denial that deters the protagonist.

When Shalmanezer falls ill trying to reach Fame, the physician overseeing Shalmanezer says that "some one must take the warm healthy blood from his veins and inject it into Shalmanezer's veins before he can be restored to health" (45). Desire, Pleasure, Wealth, and Fame selfishly refuse to give their blood to restore Shalmanezer. However, Self-Denial offers his blood to the dying man. As the narrator says, Shalmanezer's "heart did cleave unto Self--Denial. He had won [Shalmanezer's] heart by his lofty sacrifice" (*Sketches of Southern Lif*e 46). Shalmanezer realizes that he can only join peace with Self-Denial, and he realizes that strength and happiness are best gained through Self-Denial. This functions as an allegory for how Black Americans can strengthen themselves by avoiding temptation and self-governing in the face of bodily desires.

Harper's advocacy for temperance speaks to her belief that strength of the body and of her race comes from strength of character. Such a belief is abundant in—but is certainly not limited to—her *Sketches of Southern Life* and her 1892 novel *Iola Leroy*. Sanborn writes that, in her depiction of the conversazione in *Iola Leroy*, Harper argues that white people have "depleted their rallying power" by weakening their bodies through "alcohol," "masturbation," and "the institution of slavery" (699). I agree with Sanborn that Harper writes Black characters as typically superior in mental and physical fortitude compared to white characters. But this fortitude derives from resisting temptation and practicing self-denial. In this novel, white characters almost personify temptation. And Iola rejects whiteness just as she rejects temptation.

But interestingly, the Black women characters in *Iola Leroy* advocate for temperance while outwardly presenting themselves as easily rejecting temptations.

Harper's *Iola Leroy* was influential among her contemporaries, and yet Harper and her novel are underrepresented on syllabi and in anthologies—unless you are looking in collections focusing on African American literature. Elizabeth Ammons writes that *Iola Leroy* "made a significant mark in its own day, going into second and third editions, and it never fell into oblivion; it consistently shows up in literary histories of African American writing (even if only to be disparaged)" (Ammons 21). According to Hazel Carby, *Iola Leroy* was considered Harper's "least successful project" by her contemporary literary critics "on the grounds of a lack of artistic merit" (*Carby* 63).

However, Eric Gardner argues that, due to "modernist aesthetic sensibilities, as well as gender bias and the 'New Negro' impulse to avoid considering slavery, many assessments of Harper in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century found only historical or ancestral value" (Gardner 593). Further, academia is still rife with institutionalized racism. It comes as little surprise, unfortunately, that the American literature canon still favors works that reinforce images of Black authors and Black characters as slaves. Moreover, *Iola Leroy* challenges the act of passing, refuting the idea that to pass as white is ideal and uncomplicated. As Koritha Mitchell points out, the "plantation tradition" of nineteenth-century US literature "demonstrated that impressively large audiences were drawn to works with black characters, but did those characters resemble actual black people?" (Mitchell 28). The works that are taught again and again in American classrooms, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, reinforce stereotypes of Black characters—even if these works were written by abolitionists: "*Iola Leroy* highlights black characters' dignity, intelligence (even in the midst of illiteracy), and investment in family. In doing so, it offers

portrayals of black Americans that differ drastically from the literary depictions that became national bestsellers" (Mitchell 28). While *Iola Leroy* remains relatively popular in academic contexts, is it still merely appreciated for its "historical or ancestral" value as Gardner contends it was in the early twentieth century? I argue that Harper's *Iola Leroy*—embedded in her equally valuable oratory, prosaic, and poetic works—is an invaluable exploration of narrative sentimental rhetoric and provides a unique rejection of Black embodiment as intrinsically desirous. This aspect of *Iola Leroy* aligns with Harper's commitment to temperance and should be studied further as a rejection of whiteness-as-desire and blackness-as-self-government.

Furthermore, Harper has been underestimated in terms of not thinking strategically about her fictional work, instead drawing solely from her own life experience. According to Donald Yacovone, "To make her relevant to contemporary readers, historians and literary critics have downplayed the sentimental element of Harper's writings and asserted that her work grew out of her life experience, displaying little or no difference between the written and spoken word" (Yacovone 99). This assumption that the novel only draws from Harper's is difficult to support because Harper draws from a variety of sources and experiences to shape her novelistic and oratory works.

In this chapter, I explore how Frances E.W. Harper utilizes the genre conventions of sentimental rhetoric and domestic fiction—as well as the genre of the novel—to make the arguments of her oratory speeches in a way that preserves her body from certain racist scrutiny. I explore the advantages of disseminating the contents of her speeches into her fiction, as well as how embodiment in the novel interacts with Harper's use of sentimental rhetoric. Then, I discuss Iola's relationship to the male gaze as it relates to the intrinsic disembodiment that happens in fiction. I then discuss how Harper reconciles the gendered and racial implications of embodied

life in nineteenth-century America. I then discuss the rhetoric of temperance that is used throughout the novel. This leads into Harper's emphasis on themes of temptation and defenseless womanhood—themes that function through the novel genre in ways that they cannot in Harper's speeches.

Further, scholars today still all too easily dismiss the work of Southern writers and Black writers that did not adhere to the conventions of slave narratives. Harper was born free in Maryland, a slave state at the time. Exploring Harper's treatment of her relation to the South in her letters, Sherita L. Johnson argues that Harper should be acknowledged as a Southerner; doing so allows for a more nuanced understanding of how Black subjects shaped what constituted the marker of "Southern." Johnson writes that "Harper's middle class background and freeborn status have caused many scholars to mislabel her as a Northerner. To them, she appears to be an indifferent though empathetic 'outsider' merely observing the conditions of southern black life" (Johnson 72). Instead, what is at stake in seeing Harper as a Southerner is enriching our understanding of Southern literature to include the free Black and enslaved Black populations that participated in and shaped Southern culture. To deny Black Southerners that identity is to continue to deny their subjectivity and agency.

Sentimental Rhetoric in the Gilded Age

In this chapter, I argue that Harper uses sentimental rhetoric—emphasizing the male gaze—in a manner that allows her to garner sympathy from readers without objectifying enslaved and free African American bodies. She doesn't have to depict brutal bodily violence. Further, this chapter and the chapter that follows argue that Frances E.W. Harper and Grace King wrote using many strategies of sentimental literature, but "sentimental literature" is a divisive phrase for many scholars with some choosing instead to use terms like "women's fiction" or

"domestic fiction" instead. All of these terms carry different benefits and drawbacks, but several characteristics overlap in these genres. Joanne Dobson writes that scholars can identify sentimental literature by its "emphasis on accessible language, a clear prose style, and familiar lyric and narrative patterns "with as wide an audience as possible" (Dobson 268). Accessibility is relative to the author's audience and subjective and works like *St. Elmo* certainly challenge the idea that sentimental novels universally value a "clear prose style." However, Dobson notes many convincing patterns apparent among what many consider to be domestic fiction, sentimental fiction, and/or women's fiction (Dobson 268).

Ultimately, I choose to use call the writing in these genres the use of sentimental rhetoric in fiction. I do so to underscore that the authors that chose to use these modes of communication did not do so without understanding that these were choices that they made to influence others politically and socially. As Faye Halpern writes, "We should see sentimentality as less a *what* than a *how*: how does a sentimental text direct its audience to read?" (Halpern xv). Sentimental rhetoric is meant to call the audience to action based on feeling. And these novels of sentimentality served as calls to action, as a way for women to communicate the world that they wanted to live in; furthermore, these women could articulate the consequences of the political action they wanted enacted.

Many scholars argue that women stopped authoring domestic fiction/ sentimental fiction around the 1860s—if we follow Nina Baym's definition of domestic fiction as works written *by* women and *for* women. Baym argues that woman's fiction peaked in the 1850s because the "motives of self-development and social reform could run together so smoothly"—whereas women writers focused on the artistry of writing and critiqued the idealism of domestic literature toward the end of the century (*Woman's Fiction* 49). While Baym's work regarding woman's

fiction has critically illuminated the labor of women's writing in the nineteenth century, I find it difficult to agree that women stopped using sentimental rhetoric to enact social change; and sentimental rhetoric can be accomplished artistically.

Seemingly in support of Baym's argument that sentimental fiction became trite in the 1870s, Claudia Stokes writes that Harper's contemporary Mary Baker Eddy used sentimental rhetoric in the early- to mid-nineteenth century to reinforce her authority as a religious speaker in the mid-nineteenth century. However, Strokes notes that sentimentalism's usefulness dwindled by the end of the nineteenth century: "By the time [Eddy] reached the apex of her celebrity and power in the 1890s, the dutiful, compliant, sentimental female prototype of the mid-century had given way to the New Woman of the late century, whose independence, mobility, and self-reliance made the sentimental ideal seem stodgy and saccharine by comparison" (Stokes 184). Stokes' analysis is appropriate for some of the late nineteenth-century's readership, but I argue that domestic, women's, and sentimental fiction—however scholars decide to label it—thrived past the end of the nineteenth-century. And it continued even in rhetorical situations where the authors, even the more conservative, argued for women's rights and independence.

Iola Leroy contains the characteristics of woman's fiction as defined by Nina Baym in *Woman's Fiction*. Baym says that, typically, in woman's fiction, families are broken and unhappy while domestic tasks bore women characters (*Woman's Fiction* 26-7). In *Iola Leroy,* Iola's father Eugene Leroy, after he dies of yellow fever, is betrayed by his cousin Alfred Lorraine, who finds a loophole in his marriage to Iola's mother Marie. Then, Lorraine has Maria, Iola and Iola's brother Harry sent into slavery. This is the most egregious violation of family loyalty that simultaneously reveals the false promise of safety via marriage. Also, prior to

Leroy's death, his marriage to Marie is somewhat happy, following the sentimental characteristic of marriage promising enough but not excessive happiness.

Baym also writes that the heroine of the woman's novel must learn to provide for herself and often seeks a vocation like teaching (*Woman's Fiction* 39). In *Iola Leroy*, Iola seeks to earn her own living while working in a clothing store alongside white women. As Iola says to her Uncle Robert: "I have a theory that every woman ought to know how to earn her own living. I believe that a great amount of sin and misery springs from the weakness and inefficiency of women" (*Iola Leroy* 205). Iola Leroy serves as a way for Harper to participate in the Cult of Domesticity through Iola, since Iola comments on black women's denial from domestic acceptability and True Womanhood as it was defined in the nineteenth century. As the narrator describes, Iola "entered upon her duties, and proved quite acceptable as a saleswoman," reassuring readers that Black women can indeed be responsible and be acceptable to those watching them (*Iola Leroy* 207). And this is proven all too difficult for many of the white women in the novel.

Adding to the characteristics of the woman's novel, Baym says that even though "almost all the heroines do eventually marry, the stories assert that marriage cannot and should not be the goal toward which women direct themselves" (*Woman's Fiction* 39). By the conclusion of Harper's novel, Iola rejects Dr. Gresham's proposal and accepts Dr. Latimer's.

While Tompkins and Baym deserve credit for the invaluable work they have done to define and give needed attention to domestic/sentimental/woman's novels, destabilizing the rigid temporal boundaries defining the genre allows scholars to more accurately understand women authors' use of sentimental rhetoric to enact social change in literature. Baym writes that the "liberal women who began their writing careers after the Civil War found the redemptive

possibilities of enlightened domesticity to be no longer credible" (*Woman's Fiction* 50). However, Harper benefits from using characteristics of the domestic novel genre and appealing to her audience with sentimental rhetoric because doing so demonstrates ways that Black women of a variety of stations can improve the home and thus improve American society and culture. As Johnnie Stover writes, "the language that nineteenth-century African American women autobiographers use (and ultimately subvert) is necessarily the language of the dominant white culture, the only site of mutual interaction available to them" (Stover 138). In order to appeal to a white audience, African American women writers utilized the proper language as it was defined by that very same white audience.

What Baym saw as the death of domestic fiction for white women writers was not necessarily true for black women writers. White, middle-aged, able-bodied, middle-class women certainly may have found the tropes of the mid-century Cult of Domesticity trite, limiting, and outdated. However, this small group of women did not represent the women who still sought the refuge of the home and strove for the comfort that the Cult of Domesticity provided. And women that did not fit into the privileged class of women described above, they sought to expand, refine, and trouble the Cult of Domesticity, still trying to make homes for themselves when they felt they were denied from the homes of others. As Carla Peterson points out, "in appropriating novelizing techniques African-American writers were simply adapting themselves to the economy of the dominant culture in which the novel was fast becoming one of the most popular and lucrative forms of writing in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Peterson 149).

I argue that for Harper, sentimental rhetoric was necessary to maintain authority in her fiction. The sentimental style is not just a white woman's writing style, and such a claim would deny Harper her acumen as a rhetorician and as an author. And as Halpern writes,

"Sentimentality cultivates a style that aspires not to be recognized as one. It wants no textual obstacle to come between itself and the reader's experience of it" (Halpern 72). Sentimentality certainly continued after the1860s. Sentimentality underscores connection to the reader and understanding the rhetorical tools necessary to best make that connection. Sentimental rhetoric, I would argue, is about understanding the wide variety of readers and their concerns.

To maintain mastery of the sentimental genre and distance herself from her own body became a useful rhetorical tool alongside her work giving speeches. Because her body was marked for many as that belonging to a non-subject, many of the arguments she was making about self-regulation would be undercut merely by her being in her body and doing such speaking. Beginning my discussion of Harper's treatment of embodied subjectivity and self-regulation with sentimental rhetoric, I want to start by discussing the way that Harper frames *Iola Leroy*, separating it from the oral speeches Harper delivered throughout the North and South before, during, and after the Civil War. As I argue, narrative fiction—with the use of sentimental rhetoric—allows Harper to circumvent many of the obstacles her body presented while physically delivering her speeches to the public. Furthermore, Harper uses fiction to perform in bodies a like and unlike her own, allowing for a variety of persuasive possibilities and the trustworthiness that the sentimental form allowed white women to practice decades prior.

The nineteenth-century Cult of Domesticity that shaped domestic, sentimental, and woman's novels was an institutional, cultural standard for white women—although enslaved women were forced to do much of the domestic labor. As Laura Smith points out, "Black, Native, immigrant, and non-Anglo-Saxon Protestant women, no matter their class, were, as a matter of course, omitted from dominant mid-19th-century print representations of domesticity" (Smith 344). Through her speeches and in *Iola Leroy*, Harper articulates a more expansive

imagining of domestic labor or a form of the Cult of Domesticity. As one example, in "Enlightened Motherhood", Harper writes: "Marriage between two youthful and loving hearts means the laying the foundation stones of a new home, and the woman who helps erect that home should be careful not to build it above the reeling brain of a drunkard or the weakened fibre of a debauchee" ("Enlightened Motherhood"). In both her speeches and the novel, we can locate a large emphasis on the role of the home, reinforcing the importance of Black women's entrance into the Cult of Domesticity in order to gain a larger national ethos. As Iola says to Dr. Latimer in Iola Leroy: "if we would have the prisons empty we must make the homes more attractive" (*Iola Leroy* 254). Just by speaking from her own position as a Black orator and author, Harper tries to embody the Cult of Domesticity in order to appeal to as many readers as possible. But fiction provides a unique space to educate the audience. Harper's Iola Leroy stages her own conference populated only by characters of color, showing what such an educational space might look like.

Harper's *Iola Leroy* is told in the third person, with the novel's action beginning toward the Civil War's conclusion in C-, North Carolina. We meet plantation servants Robert Johnson, Thomas Anderson, Aunt Linda, Uncle Daniel, and Aunt Katie. When Union soldiers arrive, Robert, and Tom quickly enlist with the Union army with the hope to attain their freedom. Harper frames the novel in such a way that we do not meet Iola—the titular character—until Chapter V: "The Release of Iola Leroy." Prior to Iola's introduction, the novel is very male-centered, focusing on Robert, Tom, and their soldier companions Tom tells Roberts: "dere's a mighty putty young gal dere at Marse Tom's. I wish I could git her away. Dey tells me dey's been sellin' her all ober de kentry; but dat she's a reg'lar spitfire; dey can't lead nor dribe her." This is the reader's first glimpse at Iola, told from Tom's admiring perspective.

Tom describes her as a “spitfire” able to resist her master and adds, “I think she’s jis’ dying to go. Dey say dey can’t do nuffin wid her. Marse Tom's got his match dis time, and I'se glad ob it. I jis’ glories in her spunk.” “How did she come there?” “Oh, Marse bought her ob de trader to keep house for him. But ef you seed dem putty white han’s ob hern you'd never tink she kept her own house, let 'lone anybody else’s” (*Iola Leroy* 357-362). Tom first emphasizes Iola’s fighting personality and resistance toward authority, and when her white, beautiful visage comes into play it is secondary to this characterization as a strong, awesome-inspiring heroine. Tom continues to Robert: “My! but she’s putty. Beautiful long hair comes way down her back; putty blue eyes, an' jis' ez white ez anybody's in dis place. I’d jis’ wish you could see her yoresef. I heerd Marse Tom talkin' 'bout her las' night to his brudder; tellin' him she war mighty airish, but he meant to break her in” (363-5). When Tom emphasizes Iola’s whiteness, he does so adjacent to this threat of violence from Iola’s master. Iola’s master sees her as a threat, and he seeks to conquer her, despite—or because of—her whiteness.

Indeed, Iola’s ability to pass as white is a double-edged sword. She is able to gain the sympathy of others by performing whiteness and claiming her allegiance to her Black heritage. But at the same time, she is seen as more desirable to racist slavers—those who would assault and force their property to bear their children. Her whiteness invokes anger in those who hate feeling confused about the differences between the races.

Robert, Tom, and their companions aid in Iola’s escape, all of them joining the Union’s efforts and with Iola becoming a nurse for the Union army. As the novel’s titular protagonist, Iola is very attuned to her feelings, displaying seemingly irrepressible bodily responses to emotion. And in these moments, the reader is often keenly aware of the male gaze with which they are forced to look upon Iola. Much like Tom gazes upon Iola, a white Union doctor named

Dr. Gresham quickly takes a fondness of Iola and tells Captain Sybil of his admiration for her, noting that she "does not look like the other refugees" of the camp. While he does mention her physical appearance, he first emphasizes her character:

> Her accent is slightly Southern, but her manner is Northern. She is self-respecting without being supercilious; quiet, without being dull. Her voice is low and sweet, yet at times there are tones of such passionate tenderness in it that you would think some great sorrow has darkened and overshadowed her life. Without being the least gloomy, her face at times is pervaded by an air of inexpressible sadness. I sometimes watch her when she is not aware that I am looking at her, and it seems as if a whole volume was depicted on her countenance. When she smiles, there is a longing in her eyes which is never satisfied. I cannot understand how a Southern lady, whose education and manners stamp her as a woman of fine culture and good breeding, could consent to occupy the position she so faithfully holds. It is a mystery I cannot solve. Can you? (*Iola Leroy* 548-55)

Iola can occupy so many seemingly disparate ways of being with her physical body on display to express so many of her character traits. It is Dr. Gresham's certainty that Iola is not aware of his gaze that is curious here. He believes she does not notice him, and he never questions the sincerity of her behaviors. It is this honesty that embodies sentimentality. In this statement, Dr. Gresham defines what a Southern lady is and should be; by calling Iola one, he makes space for women of color to embody Southern womanhood because of their character, not their caste.

Like Dr. Gresham, Captain Sybil admires Iola's behavior and appearance. As the narrator points out,

> The General was much impressed by her modest demeanor, and surprised to see the refinement and beauty she possessed. Could it be possible that this young and beautiful girl had been a chattel, with no power to protect herself from the highest insults that lawless brutality could inflict upon innocent and defenseless womanhood? Could he ever again glory in his American citizenship, when any white man, no matter how coarse, cruel, or brutal, could buy or sell her for the basest purposes? (*Iola Leroy* 39)

The General's response to seeing Iola underscores how a woman who admits her negro heritage and allies herself with her Black blood can still possess modesty, "refinement," and "beauty." But this beauty is complicated by Iola's whiteness. However, this whiteness and beauty helps to introduce the theme of feminine defenselessness running throughout the novel. Harper, through the voice of the narrator, emphasizes the nineteenth-century belief that women should be weak, defenseless, beautiful trophies for their husbands and subverts it, turning this defenselessness into strength. Iola, being defenseless by the law and with her white, beautiful body housing negro blood—a trait that makes her a prime target for sexual violence—nevertheless risks her safety to join the workforce, help others, and engage in the Cult of Domesticity that is, ironically, public.

Dr. Gresham learns that Iola is a slave from Captain Sybil, which seems to kibosh Dr. Gresham's romantic feelings for Iola. However, when Tom is wounded in combat and dies in the care of Iola, Dr. Gresham witnesses her honest grief and is moved by her despair—renewing his desire for Iola. As the narrator describes, "There was something so sad, almost despairing in her tones, in the drooping of her head, and the quivering of her lip, that they stirred Dr. Gresham's heart with sudden pity" (*Iola Leroy* 60-1). Here we see Iola's sentimentality in her embodied sadness. Dr. Gresham does not question the veracity of her feelings, questioning whether her actions are merely performative for him to see and sympathize with her. Instead, he trusts the sentimentality as genuine and assumes she does not notice the public nature of her behavior.

As an enslaved woman, for Iola to not understand the role her body language has would be entirely naive, and why would she not pay attention to who else is in the room? In the nineteenth century, proper women were expected to adhere to standards of modesty and maintain reservation in the presence of men. As Carol Mattingly writes in *Appropriate[ing] Dress*, nineteenth-century American women were "expected to pretend that they were not being

watched. Even when approached directly, custom demanded that they keep eyes lowered. Assuming the privilege of looking directly at another undermined the power structures that helped to keep gendered and classed hierarchies in place" (*Appropriate[ing] Dress* 137). Women had to pretend they did not know they were being watched to protect their own modesty and shield them from social or physical violation.

Supporting Mattingly's argument that women were expected to be reserved in their encounters with men, Timothy Shay Arthur writes that women should be especially careful not to say too much to men, even if they are directly addressed. In his 1860 conduct manual *Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life* in the chapter "Conduct Toward Men," Arthur advises:

> Be modest, thoughtful, and rather reserved than free in your manner; repel with coldness and silence all familiarity; take but little part in sentimental conversations, if introduced, and repress any free expression of admiration for poetry, starlight, and moonshine, no matter how strong you may feel it; be careful how are you compliment a young man's appearance, his manners, or his talent; and above all, let your intentions and thoughts be right, and you need not fear any serious misjudgment of your feelings or character. (Arthur 165)

Here, Arthur's use of "silence," "repress," and "fear" set the tone of this instruction and insinuate that the women are responsible for the consequences of their embodied and verbal rhetoric. This encouragement to remain "reserved" supports Iola's quiet, careful disposition toward Dr. Gresham and others who look at let alone approach her. Further, Arthur warns ladies to avoid "sentimental conversation." [6]

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[6] It is unclear just how Arthur defines "sentimental" from this context; however, Arthur warns men in the men's conduct manual Arthur published. Arthur writes, "Books of facts and books of principles should make by far the larger portion of a young man's reading, and works of fancy and fiction be resorted to only as mental recreations, or the means of improving the taste. The first are essential to the formation of his rational mind [...]. If,

Dr. Gresham continues to watch as Iola mourns Tom's death, and the narrator describes Iola's sentimental, embodied expression of grief. The narrator says that "Iola bowed her head in silent sorrow, and then relieved the anguish of her heart by a flood of tears" (*Iola Leroy* 55). This moment demonstrates the use of sentimentality in the form of embodied emotions. However, Iola's private, uncommunicated grief suggests that she cannot commiserate with those around her or trust in the companionship and support of someone like the doctor or the general who both watch her from afar.

In *Iola Leroy*, Harper uses aspects of the sentimental novel genre—as well as characteristics of many other genres–to express anti-slavery, anti-racist, pro-Black, feminist ideologies. As Peter Schmidt points out, *Iola Leroy* demonstrates Harper's determination to wed elements of the novel of education, the ex-slave narrative[7], and Reconstruction conduct guidebooks" (Schmidt 65). And the domestic novel itself traditionally weds the narrative of education while also reciting the ideologies espoused in conduct manuals to persuade women readers to behave in a particular manner.

By adapting tropes within the sentimental novel genre, Harper is able to circumnavigate many of the drawbacks of writing her personal narrative as a Black woman. Even though Harper was born free and was not, like Iola, taken South to become a slave, her Blackness gave rise to skepticism of her Blackness. In another letter addressed to Mary Ann Day Brown dated May 13,

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instead of this kind of reading, mere fiction be resorted to, a puny intellectual growth will be the consequence, and, instead of there being the soundness of true mental force and discrimination, there will be only the weakness of a trifling sentimentality" (*Advice to Young Men* 45).

[7] I disagree with Schmidt's use of "ex-slave narrative" because the slave narrative is defined by the convention of former slaves writing of their experiences of slavery.

2817, Harper writes: “I don’t know but that you would laugh if you were to hear some of the remarks which my lectures call forth: ‘She is a man,’ again ‘She is not colored, she is painted.’ Both white and colored come out to hear me, and I have very fine meetings; and then part of the time I am talking in between times, and how tired I am some of the time.” Harper writes in this letter that her body is often a point of discussion and criticism as she delivers her speeches. This doubt of her identity suggests that, from the perspective of certain members of the audience, only a white man could possibly deliver her oratories and possess such an ethos.

Furthermore, writing the sentimental novel deters the potential drawbacks of writing in the slave narrative genre; by taking advantage of the fictional bodies, identities, and voices of a diverse cast of characters, Harper can generate sympathy without having to be the posterchild of slavery and its effects. Black men and women of the nineteenth century, when writing of their lives, were treated as evidence of slavery’s justifiability or cruelty, a dehumanizing consequence of white abolitionists’ efforts in collecting slave narratives. Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) was necessarily told through the lens of the white abolitionists who solicited Douglass’ narrative. Rachel Blumenthal argues that Douglass’ turn to autobiography after his slave narrative “embodies a generic break from the white abolitionist-mediated slave narrative. No longer does the fugitive slave only represent the sufferings of an entire slave population. No longer is his body a text available for the reading and editing pleasure of white abolition. The autobiography, finally, marks a break with the post-slavery bondage of black writing at the hands of white editors” (Blumenthal 187). Through fiction, Harper can try to circumnavigate being viewed as merely a lens into a singular experience of slavery. Through a variety of characters whose lives mirror and differ from her own, Harper depicts a nuanced and diverse experience of slavery, race, class, gender, and nation.

In a letter dated October 20, 1854 and addressed to Mary Ann Day Brown, Harper discusses the depiction of violence in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853). Doing so only further solidifies her awareness of the genre conventions and the ways that authors can rhetorically influence their audience through depictions or denied depictions of violence. Harper writes,

> Oh, if Mrs. Stowe has clothed American slavery in the graceful garb of fiction, Solomon Northrup comes up from the dark habitation of Southern cruelty where slavery fattens and feasts on human blood with such mournful revelations that one might almost wish for the sake of humanity that the tales of horror which he reveals were not so.

Here, Harper alludes to the benefits and drawbacks of depicting slavery in fiction versus the slave narrative. Because Harper was born free, she has the benefit of having that degree of separation from her protagonist Iola.

Johnnie Stover writes that, through the pseudonym of "Linda Brent and this 'character,'" Jacobs "assumes the pseudonym of Linda Brent in *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* and through this 'character," "structures her text by successfully subverting existing literary genres, particularly the sentimental novel; she purposefully uses the sentimental approach as her primary narrative paradigm in order to enlist the sympathies and support of the Northern white women who were readers of such narratives and who represented for Jacobs a receptive audience for her story" (Stover 134). Stover is right to point out that the "nineteenth-century white male denial or minimization of black women's personal narratives was instrumental in perpetuating these women's marginalization and discounting their contributions to literature and society" (Stover 135). Thus, Harper's use of the sentimental novel serves to counteract this prejudice against Black women and their personal experiences by leaning on the character of Iola—a character whose background and body differs from those of the author.

Returning to the novel's plot, inspired by Iola's despair, Dr. Gresham proposes to her, following the framework of the domestic novel in which the upper-middle class man marries and raises the rank of the heroine. He says,

> Miss Leroy, you need not be all alone. Let me claim the privilege of making your life bright and happy. Iola, I have loved you ever since I have seen your devotion to our poor, sick boys. How faithfully you, a young and gracious girl, have stood at your post and performed your duties. And now I ask, will you not permit me to clasp hands with you for life? I do not ask for a hasty reply. Give yourself time to think over what I have proposed. (*Iola Leroy* 60-1)

But he desires Iola for the way in which she performs labors of domestic care not unlike the labors a slave would perform. He emphasizes that his marriage to her would be a favor and that he seeks a woman who will perform similar duties in marriage. He also underscores how she stands "at [her] post," reaffirming that Iola will do as she's told in certain circumstances. Although Iola resisted her master, it seems as if Dr. Gresham hopes to appeal to her best nature by stroking her ego and positively reinforcing the behaviors of an obedient servant.

However, *Iola Leroy* subverts expectation by having this interaction occur early in the novel, and without transition, after Dr. Gresham's proposal, Harper transitions to a flashback showcasing Iola's father—Eugene Leroy—and his cousin Alfred Lorraine. Harper has Iola's narrative pause to have the narrator recount Iola's family history and what led her here before the reader learns of her response to the proposal. Thus, Dr. Gresham's proposal becomes a cliffhanger and a transition into Iola's childhood, subverting expectations of sentimental fiction and the marriage plot but also of the slave narrative. Iola's story is told out of order, and the pacing keeps readers wondering what Iola said to Dr. Gresham's proposal. This strategy on Harper's part keeps readers interested and invested, playing into the same sorts of action, like Eliza jumping across the ice floes in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Rather than following the

form of the chronological slave narrative, this novel is framed in a unique, artistic manner. Further, *Iola Leroy* is close enough to the sentimental novel that Harper is able to participate in the language of domestic propriety she had historically been barred from as a Black woman.

In this flashback following Dr. Gresham's proposal, Eugene Leroy and Alfred Lorraine sit and discuss Leroy's upcoming marriage to a woman named Marie. Leroy, Iola's father, is described as "vivacious, impulsive, and undisciplined, without the restraining influence of a mother's love or the guidance of a father's hand" and "in the dangerous position of a young man with vast possessions, abundant leisure, unsettled principles, and uncontrolled desires" (*Iola Leroy* 61). Heretofore, as they are in the novel, I will refer to Iola's father as Leroy and his cousin as Lorraine. Leroy is not self-regulating or self-reliant. Left to his own devices, he is indulgent and impulsive. Also, in setting the scene of Leroy and Lorraine's conversation, the narrator says, "Nearly twenty years before the war, two young men, of French and Spanish descent, sat conversing on a large verandah which surrounded an ancient home on the Mississippi River. It was French in its style of architecture, large and rambling, with no hint of modern improvements" (*Iola Leroy* 61). Because the label "Creole" was and continues to be flexible and unwieldy, it is still worthwhile to note Leroy and Lorraine's ties to Louisiana and New Orleans in particular. To some, they would be labeled Creole—albeit white Creoles. Also, this French house belongs to Leroy, and its lack of "modern improvements" and its "large and rambling" structure serves to represent the larger history of the South and the draconian practices, like slavery, that Leroy supports.

When Leroy was young and left with a large inheritance, he debased himself with this privilege; through Leroy, Harper can describe what white (passing), male privilege allows in terms of dissipation. After all, Leroy is the "only heir of a Creole planter"—so his racial identity

is complicated and vague. The narrator continues that Leroy "had come into possession of an inheritance consisting of vast baronial estates, bank stock, and a large number of slaves" and "preferred spending his vacations at the watering places in the North, with their fashionable and not always innocent gayeties" (*Iola Leroy* 61). After giving in to his basest temptations in the North—which is perhaps a critique of Northerners having as many temptations as Southerners—Leroy returns to his Louisiana plantation and is revived from his dissipation from a slave named Marie. We see Leroy as a white man easily tempted and saved by someone who has been taught and disciplined to be virtuous; this is not meant to justify slavery, but rather, Harper demonstrates throughout the narrative that white privileges have spoiled the white race, whereas labor and struggle improve the lives of anyone who engages in it. As Leroy says to Lorraine, the "circumstances it [slavery] creates, and the temptations it affords, are sapping our strength and undermining our character" (*Iola Leroy* 70-1). Because slaves have been required to engage in these activities, they are more virtuous than their masters.

Through the voice of Leroy, Harper can address the variety of ways that slavery negatively impacts white women while seeming less biased and possessing the ethos of a white male character. Leroy says, "No! but I think that slavery and the lack of outside interests are beginning to tell on the lives of our women. They lean too much on their slaves, have too much irresponsible power in their hands, are narrowed and compressed by the routine of plantation life and the lack of intellectual stimulus" (*Iola Leroy* 64). Much like Harper's narrator argues in "Shalmanezer Prince of Cosman," readers can connect moral degradation of slavery to a consequential physical degradation. In *Iola Leroy,* Leroy explains this degeneration as a simple lack of exercise for white women, but the consequences of an immoral practice remain the same: sickness. Lorraine responds, "Yes, Eugene, when I see what other women are doing in the fields

of literature and art, I cannot help thinking an amount of brain power has been held in check among us. Yet I cannot abide those Northern women, with their suffrage views and abolition can't" (*Iola Leroy* 64). Lorraine says that women are being deprived of intellectual stimulus, have too much power, and are too dependent on their slaves, and yet Lorraine refuses to acknowledge that these issues are an ethical problem that limit the intellectual growth of Southern women that might make them want abolition and suffrage.

Furthermore, Leroy points out his indulgence led to his friends ostracizing him, serving as a critique of white solidarity. As Leroy explains to Lorraine: "A life of folly and dissipation was telling fearfully upon me. My friends shrank from me in dismay. I was sick nigh unto death, and had it not been for Marie's care I am certain that I should have died" (*Iola Leroy* 68). White men and women do not demonstrate Southern hospitality. Rather, they betray themselves and others. Later in Iola's retelling of her past, readers learn that Leroy dies of Yellow Fever, and Lorraine finds a loophole in Leroy and Marie's marriage certificate. Lorraine then sells Leroy's kin into slavery. This lack of loyalty and willingness to betray his kin shows the consequences of indulgence and white privilege afforded through slavery.

This active participation in public life and demonstration of care is why I find it useful to consider Harper and her Black characters as Southern. This inclusion allows for their subjectivity in living in the South and defining its culture. Black characters in the novel *do* demonstrate loyalty, hospitality, and kindness. And they practice domestic rituals praised in conduct manuals in the nineteenth century. Just as one example, Harper's narrator underscores Black women's employment of sentiment and sympathy for those around them when Iola, late in the novel, is reunited with her brother Harry after she and her brother are sold into slavery and separated. Iola is reunited with her brother Harry. Unlike the white women in the narrative, who avoid Marie,

Iola, and other characters of color whenever possible, the Black women surround Iola and Harry in "tender sympathy" after Iola, "so flushed and bright with the glow of recognition, rushed to him, threw her arms around his neck, kissed him again and again, crying: 'O, Harry!'" (*Iola Leroy* 194). Iola faints, and the Black women of her church envelop her and her brother with shared excitement. As the narrator says, Iola "had slidden into their hearts and found a ready welcome in each sympathizing bosom" (*Iola Leroy* 194). Unlike the white women in the novel, these Black women demonstrate the Christian ideals of nurturing a community and supporting one another; they participate in the most acceptable form of mothering, serving as a model for ideal citizenship.

Returning to Leroy and Lorraine, their conversation further reveals the defenselessness of Black women's bodies and the role that plays in Iola's rhetorical strategy. And in doing so, Harper uses the white, male embodiment of Leroy's character in order to take advantage of his credibility. While Lorraine represents cruel indulgence, Leroy serves as a sympathetic, well-intentioned, flawed white, male character. When Lorraine asks. "Are you not satisfied with the power and possession the law gives you," Leroy replies: "No. Although the law makes her helpless in my hands, to me her defenselessness is her best defense" (*Iola Leroy* 65). Leroy is an example of a seeming ally to female slaves who, instead of humanizing them, sees them as exotic and precious. Like Dr. Gresham, Leroy sees slaves as pitiable, helpless and picturesque. However, he does make a useful point about how Marie and Iola take advantage of this perceived helplessness and defenselessness by understanding the rhetorical situating of their bodies. By understanding how their interlocutors commodify and fetishize their bodies, they can preserve their safety. To be proper, beautiful, and capable in the language of their masters are acts of self-preservation.

Further, Leroy advocates for enslaved Black women by arguing that, in abusing Black women, white men only debase themselves. These victims are not morally responsible for the cruelties inflicted upon them. Leroy says, "So much the worse for our institution. If it is cruel to debase a hapless victim, it is an increase of cruelty to make her content with her degradation. Let me tell you, Alf, you cannot wrong or degrade a woman without wronging or degrading yourself" (*Iola Leroy* 70). Iola's father characterizes the sexual double standard—as well as the many other bodily offenses—that shape the relationships between men and women of various races and classes in the nineteenth century. Harper makes a similar argument as Leroy in her speech "We Are All Bound Up Together," saying that a community is only as valuable as its weakest, and degradation among some is shared throughout the community. Harper says, "We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul" ("We Are All Bound Up Together"). But Harper is able, through the voice of Leroy, to envision these words said through a white, male ethos. And a man speaking this to a man, in a one-on-one conversation between family members with no other motive than communicating their truths to one another, is a powerful avatar for Harper to use for this discussion. If Iola were speaking this line, Iola's own self-interest would be in question.

In the novel, white women—particularly Southern white wives of plantation owners in the novel—are portrayed as passive and isolated at best and cruel at worst.

The narrator notes that "none of his [Leroy's] female friends ever entered his doors, when it became known that Marie held the position of mistress of his mansion, and presided at his table" (*Iola Leroy* 76). Leroy's white, female friends are absent, single-minded, and assumed to be so prejudiced against Marie that they no longer care for him. However, readers are left to speculate

whether these women's husbands allowed them to visit altogether. Further, were these women at all? We know so little of them, and to a certain extent, Harper's lack of detail here allows for some sympathy toward their isolation. And while the circumstances of this group of Leroy's friends are vague, readers see Lorraine's wife's prejudice as a source of her absence. The narrator describes Lorraine's wife as "the only daughter of an enterprising slave-trader, who had left her a large amount of property. Her social training was deficient, her education limited, but she was too proud of being a pure white woman to enter the home of Leroy, with Marie as its presiding genius" (*Iola Leroy* 88-9). Using these examples, we see white women as uninterested in helping Black women achieve skills in the domestic economy. Further, these white women are dissipated by the institution of slavery, prone to inactivity and ultimately controlled by their husbands.

We see Marie also in a compromised situation that demonstrates how plantation owner's wives could be silenced by their husbands by blaming plantation life. When Marie expresses her concern that she and her children may be sent into slavery should anything happen to Leroy, Leroy dismisses her, saying "Marie, what in the world is the matter with you? Have you had a presentiment of my death, or, as Uncle Jack says, 'hab you seed it in a vision?'" (*Iola Leroy* 80). Leroy insults Marie here, reminding her of her race and the eroticized mysticism associated with visions. He uses this racialized comment to shame her, making use of dialect and Uncle Jack—Leroy's slave. Marie responds "No, but I have had such sad forebodings that they almost set me wild," and foreshadows what happens to her and her children later in the novel: "One night I dreamt that you were dead; that the lawyers entered the house, seized our property, and remanded us to slavery. I never can be satisfied in the South with such a possibility hanging over my head" (*Iola Leroy* 80). Leroy brushes off Marie's concerns as symptomatic of her plantation

lifestyle, saying "Marie, dear, you are growing nervous. Your imagination is too active. You are left too much alone on this plantation" (*Iola Leroy* 80). Indeed, Lorraine told Leroy that white plantation owners' wives suffered due to lack of physical labor.

For Marie and Iola, helplessness is a rhetorical tool that can be adopted in certain situations. For Leroy, it is not a choice. While it seemed earlier in the story that Marie cured Leroy's dissipation through marriage, the narrator notes that Leroy continues to exhibit "feebleness of his moral resistance" and refuses to disengage from the institution of slavery that the narrator says is "a system darked with the shadow of a million crimes" (86-7). While it may appear that Marie is helpless, it is Leroy's participation in white privilege and slavery that makes him helpless to his vices.

Iola's flashback that interrupts Dr. Gresham's proposal ends with the death of Leroy and Iola's enslavement—a narrative choice that allows for Iola to keep the secrets of the violence she may have been subjected to. As readers learn, on the way to Iola's graduation, Leroy catches yellow fever and dies, and Lorraine allows for Marie and the children to be taken South and enslaved. The narration of this section, before returning to the present conversation between Dr. Gresham and Iola, concludes with a passage of Iola's willpower against temptation—a noteworthy rhetorical choice embedded in the sentimental novel genre. The narrator says that Iola, "in her lonely condition, with all its background of terrible sorrow and deep abasement, […] had never for a moment thought of giving or receiving love from one of that race who had been so lately associated in her mind with horror, aversion, and disgust" (*Iola Leroy* 110-11). I want to place emphasis on the word "never" here. Harper does not depict Black women experiencing temptation in the novel.

In white women's domestic and sentimental novels, temptation plays a large role in advocating for women's rights and women's similarity to men. Authors like Caroline Gilman and Augusta Jane Evans challenge the idea that is it white women's lot to help men by being angels in the house and not having desires of their own. In the novels *Recollections of a Southern Matron* and *St. Elmo*, the main female protagonist finds agency in confessing their temptations and challenging their rigid expectations of others. These white women gain freedom by admitting that they are just as tempted as their fellow white men are. But as a black author writing a black protagonist who claims her Blackness even though she passes, Harper cannot use the same strategy for Iola as Gilman does for Cornelia Wilton and as Augusta Jane Evans does with Edna. However, Harper uses multiple examples of Black women characters rejecting temptation altogether—whether it's sexual desire, weakness of constitution, or temptation for alcohol.

For Black women authors and orators, mentions of temptation—sexual or otherwise—were embedded in the stereotype of Black hypersexuality that was rampant in the nineteenth century and was used to justify violence toward people of color. As Ammons argues, *Iola Leroy* enters into a dialogue regarding the "dominant culture's definition of black women as all-sexual, the reality and complex mythology of rape in a racist society, and the seemingly ineradicable racism of white 'sisters'" (Ammons 24). Ammons continues that in *Iola Leroy*, "black men's sexual appetite is not an issue. White men's is. Harper's heroine is characterized as a moral paragon—linked to an elevated Victorian image of womanhood—to demonstrate the vicious untruth of the 'wanton' theory underlying rape-lynch mythology" (Ammons 30). I want to trouble Ammons' point that Iola is without vice. Rather, Harper likely knew that any mention of vice would likely be used against her. Seeing Iola's narration as a choice, again, reinforces her

subjectivity and Black literacy/understanding of rhetoric that is continually reinforced in the novel.

The novel's return from the narrative flashback to the present is a crucial moment for a novel of sentiment: the response to the marriage proposal. However, Iola concisely but politely rejects the proposal and explains her reasoning to Dr. Gresham. But when Dr. Gresham continues by trying to persuade Iola, he suggests that she has been "tried and tempted by the worst white men" (*Iola Leroy* 114-5). In the novel's most explicit mention of sexual violation, Iola responds that she was "[t]ried, but not tempted" (*Iola Leroy* 115). The narrator says that a "deep flush overspread her face," alluding to the sexual nature of the temptations Dr. Gresham mentions. But Iola knows better than to speak explicitly about these violations. Instead, she tells Dr. Gresham, "I was never tempted. I was sold from State to State as an article of merchandise. I had outrages heaped on me which might well crimson the cheek of honest womanhood with shame, but I never fell into the clutches of an owner for whom I did not feel the utmost loathing and intensest horror" (115). Again, Harper has Iola underscore the word "never." She is sure of herself, refusing to doubt her constitution. She refuses the idea of desiring someone who would dehumanize her or seek to master her. Iola has learned from her mother's mistake. Even though Leroy was well intentioned in some respects, he was dissipated continually by the institution of slavery. As Iola continues in her response to Dr. Gresham: "I have heard men talk glibly of the degradation of the negro, but there is a vast difference between abasement of condition and degradation of character. I was abased, but the men who trampled on me were the degraded ones" (*Iola Leroy* 115).

In the latter half of *Iola Leroy*, after the sensational marriage proposal, Harper's narrative seemingly takes an abrupt shift to temperance, though temptation is thematically interwoven

throughout the novel. However, readers—anticipating the conclusion of Iola's story with a stereotypical marriage—are faced with a plot centered around abstinence from drinking. The emphasis on temperance is most apparent when readers are re-introduced to Aunt Linda.

Iola and Robert meet with Aunt Linda, who invites them into her home and demonstrates her knowledge of domestic economy. And like Iola, Aunt Linda is also free of temptation. But this time, she says she has no desire for wine: "'Here,' she said, filling three glasses, 'is some wine I made myself from dat grape-vine out dere. Don't it look nice and clar? Jist taste it. It's fus'rate'" (*Iola Leroy* 185). Aunt Linda's relationship with alcohol is one of hospitality and serving others, not one in which she is selfish, tempted, and desirous of drunkenness. However, when Robert confronts her about the moral consequences of drinking, Aunt Linda is quick to denounce altogether for herself. She responds, "I don't keer 'bout it myself, but I don't 'spect John would be willin' ter let it go, 'cause he likes it a heap" (*Iola Leroy* 186). Just as Iola says she was never tempted by sexual desire, Aunt Linda merely dismisses any predilection for alcohol altogether. But Aunt Linda just exclaimed how nice the wine was, allowing Aunt Linda to participate in the domestic sphere's requirements of hospitable behavior without characterizing herself as a stereotypically desirous and sinful Black woman unable to integrate into civilized society.

Among people of her own race whom she trusts, Aunt Linda can be honest about her ability to stop drinking, as well as John's resistance to quitting. Rather than having to think about the racist stereotypes and negative generalizations that a white person might derive from John's temptation, Aunt Linda tells a complicated truth about John's relationship to alcohol—that he does have desire. Unlike Iola with Dr. Gresham, an instance where the Black woman must entirely reject any temptation, big or small, Aunt Linda can have a less absolute response.

As another example of Iola saying she resists temptation, when Robert tells Iola not to mention her race when trying to get a job, Iola says**,** "Uncle Robert, I see no necessity for proclaiming that fact on the house-top. Yet I am resolved that nothing shall tempt me to deny it. The best blood in my veins is African blood, and I am not ashamed of it" (*Iola Leroy* 208). When speaking to Dr. Gresham, a white man, Iola says she was "never" tempted, but when talking to Robert, Iola says that she is "resolved that nothing shall tempt" her (*Iola Leroy* 208). With a Black, male family member, Iola says that she is determined to resist temptation, whereas she has to eschew the possibility of temptation while speaking to Dr. Gresham.

The theme of temptation that governs the latter half of *Iola Leroy* serves to demonstrate how careful Black women must be in discussing bodies like and unlike their own. Although Harper was born and remained free, she faced scrutiny and speculation regarding her body. But through fiction, she could explore similar arguments for equal rights while speaking through the disembodied narrator and the voices of the white-passing Iola, the Black characters who do not pass, and the white men and women who populate the narrative. I seek to underscore the reading of Harper and her work as Southern and utilizing sentimental rhetoric intentionally. And in the following reading of Grace King's *Balcony Stories*, I seek to draw similarities between *Iola Leroy* and *Balcony Stories* in their Creole characters, as well as shared sentimentality at the end of the nineteenth century. Both authors have been accused of their sentimentality enabling racist ideologies, with Harper being accused of parroting a white woman's genre and with King being accused of romanticizing the Confederate South. Nevertheless, Harper's writing of Black women as rejectors of temptation and the possibility of temptation should be explored further in future scholarship.

CHAPTER V: AUTHORIAL INTENT AND CONFEDERATE MEMORY IN GRACE KING'S *BALCONY STORIES*

Grace King is a controversial literary figure for those researching women authors of the late nineteenth-century. As a white, Southern woman living through the Civil War, King struggled to reconcile her often contradictory views. King was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1853, and she remained there until her death in 1932—despite her family's fall from aristocratic wealth during the Civil War. King was bitter toward the "Yankees" who seemingly stole her family's livelihood. However, in her fiction, King also writes about the complexities of capitalism and the sinful indulgence of wealth. She spoke toward a hatred of the Irish even though her family was Scotch-Irish; instead, Grace King identified with Creoles. The author sought to understand the complexities of Creole as a label for the diverse peoples of Louisiana, and racial discourse influenced her life daily. In New Orleans, social stratification, economic inequality, gender division, and racial injustice were incredibly visible.

In 1885, three years before Grace King penned first short story, she wrote to writer Charles Dudley Warner: "It seems to me, white as well as black women have a sad showing in what some people call romance. I am very tired, but as I recollect these things, I think I shall try to write them—if no one else does it better. One of these days they may prove a pleasant record and serve to bring us all nearer together, blacks and whites." Later that year, in another letter to Warner, King extends this desire for unity by saying: "The only vocation I feel, is the desire to show you that a Southerner and a white person is not ashamed to acknowledge a dependence on negroes, nor to proclaim the love that exists between the two races, a love which in the end will destroy all differences in color; or rather I had better say—that that love is the only thing which

can do it." To say that these sentiments depict the "real" Grace King would be a stretch. Like any author of the nineteenth century, King cannot be removed from the racist society in which she lived, but at the same, I want to show that scholars who label King a racist and then dismiss her writings may be missing the opportunity to examine nuanced, complex, conflicting stories penned by King.

King held a variety of beliefs—from moment to moment, from audience to audience. But my focus is her stories' complexity and intrigue of language, characters, and the worlds built through narrative. I argue that the author's short story collection *Balcony Stories* (1894) depicts the variety of prejudices, injustices, and inequalities of (fictional) New Orleans life for women of a variety of identities. Further, this collection offers a complex commentary on the institution of marriage after the Civil War, but it also offers a critique of capitalism and the way that success seemingly relies on the failure of those of the lower classes.

Grace King published *Balcony Stories* just one year after Frances E.W. Harper published *Iola Leroy,* and both texts share depictions of Creole characters. But both texts have been received in vastly different ways, with *Iola Leroy* celebrated for its commitment to anti-racist, pro-Black thinking and *Balcony Stories* criticized for its romanticization of the past. For some critics, *Iola Leroy* succeeds despite its sentimental writing, and *Balcony Stories* reinforces the status quo of white supremacist, pro-Confederate ideologies by writing with sentimental rhetoric. Literary scholars examining Grace King's work have largely focused on authorial intent, debating whether King meant to reinscribe or subvert the racist, classist, sexist ideologies that seem to define what it means to be Southern—though these ideologies crossed the Mason Dixon Line. As Heidi M. Hanrahan writes, "Any project that attempts to see a relatively progressive view of King's work must first of course, address her critical reputation and legacy" (220). But I

want to challenge a variety of ways scholars may be tempted to overemphasize authorial intent when interpreting and discussing literature.

According to King's own recollection in *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (published posthumously in 1932), *Balcony Stories* was written in pursuit of more accurately portraying New Orleans Creoles and their diversity. King felt that contemporary authors had failed to show New Orleans as it was. When literary critic Richard Watson Gilder asked King what she thought of George Washington Cable's reputation in New Orleans. Cable's *The Grandisimmes* (1880) has been criticized for its scathing portrayal of oversimplified Creole characters.[8] Grace King felt that Cable portrayed "quadroons" as "inevitably superior" to Creoles (*Memories* 60). As King writes it, Gilder challenged King to write New Orleans as she saw it. Readers can view *Balcony Stories* as King's attempt to more accurately portray—from her perspective—the people of New Orleans across the nineteenth century. But as Lori Robison points out, if we take as a fact that King is responding to others' views of New Orleans by writing her own literary history of the city, King's "local color stories...implicitly represent a white, upper-middle-class retelling of regional. politics that serves to reinscribe harmful stereotypes of African Americans" (Robison 55). But if we instead close read the works in *Balcony Storie*s as they are presented as a collection, literary scholars open a myriad of more interesting interpretive possibilities. Further, scholars escape the pressure to figure out exactly what King believed in the moment of her writing.

Further, in this chapter, I want to avoid repeating the scholarly focus on Grace King from a purely historical perspective. In *Grace King* (1980), David Kirby argues that the author's

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[8] Elmo Howell writes, "Most of Cable's Creole characters subscribe to the prevailing system without giving it much thought. […] Lazy and indifferent, they abhor change and distrust the idea of progress" (Howell 50).

works provide a “unique angle of vision into the psychology of the American female” and “allow the present-day reader to look long and hard at a portion of the Southern experience that is not to be found in the writings of better-known authors” (Kirby 9). Douglas J. McReynolds responds in his article “Passion Repressed” (1983) that, although Kirby's analysis is “thoughtful and interesting […] it falls short, for it insists on a merely historical significance to King’s short stories: hers is a fiction notable, he argues, because it affords us a unique lens for viewing the past” (McReynolds 207).

Grace King is just one author. She can’t speak for nineteenth-century women, for Southern women, for regionalist authors, or even for New Orleans writers. Further understanding King’s legacy helps us to recognize assumptions we continue to make about Southern women, Southern authors, and women writers throughout the United States. And her writings ask us to question whom we’re including in our anthologies and syllabi in 2021. Further, for the last twenty years, scholars have continually struggled to discuss Grace King’s treatment of race, alongside the fact that Grace King profited from slavery as a slaveowner’s daughter. In *Writing Out of Place* (2003) Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse write that King is “not unlike Dunbar-Nelson, who, to write about race in Northern periodicals, had to write about creoles. Yet King’s strategy has often led critics to assume that her work re-inscribes a conservative southern racial agenda” (Fetterley and Pryse 288). James Nagel is one such critic, who argues that King romanticizes antebellum New Orleans and fetishizes institutions that enabled slavery: “The volume, as a whole [...] is a saga of an idealized lost culture and the birth of a new one, a longing for what was lost, and a reluctant resignation to the world that has replaced it” (Nagel 83). While there is much that I agree with in terms of Nagel’s readings, I disagree with his argument that

King romanticizes the past. Many of these stories show the consequences of romanticizing the past and the ways that women are ruined if they don't embrace modernity.

In *Balcony Stories,* King depicts the varied population of nineteenth-century New Orleans. She utilizes sentimental rhetoric through personal narrative and the embodied realities of diverse women. The women in each of these chapters, as we are explicitly informed by the narrator, interact with space and time as it relates to their own bodies. Grace King sees the rhetorical influence of the body and interrogates the written word as limiting, favoring oral traditions and body language. In this chapter, I discuss three of the stories in *Balcony Stories*: "A Drama of Three," "La Grande Demoiselle," and "Story of a Day." Ultimately, a close reading of these short stories offers—but is not limited to—critiques of wealth, a resistance to the male (or simply consensual) gaze, and commentary regarding women's embodiment through sentimental rhetoric.

Grace King opens *Balcony Stories* with a preface titled "The Balcony," in which we get lush descriptions of spaces women can safely gather to speak openly, honestly, away from men—but where children may be able to overhear. These children represent a hopeful future wherein children share these women's stories and implement social change. And it is in these admissions of women's histories in their own spaces that we may have hope for the future. In this opening, King establishes the balcony as a place that troubles the false dichotomy of public and private spheres. These private conversations, as we learn in the stories, are doing public work in changing the minds of listeners. And King focuses on the diversity of the group of women. King's narrator says: "Each woman has a different way of picking up and relating her stories, as each one selects different pieces, and has a personal way of playing them on the piano" (*Balcony Stories* 3). Here, King's choice of verbiage emphasizes intentionality and the

ways that women choose which stories they bring to their audience. The idea of "select[ing]" different "pieces" from the entire story underscores that an audience only hears what the storyteller wants them to hear. Thus, King's narrator points out these women's histories end up being incredibly biased and can never represent the entire truth. Further, this as an emphasis on rhetorical approach—knowing your audience, choosing your words thoughtfully. These storytellers in King's introduction try to persuade their fellow women and anyone else who happens to overhear.

King narratively frames the *Balcony Stories* collection as a series of stories later relayed by the sleeping children of the balcony women. The narrator says:

> And if a child inside be wakeful and precocious it is not dreams alone that take on reflections from the balcony outside: through the half-open shutters the still, quiet eyes look across the dim forms on the balcony to the star-spangled or the moon-brightened heavens beyond; while memory makes stores for the future, and germs are sown, out of which the slow, clambering vine of thought issues, one day, to decorate or hide, as it may be, the structures or ruins of life. (*Balcony Stories* 3-4)

At first glance, it seems like the narrator is suggesting that the children will listen to the women on the balcony and learn from them, serving as hope for the future. But as Nagel points out: "This narrative circumstance controls the entire volume" (Nagel 63). The language here suggests that the source of the collection, narratively speaking, is a listening child filtering the oral tradition to the written word. Readers are then multiple times removed, the narration becoming less and less reliable.

Given the circumstances of the narration, Grace King should be considered multiple times removed from the narrative voice; in that case, authorial intent seems too difficult to discern from the narration or the characters' actions alone. Instead, I want to pay attention to the

available interpretations of the texts and open up new avenues for understanding the use of sentimental rhetoric in the collection.

In the first edition of *Balcony Stories*, King's opening story is "A Drama of Three," in which the narrator [9] details a day in the marital life of Madame B- (later referred to as Honorine) and her husband "the old General." King's narrator begins, "It was a regular dramatic performance every first of the month in the little cottage of the old General and Madame B-." (*Balcony Stories* 7). The dramatic performance to which the narrator alludes, however, is not revealed until the second half of the story. The General's landlord is playing a prank on the couple by sending a letter to them on the first of each month. Instead of focusing on this point of contention, the narrator initially emphasizes the physical, erotic desires of Honorine. The narrator explains, "Ah, to the end a woman loves to celebrate her conquest! It is the last touch of misfortune with her to lose in the old, the ugly, and the commonplace her youthful lord and master" (*Balcony Stories* 8). Rather than the General being the conqueror, the narrator positions the woman as such. One could read this exclamation as a mocking tone, however. But it is suggested that the woman chooses her "lord and master," which we see in the collection's next story "La Grande Demoiselle"—wherein the titular character refuses to choose a suitor until she is much older and chooses a controversial "lord and master" of her own (*Balcony Stories* 8).

In "A Drama of Three," King characterizes a woman who is erotically desirous of the husband of her past. While this, in part, could function as a metaphor for the fetishization of antebellum New Orleans after the Civil War, it is the carnal nature of her desire that distracts from such a reading. As the narrator says, "If one could look under the gray hairs and wrinkles with which time thatches old women, one would be surprised to see the flutterings, the

[9] Readers can assume that the narrator of this story is an unnamed woman from the titular balcony.

quiverings, the thrills, the emotions, the coals of the heart-fires which death alone extinguishes, when he commands the tenant to vacate" (*Balcony Stories* 8). Even though Honorine is old, she has erotic pleasure that seemingly passes without judgment from the narrator, but this pleasure seems to go unnoticed by her husband. This neglect of women's desires runs throughout the *Balcony Stories* collection.

Preparing her husband to face his landlord, coupled with her husband's neglect, allows Honorine to enjoy her body and to explore her sensual feelings. This raises many questions. Is Honorine attracted to rejection from her husband or the unspoken desires and secrets she and her husband keep from one another? What is at stake with Grace King potentially showcasing, in her first story, a woman protagonist who derives sexual pleasure from the circumstances that have arisen from the loss of economic status and rank? What if sexual pleasure is derived from a marriage that is antithetical to the domestic economy defined in the mid-nineteenth-century?

In the story, we learn that Honorine relies more on embodied knowledge than experiential knowledge, driving her action in the story. And she often does not return the General's aggressive speech—instead keeping her thoughts to herself, even when her husband insults her intellect. As the narrator says, "It was perhaps the only reproach one could make to Madame Honorine, that she never learned by experience" (*Balcony Stories* 13). In this opening sketch, King introduces the reader to embodied, sentimental knowledge—feeling as a way of knowing. In contrast to her husband's embodied, gut instincts, Honorine seems unbothered and yet contemplative about the embodied knowledge she acquires throughout the story's actions.

As we learn, on the first of every month, Honorine grooms her husband so that he can pretend to still be wealthy and upper class as he pays his rent. And on that same day each month, Honorine and the General receive a mysterious letter—delivered by Pompey, a character of color

that complicates the critical perception of Grace King as merely romanticizing the past and glamorizing the Confederacy.

King is not allied with the General, and the patriarch is characterized as a cruel white supremacist who cannot accept the results of the Civil War. As Fetterley and Pryse point out, Journel—the General's landlord—"sends an anonymous letter to the General every month containing the amount the General owes him in rent just for the pleasure of having power over one who formerly had power over him" (Fetterley and Pryse 296). Journel's family served the General's, but now, because of the Civil War, Journel now possesses more wealth. The General, rather than learning from experience to sympathize with the lower classes, his pride and shame cloud his judgment, and he fails to also sympathize with his wife, ignoring her growing concerns regarding his fidelity. As we learn in later stories in this collection, the women King showcases are often capable of learning from their fall from grace, exercising sympathy, whereas men merely become all the worse for their experience.

This story emphasizes the ways that women can be logically and erotically at odds with themselves because Honorine desires whom her young husband used to be, not whom he is now. Fetterley and Pryse extend their discussion of this story by contemplating how Honorine's "erotic identity" is influenced by her seemingly obligation to maintain her husband's "sense of superiority" (Fetterley and Pryse 296-7). Honorine is erotically desirous of her young, powerful husband, but Honorine's vocal disagreements with her husband alongside her erotic desire for the past husband underscores that Honorine can logically and actively disagree with her husband, separating the husband she has from the sensual desires she imagines. She most ostensibly challenges him when she says, "But, husband, you must remember we do not hire Pompey. He only does it to oblige us, out of his kindness" (*Balcony Stories* 13). Even though the General

dismisses her assessment, she still feels she can question him confidently. Honorine's characterization reinforces that women can desire that which is immoral. However, women can act upon what they feel is right outside of their fantasies. I have yet to see scholars recognize this possibility for this story, and it certainly deserves more attention.

While I agree with Fetterley and Pryse that this story "reveals no sympathy for the old General, whose false sense of superiority in the present moment seems to reflect retroactively on the past [...]," Nagel's more recent reading of the story focuses on King's reluctance to name the Civil War and does not question King's allegiance to her characters (Fetterley and Pryse 296). When discussing "A Drama of Three" Nagel criticizes how King's "entire drama is the result of the social transformations of Reconstruction, and yet it and the Civil War are never mentioned" (Nagel 64). This assessment seemingly supports King's own disillusionment—her fantasy that the South will rise again. However, King's narrator provides an explanation for this absence in the following story, "La Grande Demoiselle": "Every one knows what happened after '59. There is no need to repeat. The history of one is the history of all. But there was this difference—for there is every shade of difference in misfortune, as there is every shade of resemblance in happiness" (*Balcony Stories* 28). The interpretive possibilities for why Reconstruction or the Civil War would go unnamed in this story are varied, but Nagel does not unpack these potential readings. Instead, he concludes that only Honorine "grasps the full meaning of what they have lost" while the General remains in a fantasy, detached from reality. Honorine is dismissed by her husband and by Journel—who does not even see her as he collects rent from the General, and it seems that Honorine has gone underread in recent scholarship as an example of how authors can represent older women's sexuality and the contradictions that can occur between sexual desire and moral, embodied knowledge.

Although stories like “A Drama of Three” relay the cruelties of slavery and critique a fetishization of the past, scholars have thoroughly discussed King’s story “A Crippled Hope.” In “A Crippled Hope,” Little Mammy can be viewed as a grateful slave who suffers more in her freedom. However, I see this story as it relates to Honorine in “A Drama of Three”—a woman who is sexually attracted to a man whom she fundamentally disagrees with. In “A Crippled Hope,” little Mammy tries to hate white people for her own benefit, but this is counter to her nature. Scholars have struggled with “A Crippled Hope” as it relates to King’s ties to slavery and the supposition that Mammy’s portrayal glorifies slavery. But as Robison argues, the story that the story “very explicitly condemns slavery and uses a discourse of femininity, motherhood, and story to redeem the young African American woman who is its main character.” Further, I agree with Robison that “these same discourses also support the story's inherent racism” (Robison 65-6). What scholars have not noted is that the story can contain racist discourses with purpose or a variety of interpretations. Should a story with racist messages be seen as perpetuating racism? Does the story point toward the internalized racism that little Mammy experiences? Perhaps the answer provides a more complex reading of the story that allows for a more nuanced discussion of race in nineteenth-century America.

“‘La Grande Demoiselle’” follows “A Drama of Three” and tells the story of the titular young woman who practices traditionally coquettish behavior, relishing in the excitement of courting men but refusing to settle down. The title alone seems to suggest that, unlike Honorine of “A Drama of Three,” the protagonist of “La Grande Demoiselle” demands to not be ignored. But the title is not the woman’s name. It is her reputation as a young, desirable woman, showcasing how women are often discarded after reaching a certain age or a certain purpose. “La Grande Demoiselle” is Mademoiselle Idalie. But, as the narrator says, “La Grande Demoiselle”

is the name "she was called by everybody as soon as she was seen or described" (*Balcony Stories* 23). It seems that, through this sentiment, that women are meant to be seen and gossiped about, but they aren't meant to be defined more anything more than the superficial and the material.

"La Grande Demoiselle" is more of an ideal or archetype rather than an actual person, and Grace King connects this idealization of her to the idealization of the Confederacy by describing La Grande Demoiselle's plantation home as picturesque and better than its reality. The landscape of the American South and the Confederacy, too, are idealized. The narrator says, "It was a plantation, the Reine Sainte Foy, the richness and luxury of which are really well described in those fervid pictures of tropical life, at one time the passion of philanthropic imaginations, excited and exciting over the horrors of slavery. Although these pictures were then often accused of being purposely exaggerated, they seem now to fall short of, instead of surpassing, the truth" (*Balcony Stories* 24). Here, readers are subjected to the juxtaposition of the Southern landscape and the horrific human rights violations that enabled such beautiful landscapes to exist. And this story continues to connect the Southern landscape—as is often compared to a woman's body—to the fate of many Southern belles. These Southern beauties were, too, idealized and ruined by the society that constructed them. Taught to value wealth over humanity, competition over kindness, these Southern women are unable to uphold the ideal of Southern womanhood.

As we have already noted, for each story in this collection, the narrator is different and is necessarily separate from King herself. But through the voice of the narrator of "La Grande Demoiselle," King acknowledges the negative effects of slavery on both slaves and slaveowners. In doing so, we see Idalie's extravagance, indulgence, and fall from grace as a symptom of her environment and a critique of excess wealth and privilege. The narrator acknowledges that that,

"most noticeable to the natural, as well as to the visionary, eye—there were the ease, idleness, extravagance, self-indulgence, pomp, pride, arrogance, in short the whole enumeration, the moral *sine qua non* , as some people considered it, of the wealthy slaveholder of aristocratic descent and tastes" (*Balcony Stories* 24). Like her fellow aristocrats of the South, Idalie is undisciplined; as the narrator says, "whatever discipline may have been exercised on the place, either in fact or fiction, most assuredly none of it, even so much as in a threat, ever attended her sacred person" (*Balcony Stories* 25). This passage and criticism recall the ideal of self-discipline and self-regulation in nineteenth-century conduct manuals. Independence, for many of her contemporary women, would mean controlling oneself as a form of rationalizing freedom and agency as a responsible subject. But later in the story, La Grande Demoiselle does learn discipline when she is impoverished.

After her family loses their wealth during the Civil War, Idalie marries a poor man named Champigny. The narrator also discovers that Idalie now teaches at the school for Black children. Recognizing that the circumstances of the marriage are a mystery, King's narrator addresses the audience directly, saying that "Only the good God himself knows what passed in Champigny's mind on the subject. We know only the results" (*Balcony Stories* 35). King's narrator, in the context that this change in Idalie's life is embedded in the realities of the Civil War, suggests that readers should also pay attention to the circumstances rather trying to imagine what occurred in the past. This story as it transpires even suggests that we cannot fixate on an imagined and idealized past. Even though Idalie doesn't end up financially benefiting from her marriage, her fate isn't so far-fetched from the goals of the sentimental novel. She has a job teaching and trying to make the world more fair, more moral. She rids herself of her excesses and practices a more respectable lifestyle than she did when she was wealthy.

Much like in "'La Grande Demoiselle,'" King's *Balcony Stories* tale "The Miracle Chapel" provides criticism of economic disparity in New Orleans. The narrator writes, "But the rich have their miracles, no doubt, even in that beautiful empyrean of moneyed ease in which the poor place them" (*Balcony Stories* 58). King's narrator demonstrates an awareness for how the rich benefit from the poor, and her tongue-in-cheek lament for privilege underscores the brutal economic inequality of the area. Further, in King's "The Old Lady's Restoration," a story about a woman who is "restored to her fortune," readers learn that this fortune is not based in monetary wealth or in material possessions—but in humility, genuine friendship, and gratitude (*Balcony Stories* 177). Poverty can be a gift, and while we are denied access to Idalie's thoughts in "La Grande Demoiselle," this is also an interpretive possibility. Again, readers cannot be so sure if Idalie in "La Grande Demoiselle" is unhappy. And I argue that scholars should pay more attention to the role of writing in the lives of the women in this collection, as this story urges us to.

McReynolds, rather than seeing growth in Idalie's changing body and social circumstances, views this change as a way for Idalie to validate how broken Reconstruction is. McReynolds writes, "For her to look to Reconstruction as an opportunity for building something new would be for her to deny the value of what she had lost; for her to attempt rebuilding would be to deny she had lost at all what is so clearly and irretrievably gone" This assumption of Idalie's attitude toward Reconstruction and personal growth does not seem to be supported in the text, especially since readers rely mostly on assumption of her social and economic circumstances. Therefore, I find it difficult to support this reading. McReynolds also reinforces the negative attitude toward Idalie's current situation saying that she "grows ugly, wears a veil, teaches at the colored school for seven dollars and fifty cents a month, and finally marries an old

man who is known to be celibate" (McReynolds 213-4). Considering that the next story in the collection, "Mimi's Marriage," mostly concerns the benefits of getting married and gaining a more realistic perspective of self, others, and one's circumstances, McReynolds' reading of the situation as wholly negative is, again, difficult to defend.

Fetterley and Pryse read the situation in a different manner, noting that, although Champigny seeks to "restore" Idalie's class, whiteness, and wealth, "King's narrator hardly shares his commitments" (Fetterley and Pryse 295). And because readers have such restricted access to Idalie's thoughts, we cannot assume that she shares her husband's commitment to her supposed restoration. Furthermore, Fetterley and Pryse argue that although King's "representation of the 'grand demoiselle' might suggest the North's construction of the South before the war as a woman out of control, King's critique focuses on class and on the ways in which gender serves to construct class; upper-class men require the conspicuous construction of 'their women' [...] to manifest their status" (Fetterley and Pryse 295). Fetterley and Pryse offer a nuanced reading of "La Grande Demoiselle" that attends to King's structure and narrative framework of the story. But unfortunately, Nagel's more recent critique, again, casts a shadow on King's work by making it seem like an outlier in the collection.

Nagel writes that the "story that follows 'A Drama of Tree' derives from the same historical background but features a female protagonist, the normative case in King's fiction" (Nagel 64). Nagel does not follow up this assessment, emphasizing that a woman protagonist is "normative" for King—another choice that perhaps suggests that King is merely repeating a pattern here. It would be laughable for a scholar to point out that a male author makes the normative choice of male protagonists, especially when this point does not contribute to an overarching argument. Nagel is right to note the "fundamental corruption behind her social

station, one revealed through an emphasis on the tainted source of familial wealth [...]" (Nagel 65). Idalie's familial wealth derives from slave labor. But Nagel fails to comment on Idalie's teaching Black students later in the story. Is this further evidence of Idalie's growth? This seems necessary to discuss. Instead, Nagel focuses on comparing King's work to Faulkner's: "It is a masterful story that in technique anticipates some of William Faulkner's best stories, such as 'A Rose for Emily,' in its use of unreliable narration, humor, and speculation as a basis for narration" (Nagel 67). If Nagel's overarching argument is that *Balcony Stories* romanticizes the Confederacy, Nagel does his argument a disservice by ignoring Idalie's employment and instead emphasizing that, when he sees King as skillful, it is merely when she is supposedly emulating popular male authors of her time.

Readers should ask questions of King's narrators, noticing when a woman's thoughts are hidden from the reader. We cannot assume that Idalie shares the priorities of her husband, a lesson we learn throughout *Balcony Stories*. Honorine in "A Drama of Three" is employed to maintain her husband's pride. Further, scholars have read "La Grande Demoiselle" as Idalie's humiliation, failing to see her change as an improvement to her constitution.

In *Balcony Stories*, marriage is a complex subject, providing solace for some women and spurring the downfall of others. In "Mimi's Marriage," the story that follows "La Grande Demoiselle," Mimi explains that, for her, marriage encourages a more realistic perspective on life, and seeing reality is more important than imagining idealistic husbands and otherworldly romances: "It is the end of dreams, marriage; and that is the good thing about it. God lets us dream to keep us quiet, but he knows when to wake us up, I tell you. The blue bows knew! And now, you see, I prefer my husband to my brun; in fact, Loulou, I adore him, and I am furiously jealous about him" (*Balcony Stories* 53). Contextualizing this passage with the collection's

relationship to the Civil War, one could interpret this as an urging for readers to continue the mission of "La Grande Demoiselle"—to focus on the present rather than imagining an idealistic Confederacy that never really existed. And in King's "Story of a Day," we see the horrors enacted by not remaining in the present, not intervening in cultural corruption while romanticizing the scenery and the past.

King's "Story of a Day" has received a mostly positive critical reception, praised for King's craftsmanship and dedication to lush descriptions of the bayou. However. Stéphanie Durrans writes that "[a]mong all the stories collected in Grace King's *Balcony Stories*, "The Story of a Day" is probably the one that has least attracted the attention of critics" (Durrans 106). While it seems that the story's impressionistic qualities certainly please her critics, it seems that scholars struggle to make sense of the work compared to the rest of the stories in the collection. But I disagree that this story is a "somewhat anomalous part of *Balcony Stories* that "does not involve the central unifying themes of social and economic loss in Reconstruction" (Nagel 71). I do not agree that these are necessarily the central unifying themes of the collection. King herself said she wanted to depict the variety of experiences people were having in New Orleans in response to George Washington Cable. But even if we are skeptical of what Grace King's real motivation was with this collection, the stories are united through many other themes like the dangers of romanticizing the past, shifting women's roles after the Civil War, and the ways that women are often disenfranchised by a system that only benefits a small group of people (white men) while in their prime. The story follows such a sentiment in so far as we see a protagonist named Adorine who must continue living despite a dead husband, and she stops her dreaming to focus on her present. In doing so, she may be socially ostracized as an old maid. However, she's better off than many of the women in the collection.

In the story, a group of women travel into the bayou to speak with Adorine, a woman whose husband died in the swamp. The narrator describes her experience traveling a picturesque and poetic manner that has enchanted literary scholars. Furthermore, she begins by having readers think about the form of the discussion and its structure well also highlighting the privilege of the women who go to see Adorine. The narrator says, “It is really not much, the story; it is only the arrangement of it, as we would say of our dresses and our drawing-rooms” (*Balcony Stories* 69). The narrator starts the story with the focus on the material, on the things that she and women like her possess. Her emphasis on my multiple dresses, multiple drawing-rooms, her way of relating to Adorine being through personal possessions rather than similar experiences.

What is most interesting about the beginning of the story and its impressionistic qualities that scholars have focused on is that language can make such cruel imagery seem so beautiful. Given that Mimi's marriage weaponized language, it is worthwhile to think about how this narrator uses the written word and its ability to glamorize violence. The narrator explains: “It began with the dawn, of course”—demonstrating an air of confidence and assurance as she proceeds into the relatively unknown for her and her companions.” By continuing this sentiment with imagery like the “skiff for our voyage, silvered with dew, waiting in the mist for us, as if it had floated down in a cloud from heaven to the bayou,” the narrator emphasizes that she is glorifying and romanticizing the landscape prior to encountering the visceral horror among the beauties of this scenery.

Much like Mimi in “Mimi’s Marriage,” the narrator in “Story of a Day” provides a criticism of written language by seeming self-conscious about her use of poetic language. Our narrator says, after describing the bayou’s relation to heaven:

> When repeated, this sounds like poor poetry; but that is the way one thinks at day dawn, when the dew is yet, as it were, upon our brains, and our ideas are still half dreams, and our waking hearts, alas! as innocent as waking babies playing with their toes. Our oars waked the waters of the bayou, as motionless as a sleeping snake under its misty cover—to continue the poetical language or thought. (*Balcony Stories* 69)

The narrator describes herself and her naive companions as "innocent as waking babies" to emphasize how they truly do not understand the bayou, despite an outsider perhaps seeing the area as simple or uncivilized. Perhaps this provides an opportunity for Grace King's narrator to critique regionalist writing or perhaps what scholars view regionalist writing as. Maybe the more appropriate genre she is criticizing is travel writing. But the poetical language distracts the narrator from seeing the intricacies and threats of the bayou, another potential critique of those who glamorize the South. Nagel writes that the conclusion of "Story of a Day" is "rich in pathos and empathy, but the tragedy derives not from the war and its aftermath but from the inexorable danger inherent in nature, a matter inaccessible to human intervention" (Nagel 72). However, Nagel takes for granted all the ways that the story alludes to the Civil War or suggests the Civil War and its sentiments. Much of this collection is about what must remain unsaid or spoken in code given this is how women were expected to speak.

The narrator also suggests that there is strength in being raised in danger, which resonates with this collection's theme of women being forced to be resilient, even though this resilience should not be glamorized—a truth that becomes apparent when the women observe the cattle. The narrator says, "It is well that the lilies grow taller and thicker over the more treacherous places; but, misery! misery! not much of the process was concealed from us, for the cattle have to come to the bayou for water" (*Balcony Stories* 73). In this instance, the lilies seem to represent women who grow stronger in more "treacherous places" since the bulk of the story is about

Adorine's loss of her lover and the way she has continued as a spinster, managing to be perseverant after such a loss.

But readers are not meant to see Adorine as without pain. Rather, this pain is masked or silent. This is evident in the drowning of a cow that foreshadows this revelation about women like Adorine. The narrator describes the experience of seeing a cow sinking into the swamp:

> Such a splendid black head that had just yielded breath! The wide-spreading ebony horns thrown back among the morning-glories, the mouth open from the last sigh, the glassy eyes staring straight at the beautiful blue sky above, where a ghostly moon still lingered, the velvet neck ridged with veins and muscles, the body already buried in black ooze. (*Balcony Stories* 73)

At once, this animal can be read as Adorine's lover, who similarly died in the mud. Or, we could see this violence as a representation of how white voyeurs see Black women's bodies as animalistic and simultaneously picturesque, wherein white onlookers are merely bystanders willing to witness the violence and do nothing. Further, this could just be imagery of women slowly and cruelly dying in silence—alone. Is this a horrific image of spinsterhood? Perhaps. And the imagery only gets more horrifying.

The women see a cow sinking into a bayou mud, an image that seems to depict feminine resignation and the violence of womanly existence among a culture of bystanders. The narrator writes:

> And such a pretty red-and-white-spotted heifer, lying on her side, opening and shutting her eyes, breathing softly in meek resignation to her horrible calamity! And, again, another one was plunging and battling in the act of realizing her doom: a fierce, furious, red cow, glaring and bellowing at the soft, yielding inexorable abysm under her, the bustards. (*Balcony Stories* 73)

The narrator emphasizes that the heifer is "pretty," focusing on aesthetic beauty rather than any other values the heifer might have. It seems like a commentary on women of the south in general simply because we say "meek resignation to her horrible calamity." Perhaps this is the truth of

southern womanhood the king wants to reveal through this narrator. Or it could be a commentary on how outsiders view the South seeing that women are weak and are overly sympathetic to them instead of reading them as these poor defenseless creatures rather than independent subjects capable of taking care of themselves.

King's critics tend to read her characters as overly pathetic rather than strong enough to cope with the loss or tragedy. As Robison writes, "The story captures a sense of the immutable tragedy of Adorine's life through the dreamlike, timeless quality of its setting, not through plot or character development. [...] The story makes no mention of its historical setting, and how long Adorine has mourned or how long the narrator visits the bayou is not clear. Because of the story's impressionistic quality, Adorine is finally portrayed as a mythic character who seems to live outside of an actual time or place and who thus seems passively fated to suffer" (Robison 64). When "Story of a Day" is read outside of the *Balcony Stories* collection, it certainly makes sense to read the story as timeless, surreal, and impressionistic. But given the overarching setting, historical context, and frequent allusions to the Civil War and Reconstruction throughout *Balcony Stories*, I argue that the story is read differently alone than in the collection. Also, referring to Robison's interpretation of Adorine's fate, it seems unfair to interpret this story as wholly tragic in terms of how Adorine's life could have concluded had she gotten married.

Considering that so many of King's stories are about women being conditioned to cope with tragedy, I would prefer this reading of the story though there are a variety of readings that are possible here. As Durrans writes, King's short story "brings together and plays upon a number of generic conventions that constitute any number of potential interpretive frameworks available to a writer of the era" (Durrans 106). There are a myriad of ways to interpret the works

in *Balcony Stories*, and the tendency of scholars to adopt an autobiographical approach to King's stories limits the potential of these interpretations.

Returning to the story, the woman narrator realizes the effect of the white, feminine gaze as the cattle watch the sinking cow drift closer and closer to her death. One could read this instance as sympathy for white women who merely watch Black women suffer. But at the same time, such a reading would accept that all women are of the same species, humanizing women of color. The narrator says that "settling afar off, and her own species browsing securely just out of reach. They understand that much, the sea-marsh cattle, to keep out of reach of the dead combatant. In the delirium of anguish, relief cannot be distinguished from attack, and rescue of the victim has been proved to mean goring of the rescuer" (*Balcony Stories*73). In Francis Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy*, we see so much of white women not helping other white women or black women. So, it is possible this could be a commentary of how women do not help one another when they are in danger. And it seems like this is a method of survival. What is interesting here is that through all of this imagery of nature, King's narrator lifts the veil on our assumed civilization. If we are so civilized, we wouldn't be able to see so much of our own behavior in the behavior of these cattle. But do these women see themselves in this behavior? This is unclear.

The women witness all this horror and eventually arrive at Adorine's home. We learn that she is an old maid even though she's only twenty-five years old. And through all we've witnessed this in forms overarching themes that have gone unnoticed in scholarship heretofore. The narrator says of meeting Adorine:

> A woman seldom alters her coiffure after a calamity of a certain nature happens to her. The figure had taken a compact rigidity, an unfaltering inflexibility, all the world away from the elasticity of matronhood; and her eyes were clear and fixed like her figure, neither falling, nor rising, nor

> puzzling under other eyes. Her lips, her hands, her slim feet, were conspicuously single, too, in their intent, neither reaching, nor feeling, nor running for those other lips, hands, and feet which should have doubled their single life. (*Balcony Stories* 75-6)

Much like the heifer earlier in the story, Adorine is seemingly passive—not moving, not running, not feeling, not crying out for help if she's suffering like the cattle? This story offers a larger commentary on spinsterhood and the ways that the other women don't help her. As a result, Adorine is forced to grow stronger because she's not helped and yet the strength is not fetishized. I don't want to read Adorine as helpless as other scholars have and yet it seems that Grace King is interested in offering complex depiction of what women wear and how they're not only weak or strong. They can have desires that don't match their morals and they can be contradictory in many ways. Adorine is a spinster continuing to survive and try to foster a household.

This story does not fetishize or glorify Adorine's circumstances. Instead, Adorine's story is enmeshed in expectations of women's conduct, economic disparity, violence, senseless tragedy, mythology, and Acadian culture. As the narrator notes, "Adorine's family, Acadian peasants though they were, knew as much about it as any one else, and all that any one knows about it is that marriage is the cure-all, and the only cure-all, for love" (*Balcony Stories* 84). Adorine may be better off for not having gotten married. Further, Adorine provides an example of a woman who is still in love with her partner because she did not marry him. It does not seem that scholars have considered the story's relationship to the Civil War and the ways that the violence and the romance are part and parcel with the South's attitude towards the Confederacy at this point. Perhaps it is Grace King's past that clouds that interpretation considering that scholars don't want to read the story in a way that has King criticizing a fetishization of the Civil War or the Confederacy.

Overall, *Balcony Stories* may seem like an ill-compiled selection of short stories, but it should be read contrary to scholarship that merely accuses it of romanticizing the past or, more specifically, the antebellum South, the Civil War, the Confederacy, and Reconstruction. Instead, it does the opposite by consistently criticizing those who glamorize the past and the Southern landscape. This collection calls for women specifically to attend to the variety of women surrounding them instead of looking back to the past as better than what it was. Further, the women storytellers show that sharing stories changes how we see both the past and the present.

CHAPTER VI: SOUTHERN WOMEN AND THE LITERATI

Nineteenth-century American women had to persuade the public that they, too, should be allowed to make money from writing. As Fanny Fern depicts in her novel *Ruth Hall*, writing was a way for women to support themselves and their families. But women were not always welcomed to literary circles—especially when their work gained popularity among the public. Speaking of women's success in publishing, Nathaniel Hawthorne writes, "America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with the trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the 'Lamplighter,' and other books neither better nor worse?—worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000" (Hawthorne 87). Hawthorne connects the state of the literary marketplace with the morality of readers, but frustration with women's works outselling his own undercuts any real concern Hawthorne had for the moral fabric of his fellow readers. To speak to today's readers, why is it that E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* is outselling Pulitzer Prize-winning novels? Say what you will about the quality of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or *Twilight*; these books have as much to say about their readers as any other. They speak to their current audience and current cultural moment, which drives sales. But it is women's invitation to the literary circles that seems to drive Hawthorne's sentiment the most.

And this isn't just a nineteenth-century problem. Nineteenth-century sentimental fiction still gets underwritten as not literary enough and not artistic enough. As I have discussed throughout this project, nineteenth-century domestic fiction, sentimental fiction, women's fiction, and other genres that share sentimental rhetoric get undermined as badly written. This can be seen in an episode of Crash Course US History, a YouTube course hosted by John Green.

John Green and his brother Hank founded the Crash Course YouTube channel in 2006, and as of November 2021, the channel has twelve million subscribers. Host John Green is an author of young adult novels, including *The Fault in Our Stars*. As a writer of young adult novels that often criticize the romanticization of young women and girls as oversimplified objects of desire, Green identifies himself as a feminist and a proponent of marginalized group.

But in his 2013 YouTube video "Women in the 19th Century: Crash Course US History #16," author John Green boldly explains to an intended audience of high school students: "Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the terrible but very important *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (8:14). He does not explain why *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is terrible, but one could assume he means the writing style, the deliberate rhetorical choices Stowe had to make that did not lend itself to more imaginative writing, or even just the disparity between twenty-first century literature and nineteenth-century literature. Even more so, Green does not mention the genre in which Uncle Tom's Cabin is written. Green continues, "There's a reason we read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in history classes and not in literature ones, but *Uncle Tom's Cabin* introduced millions of Americans to the idea that African American people were people" (8:38). Green treads a dangerous line, suggesting that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other works that served very specific rhetorical purposes should be reserved for history classes and not treated as literature. This is as if to say that literature should not be political, that language should be constructed artistically enough that its intentions are not known, that the audience must be obscured from the ideologies possessed by the author.

Green rightly mentions that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "humanized slaves to such a degree that it was banned throughout most of the South." However, he does not clarify how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fit within the sentimental novel and domestic novel categories of writing. Further, Green

does not explain why reading such literature at the time was both politically engaging and entertaining for Stowe's contemporaries. Understanding the literary marketplace, popular literature, and developing styles of writing continues to be useful in the study of literature, and while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may not please twenty-first-century readers due to changing tastes in writing, Green should note this point before relegating *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to history curricula.

The authors I have discussed viewed themselves—to varying degrees—as serving a purpose for their communities, trying to enact change with their work. But the labor of writing and being a creator of literature is a vital talking point of the nineteenth century. For Caroline Howard Gilman, Augusta Jane Evans, and Grace King, a concern regarding the recovery or increased attention to nineteenth-century Southern white women's writing is that this increased attention would preserve racist attitudes from the antebellum and postbellum era. However, this project has argued that these works underscore how white feminism relies on racist arguments to bolster white women's ability to self-regulate.

Writers like Gilman, Evans, Harper, and King laid the foundation for Foucault's conceptualization of docile bodies. These women wrote sentimental fiction centralized around how the body relates to identity formation in a landscape where Southern women were expected to lack bodies—and thus lack bodily autonomy. Gilman and Evans' works, in following the template of the sentimental novel, tries to give women uniform instructions on how to act. All these questions on ways of being seek easy, singular answers. Harper's work shows the limitations of these instructions to white women and the difficulty for women of color to fit into the Cult of Domesticity as it currently exists. And Grace King's work shows the changing disposition toward conduct manuals and that if we really understand each woman as individuals, we cannot assign easy templates on their ways of living. These scripts no longer work. Each

woman's body matches the oral tradition, both public and private, ephemeral in its effect. It can only be understood in its time and place.

In the case of Harper, sentimental rhetoric and domestic fiction creates a way to escape the rhetorical limitations of her marked body through writing. But for King, sentimental fiction is used to explain the ways that the written word has limited women's opportunities and shaped their expectations of marriage, of their autonomy, and of the place where they live.

To study nineteenth-century American literature should be to confront the difficult, often contradictory, violence, oppressive realities of life embedded in the institution of slavery. If we ask scholars remove racist authors or potentially racist authors from our reading lists let alone our syllabi and from our anthologies, we risk losing an awareness for the rhetorical strategies that continue to perpetuate racist ideologies without reflection and examination. These authors should be placed in their context with empathy as we would any other author—even though it feels uncomfortable to be able to empathize with someone who also empathized with the Confederacy.

I remain invested in this conversation because our understanding of nineteenth-century history commonly comes into question when we debate whether or not we should have Confederate monuments in museums or cemeteries. I am continually reaffirmed in my dedication to the study of nineteenth-century literature because it is still so important today; we should continue studying the variety of voices that were prominent at the time and give an accurate historical depiction of what the contemporary literary marketplace was like and what influence Southern women made. If we take for granted what contributions Southern women made amongst their contemporaries, we risk replicating the racism that some of these women perpetuated. And we also take for granted the contributions that we might want to give them praise for. Just because someone is racist doesn't mean they didn't argue for women's rights; we

cannot pretend that early feminists were absent of the racist ideologies they were entrenched in whether they were Northern or Southern.

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