INDIVIDUALISM POSSESSED: THE SUPERNATURAL MARRIAGE PLOT, 1820-1870

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INTRODUCTION

THE SUPERNATURAL MARRIAGE PLOT, 1820-1870

Despite the prevalence of literary supernaturalism in the United States during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, there has been little critical exploration of this class of fiction, and few sustained, book-length studies. Most of the notable examinations of Victorian American supernaturalism take the form of essay collections such as *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1820-1920*, edited by Howard Kerr, John W. Crowley, and Charles L. Crow, *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, edited by Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar, and *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination,* edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. The introductory material to these texts provides a broad sense of historical context—supernatural fiction, which can trace its roots to the late-eighteenth-century Gothic novel, was hugely popular in nineteenth-century America and represents "part of the development of modern psychological fiction" (Kerr 1)—but little deep insight into the precise functions of literary supernaturalism or into the cultural specificities being addressed by such tales.[1] Further, studies of supernatural fiction almost universally focus on ghostliness,[2] neglecting the array of supernatural figures that materialize in Victorian American fiction. In this study, I will argue for the existence of a previously unexplored genre, one which arises at the intersection of supernaturalism and the marriage plot, concerns itself with definitions of marriage and gender roles,

enters the cultural debate between selfless angeldom and self-interested individualism as models of female identity, and describes its female protagonists (and often its male protagonists as well) using supernatural language.

This genre, which I will refer to as the supernatural marriage plot, peaks between 1820 and 1870, the decades between the emergence of the Angel in the House and the rise of the New Woman, and the era during which the genre of domestic fiction materialized. In general, supernatural marriage plots are grappling with the emergence of domestic ideology, which arose during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s in response to industrialization's metamorphosis of the middle-class home:

> While the man ventured forth into the world, the woman at home gained an independent realm of her own, one that was no longer constantly under male domination. . . . Nor was the wife tied down to wheel and loom, hearth and dairy. Once home manufacture was transferred to workplace, the woman at home was responsible primarily for housekeeping, child rearing, and moral and religious life. (Woloch 114)

Because the center of production moved outside the home, women and men were defined as occupying separate spheres; further, the home was redefined as a refuge from the harshness of the outside world. With these separate spheres came separate roles, which came to be viewed as innate:

> men were expected to be competitive, assertive, individualistic, and materialistic so as to be able to make their way in the world. The woman at home needed a compensatory set of character traits. Dependent and affectionate, she was also pious, pure, gentle, nurturant, benevolent, and sacrificing. (Woloch 119)

Woman's supposed piety and purity elevated her to the supernatural realm of the angels, as Barbara Welter, quoting 1841's "Female Influence," indicates: "If [woman] chose to listen to other voices than those of her proper mentors, sought other rooms

than those of her home, she lost both her happiness and her power—'that almost magic power, which, in her proper sphere, she now wields over the destinies of the world'" (211). In exchange for this magic power to sway the opinions of husbands and fathers—referred to as "influence"—the Angel in the House was expected to relinquish individualistic desire and agency in favor of selfless service to others and submission to masculine authority. This submission was transformed by domestic ideology into another primary source of True Womanly authority, in that "doing the will of one's husband and father brings an access of divine power" ("The Other American Renaissance" 43). And her self-abnegation, along with her purity, held the key to her supernatural status by figuratively rendering her a disembodied spirit. Any woman who "rejected these constraints . . . [was] viewed as unnatural" (Smith-Rosenberg 13) and, by denying that "'the power of woman is her dependence,'" she supposedly relinquished access to the one true source of feminine authority (Boylan 162).

Domestic ideology's convention of obedience to male authority figures was reinforced by law. Although woman's legal status was left up to the individual states because of the Constitution's neglect of this issue, the states were generally consistent in deriving their statutes from English common law's concept of *coverture*, in which the identity of the married woman became absorbed into that of her husband. The fact that women "'died' a civil death upon marriage with their independent civil identities tossed aside" meant that they could not enter into contracts or file lawsuits without their husbands' permission, nor could they own property (Rowland 17). These legal concerns, along with "the very different public

activities of women and men, and the tensions between women's activism and popular ideas of proper domesticity, generated a new debate about the 'woman question' in the 1830s" and led to the first Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Evans 76). Central to the movement was a concern with marriage reform; "'more congenial marriages'" were "a major feminist goal" (Woloch 277), as were the economic and legal transformations which would render marriage more equitable. In particular, the early feminists advocated an individualistic model of female identity:

> One of the main things that differentiated women's participation in the woman's rights movement from their participation in other reforms and benevolent activities like abolition, temperance, and poor relief was the degree to which the struggle for woman's rights represented a rejection of the prescription that women should be selfless. . . . women's demand for improved educational and economic opportunities and political equality was based unabashedly on the principles of individual self-interest. (Hoffert 34)

As a result, the movement also stressed an ideological transformation that would undermine angelic selflessness; as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the organizers of the Seneca Falls Convention, told a reporter, "'put it down in capital letters: SELF-DEVELOPMENT IS A HIGHER DUTY THAN SELF-SACRIFICE'" (quoted in Dobson 223). And given the concept of possessive individualism, which had become "an article of cultural faith" by the mid-eighteenth century and according to which "[o]ne must claim ownership of property in order to be an individual" (Brown 2, Weinauer 14), the feminist concern with property ownership contributed to their broader project of promoting female self-development.

One response to the rise of domestic ideology and the debate over the status of women was the emergence of domestic, or sentimental, fiction, a hugely popular

genre which dominated the literary scene throughout the middle of the century. Domestic fiction centers on a defiant heroine who learns, through an education in Christian duty and humility, "to transmute rebellious passion into humble conformity to others' wishes" ("The Other American Renaissance" 44). This transformation of rebellious individualist into self-sacrificing angel involves the acquisition of self-control; as Jane Tompkins notes, "the pain of learning to conquer her own passions is the central fact of the sentimental heroine's existence" (*Sensational Designs* 172). In particular, she must learn to accept her guardians' right to expect her obedience, and as such, she must suppress her indignant response to the mistreatment of authority figures by rationalizing away her sense of injustice—by learning, like Ellen Montgomery of Susan Warner's best-selling sentimental novel *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), to "reason and school herself into right feeling":

> "it is wrong; and am *I* to go and make an apology!—I can't do it." "Yes, for the wrong you have done," said conscience,—"that is all your concern. And [your uncle] has a right to do what he pleases with you and yours, and he may have his own reasons for what he has done . . . he is in the place of a father to you, and you owe him a child's duty." (553-4)

Ellen's conscience—the internalized voice of her mentors—is the voice of self-control, which ensures her submission to the authority of others by continually reinforcing the lesson of sentimental fiction: that rebellion and self-interest are wrong and must be stamped out.

Gerty, the protagonist of Maria S. Cummins' hugely popular sentimental novel *The Lamplighter* (1854) is, along with Ellen Montgomery, one of the "prototypical heroines" of domestic fiction (Kreger 327), and her trajectory exemplifies the transformation undertaken by the typical sentimental heroine.[3] The

novel "makes self-abnegation the highest virtue" (Harris, "Stoddard's *The Morgesons*" 16), and the girl whose "ungoverned and easily roused nature dwelt upon its wrongs" (Cummins 34) finally, through the intervention of her mentors, adopts their philosophy of selflessness and submission:

> Her own great misfortunes and trials could not be helped, and were borne without repining; but the misfortunes and trials of others became her care, the alleviation of them her greatest delight. (Cummins 57)

Contrary to the perspective of critics such as Ann Douglas, who argues that domestic fiction taught women to do the "dirty work of their society" (11) by making them complicit in their own oppression, sentimental fiction in fact attempted to help women contend with the limitations imposed on them:

> Most of the novels assume . . . that women will perform most of their life activities in the household and strive to give women traits that would make them emotionally content with comparatively limited space and mobility. (*Woman's Fiction* xxvi).

And as Jane Tompkins argues, these novels are concerned with affording women power given their condition of relative powerlessness:

> Since they could neither own property, nor vote, nor speak at a public meeting if both sexes were present, women had to have a way of defining themselves which gave them power and status nevertheless, in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world. That is the problem sentimental fiction addresses. (*Sensational Designs* 160-61)

However, although sentimental fiction contributed to the elevation of women's status in many ways and allowed them covertly to negotiate power, for those concerned with the reform of marriage laws and troubled by the limitations of women's appointed roles, those who—like the early feminists—wished to revise

conceptions of femininity to allow for an individualistic model of self-definition, the trajectory and tactics of sentimental fiction were clearly problematic.

This troubled response to the tenets of domestic fiction is central to my project, which focuses on a second major generic response to the rise of angel ideology, the supernatural marriage plot. This previously unexplored genre does not involve literal supernatural events; rather, it uses supernatural metaphors—for instance, describing a character as an elf, an imp, a witch, a ghost—to depict a female character's "masculine" and rebellious traits, those traits which she is attempting to preserve in order to avoid her sentimental counterpart's movement toward angeldom. The degree to which she succeeds in preserving herself depends in large part on the reactions of those around her: at the very least, her future husband must figuratively enter the supernatural realm as well, signifying his ability to accept the nontraditional woman as she is rather than expecting to transform her into some version of the True Womanly ideal. I contend that this genre, like the genre of domestic fiction which spans the same decades, arose in response to the questions posed by angel ideology, and that the two genres are engaging in a debate over the proper roles of men and women in marriage and the legitimacy of angeldom as a means of defining female identity. Further, the supernatural marriage plot, in keeping with midcentury feminism, proposes an individualistic model of identity for women instead of the self-renunciation associated with True Womanhood.

The genre does at times participate in aspects of domestic ideology; for instance, the supernatural marriage plot typically embraces the sentimental notion of sympathy as a universal good for both sexes. And as Nina Baym suggests,

sentimental fiction and ideology permit women to maintain integrity and self-interestedness through covert means, by allowing them on occasion to disguise their own desires in the cloak of duty to others, especially to God. But although both genres seem to have similar goals in their concern with enhancing female power—and although, as Joanne Dobson argues, domestic novels were "often shot through with indications of dissatisfaction and dissent" (226)—supernatural marriage fiction and sentimental fiction differ radically in the forms of power they advocate, the means through which they permit women to access power, and as a result, the models of female identity they promote.

For one, supernatural marriage fiction rejects sentimental fiction's approved trajectory of female development, insisting that women should retain a self-interested awareness of injustice rather than deploying "Christian principle" such that "the spirit of pride [is] entirely broken, and resentment [dies] with self-justification" (*Wide, Wide World* 319, 554). In fact, a number of supernatural marriage plots depict the suppression of self-interested indignation as dangerous to women. *Hobomok*'s selfless women lose their health and ultimately their lives because of their refusal to complain about their husbands' decisions, while *The Hidden Hand* and "A Whisper in the Dark" reveal that domestic fiction, by teaching women to justify the injustices of authority figures, prevents them from detecting their guardians' abuses of authority. The genre also proposes an alternative to submission as a means of achieving power and of covertly clinging to a sense of self, preferring an individualistic ideology that permits women to assert their desires openly and lay claim to "visible power" (Smith-Rosenberg 176). Like the early woman's rights

reformers, who wished "to claim the rights of citizenship based on the principles of individualism and self-interest rather than on the principles of self-sacrifice" (Hoffert 10), the supernatural marriage plot opposes the ethic of utter selflessness promoted by sentimental fiction, in which a woman could pursue her own interests only indirectly, if at all—in the guise of duty—and thus only in limited ways.

Despite Baym's contention that "submissiveness, though sometimes a strategic imperative, was precisely what these stories were making problematic" because each included "an obligatory scene of resistance to authority" (*Woman's Fiction* xxxix), the resistance is minimal, and is far outweighed by the promotion of submission. For instance, although Ellen Montgomery's duty—because of a promise made to one of her mentors—permits her to rebel when her Scottish relatives try to eliminate her morning hour of prayer, her every other desire is subordinated to the wishes of her guardians, who "would do with her and make of her precisely what they pleased, without the smallest regard to her fancy" (504). As Joanne Dobson argues, "[s]elf-sacrifice and domestic submission were principles vaunted for women; self-determination was consistently discouraged"; she also notes that *The Wide, Wide World*'s famous dictum, "'Though we must sorrow, we must not rebel'" "is a concise and apt expression of the nineteenth-century American cultural ethos of ideal femininity" (223). On the whole, whereas sentimental fiction typically attempts to access female power from within the confines of its culture's gender ideology, the supernatural marriage plot, recognizing the restrictive nature of such power, implicitly aligns itself with the early feminists in its desire to transform that ideology.

The marriage plot serves as an obvious narrative form for texts designed to examine the cultural and legal expectations associated with wedlock. And since domestic ideology centers on the institution of marriage, texts ending in marriage represent one of the most obvious sites for an interrogation of the tenets of domesticity. Further, Nina Baym notes that in "virtually all" domestic fiction "the heroine's trajectory ends with a happy marriage" (*Woman's Fiction* xvii); it stands to reason, then, that a corresponding genre would likewise adopt the marriage plot. The traditional critical take on the marriage plot, exemplified by the work of Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Joseph Allen Boone, insists that this plot structure undermines a text's attempts at critique; the marriage plot has often been depicted as an inherently conservative narrative form, both in its assumption of marriage as the only trajectory for women and in its "impetus toward concluding stasis" which "inculcates a vision of a coherence or stability underlying social reality and cultural convention alike" (Boone 78). However, recent criticism takes a more complex view of this narrative structure, examining its role in "contribut[ing] to contemporary debates on women's place at home and in the public sphere, on love and romance, on courtship and marriage" (Tracey 27-8). As Julie A. Shaffer points out, since eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female authors

> have been understood to have been by and large constrained to use the marriage plot form, arraigning that form as useless implies that these writers had no means within fiction to signal their critical stance toward the reigning ideology. (130)

The texts I will be investigating in this study, while embracing the purportedly tidy ending of the marriage plot, nonetheless critique the reigning ideology by exploring

new possibilities for female identity within romantic relationships and calling into question, in both subtle and overt ways, expectations of male authority and female obedience. The use of the marriage plot also serves a practical function: given Victorian America's almost-universal assumption of marriage as woman's sole vocation, these texts reflected the reality of middle-class women's lives—that they would, almost inevitably, marry—and focused on the process of mate selection as a means of permitting continued individualism after marriage. Since woman's legal and social role in marriage was anything but equal, selecting a husband capable of an egalitarian marriage became all the more important. These texts attempt to, as Boone puts it, "reconcil[e] the contradictory pull between the protagonist's independent identity and sexual-marital role," a tension which "takes on a note of special urgency in the case of the intelligent, strong-willed female protagonist" (12, 13).

I have chosen 1870 as the endpoint for my project because, in the decades to follow, the New Woman gradually replaced the Angel in the House: cultural shifts such as the infiltration of feminist concerns into mainstream culture, the rise of female professions, and the rapid expansion of higher education for women all undermined the impact of domestic ideology and led to the decline of domestic fiction. Further, as Nancy Woloch notes, the New Woman was both "more powerful at home" and "likely to be more active outside it" (270). Thus, the undermining of angel ideology that I observe in these texts was, during the 1870s, becoming more ideologically dominant, thereby reducing the need for such fictions. A shift away from the marriage plot also occurs around this time; rather than ending with

marriage, texts began exploring life after marriage, in part because of the realist impulse in fiction, and in part as a response to feminist critiques of women's role in marriage. And, as Nina Baym argues in her landmark study of the genre, domestic fiction also declines at this time, thus ending the dialogue in which supernatural marriage fiction was engaged.

I should at this point pause to clarify my stance on separate spheres ideology in light of more recent critical trends. Contemporary reevaluations of domestic ideology's function in the nineteenth century—spearheaded by critics such as Lora Romero, Cathy Davidson, and Lawrence Buell—have argued that the spheres were never, in reality, as separate as ideology would lead us to believe. The current critical perspective toward the cult of True Womanhood, as Ian Marshall notes, "involves the dismantling of the notion of separate spheres, seeing it as in part a rhetorical construction and seeking to recognize women's influence on 'the main course of human development,' instead of somehow apart from it all" (14-15). Critics engaged in this project argue that "the binaric version of nineteenth-century American history" does not accurately reflect "the different, complicated ways that nineteenth-century American society or literary production functioned" (Davidson, "Preface" 445). In part, this critical effort has involved an examination of the ways in which women played a prominent role in public life throughout the century. As Mary P. Ryan argues in her study *Women in Public,* "contrary to common assumptions that women's place in nineteenth-century America was in the home, it is not difficult to locate Victorian women . . . in the public arena" (3); she is joined in this project of locating public women by other historians who, for instance, focus on

female benevolent associations (Lori D. Ginzberg) and women's work (Jeanne Boydston). And on the literary front, Alison Piepmeier's recent study explores the lives of a cluster of public women, revealing the ways in which they constructed their public selves through various strategies of embodiment and thereby shaped "the available options for women and the larger public culture" (15).

Further, as many critics have noted, "the border between [the spheres] was always porous" (Sklar xiii), and not only was the ideology of separate spheres often strategically deployed to promote this blurring of boundaries, but its influence also expanded well beyond the arena of gender. Amy Kaplan nicely summarizes the issues at stake in this rethinking of the spheres:

> Most studies of this paradigm have revealed the permeability of the border that separates the spheres, demonstrating that the private feminized space of the home both infused and bolstered the public male arena of the market, and that the sentimental values attached to maternal influence were used to sanction women's entry into the wider civic realm from which those same values theoretically excluded them. More recently, scholars have argued that the extension of female sympathy across social divides could violently reinforce the very racial and class hierarchies that sentimentality claims to dissolve. (581)

Numerous critics have explored the ways in which the ideology of separate spheres helped to free women from the very domesticity it sanctioned. For instance, sentimental ideology's prescription of female selflessness opened the door for women's participation in public life by justifying their membership in benevolent associations (Hoffert 34). Susan Coultrap-McQuin argues that female authors were able to enter the public realm of authorship by conforming to the tenets of True Womanhood in their relationships with paternalistic publishers. Similarly, female spiritualists, by insisting that they were simply doing the bidding of the spirits in

their public performances, used notions of submissive, highly spiritualized femininity to validate their appearance on the public stage; mediumship thus "allowed women to discard limitations on women's role without questioning accepted ideas about woman's nature" (Braude 83).

In addition, separate spheres ideology played an integral role in the consolidation of the middle class. For instance, Nancy Armstrong argues that clearly delineating the traits of the domestic woman provided the emerging middle class with a sense of stability and unity; in addition, "the well-regulated home served not merely as a refuge from the fluctuations of men and markets but as a bulwark against social strife" (Lang 15). Ideological constructions of the middle-class home also, as Laura Wexler and Amy Schrager Lang argue, bolstered the middle class at the expense of "different classes and even races who were compelled to play not the leading roles but the human scenery before which the melodrama of middle-class redemption could be enacted"; in other words, the middle class was defined in part through the "fierce devaluation of the extradomestic life" implicit within domestic fiction and ideology (Wexler 16, 17). And as I will discuss later, the concept of a private sphere, by establishing a site of interiority, provided the basis for the concept of male individualism which bolstered the marketplace.

In addition to such critical reevaluations of the ways in which public and private were in fact intermingled and interdependent, recent critics have also examined how the spheres paradigm has impacted critical inquiry itself. The recent essay collection *Separate Spheres No More*, edited by Monika Elbert, attempts in part to "emphasize the connectedness between old male canonical texts and new female

or 'other' canonical works" (16). Piepmeier's study concerns itself with the ways in which "binaries such as private/public and victim/agent . . . shape what critics are able to see" (7). And Romero, in her nuanced examination of the complex ways in which Victorian Americans interacted with domesticity, argues that contemporary critics have consistently viewed domesticity as either hegemonic or countercultural, without recognizing the ways in which "some discourses could be oppositional without being outright liberating. Or conservative without being outright enslaving" (*Home Fronts* 4).

The spheres, then, were never mutually exclusive, either in the ideological functions they served or in the material realities of men's and women's lives. And these newer theoretical perspectives, by illuminating gaps in past critical modalities, have created a reluctance to engage critically with separate spheres ideology. However, the usefulness of such complicating perspectives does not negate the fact that domestic ideology manifested itself as a dualism and that this dualism played a central role in the mid-century debate over the Woman Question. As Susan Coultrap-McQuin notes, "there is ample evidence that women themselves did not wholly conform to prescriptions of True Womanhood; nevertheless, those prescriptions exerted a strong influence on what was seen, understood, and said about women's lives" (11).

Further, I contend that supernatural marriage fictions, like many nineteenth-century texts, are responding precisely to this ideological bifurcation, and as such it cannot be dismissed as a valid lens through which to analyze them. In approaching these texts, I am taking the perspective that "public and private spheres were

metaphorical rather than actual places" (*American Women Writers* 11), but insisting that "[a]ll women knew the tenets of femininity; these tenets formed the bedrock of their acculturation" (Dobson 224). And even the most cursory survey of nineteenth-century texts—from women's magazines and medical texts to poetry and fiction—reveals the degree to which the metaphorical Cult of Angeldom and rigidly binarized notions of gender dominated the cultural landscape. An 1856 essay, "The Homes of America the Hope of the Republic," is representative of the typical ideological bifurcation between women's and men's spheres in its idealization of the "charmed circle of HOME" (292) as a refuge from the world:

> At night, when we return from laboring with brain or hand . . . the footprints of angels are all about its doors. Truth, purity, virtue have kept it in our absence, and swept and garnished it for our return. (297)

And the 1859 essay "Female Influence in the Affairs of State—Politics Not Woman's Sphere" depicts woman's realm as rigidly circumscribed and inescapable: "they have a sphere out of which they cannot travel, and which they therefore dignify and adorn" (177). The writings of nineteenth-century feminists who embraced a more individualistic model of identity for women likewise reflect the cultural dominance of separate spheres ideology; Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844), for instance, represents in large part a rebuttal of her culture's notions of woman's proper place, including the prevalent concern that feminism will "'break up family union, [take a] wife away from the cradle and kitchen-hearth to vote at polls, and preach from a pulpit,'" thereby preventing her attending to "'her own sphere'" (15). In order to interrogate their culture's ideological insistence on separate spheres and rigid gender binaries, then, Victorian authors had to engage

directly with these ideologies, suggesting that the concept of separate spheres cannot be abandoned so readily, and in fact, must be addressed in order adequately to analyze the ways in which authors responded to the schematic notions of gender promoted by their culture.

And keeping sight of these bifurcations is particularly crucial in examining the supernatural marriage plot, given that the authors of this genre underscored—and often exaggerated—the tenets of domestic ideology in order to interrogate them. For instance, both Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) manifest their concern with woman's place by deploying the imagery of spheres and depicting them as rigid enclosures. In Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), the primary source of marital discord is a radical opposition between male and female spheres: the heroine's father sees "nothing beyond the material," while her mother is "indifferent to the world" (24, 17), and her sister and brother-in-law literally partition their home into separate halves. Many supernatural marriage plots, following in the tradition of the eighteenth-century female gothic discussed by Kate Ferguson Ellis in *The Contested Castle*, equate domesticity with imprisonment and depict the home as a separate world in which women are sequestered: *The Morgesons* contrasts an adventurous individualist with her sister, a childlike agoraphobe, and E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) and Louisa May Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" (1863) both warn of the dangers of domesticity and male authority by imprisoning female characters in attics and asylums. And many texts—including Catharine Maria Sedgwick's "The Country Cousin" (1830) and Augusta Jane Evans' *St. Elmo* (1866), as well as *The*

Hidden Hand and "A Whisper in the Dark," depict ghostliness as a way station between individualism (the realm of men) and angeldom (the realm of women), suggesting that traversing the boundary between the spheres involves a traumatic crossing over into a different state of being. These exaggerations reflect authors' profound concern with the rigidity of the ideological separation between the sexes, and emphasize the continued scholarly relevance of the concept of separate spheres.

Supernatural marriage fictions confront mythologies about gender not only because of the cultural dominance of separate spheres ideology, but also because they are attempting to combat this ideology by creating a set of countermyths. Just as antebellum feminists "rejected metaphors most closely associated with woman's traditional sphere of home and benevolence" (Hoffert 11), authors of supernatural marriage fiction established their own, nondomestic set of metaphors, replacing the supernatural angel with the supernaturalism of fairies, ghosts, and witches. And what is at stake in this metaphorical debate is the very definition of female selfhood. As critics such as Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins have noted, the angel of domestic fiction is typically not the passive, clinging, emotional creature that one would expect; rather, domestic ideology often embraced the virtues of hard work, industry, and emotional self-control as the ideal traits of the True Woman. However, despite this emphasis on activity and resolve, the expectation of obedience to husbands and fathers, the renunciation of self-interest, and the accompanying journey of the domestic heroine from rebellious girl to angelic woman centers on her "vanquishing all individualistic desire" (Kreger 333). "[T]he structures of [women's] socialization were in direct conflict with the doctrine of American individualism" (Dobson 224),

and it is this denial of female individualism that lies at the crux of the debate between domestic fiction and supernatural marriage fiction. Whereas domestic ideology insists that women should live primarily for others, rely on "influence" as their sole source of power, and subordinate self-interest in order to reconcile themselves to the injustices associated with living "in a condition of servitude" (*Sensational Designs* 173), the supernatural marriage plot allows for female autonomy and self-development. This genre proposes an alternative to angelic selfhood by raising the specter of an individualistic model of identity for women.

As critics such as Gillian Brown and Joyce Warren have noted in their studies of American individualism, nineteenth-century domesticity represents a site of security and stability, a region that protects the self from the vicissitudes of the newly emerging marketplace. Woman and the home "represented stability in a rapidly changing society" (Warren 8) and provided a "refuge for the individual [which] signified the private domain of individuality away from the marketplace" (Brown 3). Domesticity thus became the "correlative to, as well as the basis of, men's individuality" (Brown 4), and, as a result of their role in creating the conditions that allowed for individualism, women were denied access to individualism in their own right. As Warren notes, "it is the man who has been encouraged to achieve, who has sought the expansion and development of the self. The role of the woman was not to *be* the achiever but to be available to be *used* by the achiever for his advancement" (6). Despite Emerson's support of the women's movement, the presumed maleness of the achiever is nonetheless evident in his essay "Self-Reliance," in which he argues that "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one

of its members . . . The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion," and insists that "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist" (49-50). And as Fuller argues in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, most of her contemporaries "think that nothing is so much to be dreaded for a woman as originality of thought or character" and that "self-dependence, which [is] honored in men, is deprecated as a fault in most women" (22). This overwhelmingly masculine depiction of individualism underscores the difficulties facing women who wished to evade the conformity demanded of the angel, who longed for the expansion and improvement of the self and the right to self-ownership promised by individualism.

In proposing an individualistic version of self-fashioning for women, the supernatural marriage plot speaks to implicit contradictions in domestic ideology's definitions of "human" and "inhuman," "natural" and "unnatural." Although the angel is a supernatural being, she is considered natural, the embodiment of "True" Womanhood, and, as we shall see in Chapter II, she is depicted in decidedly nonsupernatural terms in the context of domestic fiction. The female individualist's supernatural status in part reflects her abjection at the hands of Victorian culture, which considers such a woman "unnatural," even inhuman, because she is considered unfeminine, and which denies her human status by casting her out of the social band. At the same time, however, the supernatural marriage plot tends to rehabilitate such figures—figures who would, in the context of domestic fiction, be "humanized" into angeldom—by depicting these unnatural, inhuman beings in very sympathetic terms and by portraying the supposedly masculine qualities associated with supernaturalism in a generally positive light. Rather than being limited to a

generic feminine identity and worshipped by men who cannot see beyond the fantasy of perfect angeldom, women should, these texts imply, have access to the multiplicity offered by individualism and the fallibility offered by human, rather than divine, status.

Further, supernatural marriage fiction, ironically enough, serves to humanize its inhuman protagonists. This genre centers on the unruly, willful, individualistic girl who is typically subdued into angeldom through the machinations of domestic fiction, and thwarts this transformation by protecting her with talismanic supernatural language. These texts suggest that the traits which domestic fiction subdues or strips away in order to "reveal" the True Woman beneath are in fact the very traits which make the heroine complex, interesting, and appealing, and which differentiate her from the homogeneous mass of perfect and pious angels. The supernatural marriage plot thus implicitly humanizes and naturalizes that which domestic ideology renders inhuman and unnatural. In the process, it suggests a connection between "human" status and an individualistic model of identity. Although it may seem odd, on the surface of it, to use supernatural language to insist on a character's humanity, this approach in fact pushes the logic of domestic fiction to its inevitable conclusion. Since domestic fiction depicts a supernatural figure—the angel—as normative by enshrouding her in decidedly realistic, nonsupernatural rhetoric, the texts I am examining must deploy supernaturalism to depict the angel's counterpart, the "human" woman.

I will, then, use the term *human* throughout the project to refer to supernatural marriage fiction's implicit definition of humanity: by applying

individualism to both sexes and suggesting that the binary oppositions integral to domestic ideology are not nearly as clear-cut as proponents of angeldom would like to believe, these texts emphasize the shared humanity of men and women. *Human* will also suggest, at a more basic level, the opposition between supernatural and nonsupernatural beings, an opposition whose ideological implications are at stake in supernatural marriage fiction. If being labeled "unwomanly" translates into being labeled "unnatural," and being labeled "unnatural" translates into being labeled "inhuman," then those rebelling against domestic ideology are fighting not only for their chosen sense of identity, but for their literal status as human beings.

Although the supernatural language used to describe these inhuman humans is quite varied, certain terms predominate, and a brief overview would be useful at this point. In traditional European folklore, elves, sylphs, and sprites are all, loosely speaking, types of fairies; as such, nineteenth-century authors tend to use the terms rather interchangeably. In Victorian parlance, all of these terms connote childlike playfulness and mischief, as does *imp*, which refers to a small demon whose mischief, like that of elves, can sometimes adopt a more malicious tone. *Elf* and *sprite,* however, are typically used to emphasize a character's teasing, mischievous nature, while *fairy and sylph* typically suggest charm, beauty, and ethereality. Like fairies and elves, which are at once delicately beautiful and rebelliously mischievous, the witch figure suggests a dual, seemingly conflicting nature: *witch* suggests both a woman with disturbing powers living a life of isolation and an enchanting beauty associated with the attractions of romantic love.

The potential maliciousness of many of these supernatural figures—demons, imps, elves, witches—likewise reflects a duality in these texts, and could in fact be read as a critique of female individualism. In some instances, such a vexed depiction could reflect a conflict in the author's feelings about a rejection of angeldom. However, the sympathy with which these supernatural individualists are usually portrayed suggests other impulses at work in these texts. For one, the negative connotations at times associated with supernatural metaphors reflect the dominant culture's disdain toward female individualists, the very disdain which leads to the isolation endured by these figures. Further, the conflicted nature of these supernatural figures mirrors the conflicted nature—the shadings of dark and light—one would find in a flawed, human woman, as opposed to the purity and perfection demanded of the angelic ideal. Thus, the association of supernatural figures with female individualists accurately reflects the complexity of character being sought by women who reject an angelic identity.

Further, the duality inherent in these supernatural metaphors speaks to the very problem being addressed by authors of the supernatural marriage plot: angel ideology's assumption that femininity cannot exist in the absence of utter purity and selflessness, that a woman would unsex herself and relinquish her peculiarly feminine power by pursuing an individualistic identity. The particular emphasis on fairydom and witchery in the supernatural marriage plot suggests an attempt to counter the notion of separate spheres by evoking mythical beings that are conventionally perceived as at once alluring and disruptive. By combining ethereal, bewitching feminine beauty with mischievous unruliness, these texts implicitly

counter angel ideology's insistence that individualism for women would strip them of their femininity. And by depicting the individualistic woman as a supernatural being possessed of mysterious powers, these texts undermine the sentimentalists' assumption that True Womanhood represents women's only potential source of power. Supernaturalism in these texts thus serves to defuse common Victorian anxieties about the ramifications of a more individualistic identity for women.

Such a bewitching yet individualistic woman is the heroine of Child's *Hobomok*. Like Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the other focus of Chapter I, Child's novel centers on a "supernatural" woman who is ostracized for her individualism, and who must find a way to come to terms with society while simultaneously preserving her self. In addition to establishing the basic patterns at play in the supernatural marriage plot, this chapter explores the importance of male transformation in these texts, and—in *The Scarlet Letter*—the consequences when such a transformation fails to occur.

Chapter II, which contrasts Stoddard's *The Morgesons* with Evans' *St. Elmo*, demonstrates supernatural marriage fiction's role as a counterbalancing force to domestic fiction, and reveals that the two genres were engaged in a dynamic, ongoing dialogue. Both genres conventionally open with a rebellious, individualistic girl, one who, in the domestic novel, is subdued (typically through Christian ministrations) into angeldom. But where Cassandra Morgeson's story arc involves negotiating a path to adulthood that evades the domestic novel's angelic transformation, *St. Elmo's* supernatural individualist—whose supernaturalism is, from the outset, depicted as a diseased state which must be purged in order for her

to access her true, womanly nature—descends from elfishness through ghostliness to a final, trancelike angeldom.

This implicit connection between ghostliness and living death is the focus of Chapter III, which explores the ways in which the supernatural marriage plot, by problematizing ghostliness, critiques the social and legal disadvantages that renderwomen powerless and invisible. In addition, through this gloomy depiction of ghostliness the genre implicitly rejects the disembodiment associated both with angeldom and with an earlier paradigm of citizenship. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler argues, mid-century feminists recognized the vexed nature of the early republic's abstracted model of citizenship, and tried rhetorically to reclaim the body as a means of strengthening their position. The supernatural marriage plot, I contend in Chapter IV, participates in this "siege on the political abstraction of personhood" (Sanchez-Eppler 5) by rejecting a ghostly evasion of the body in favor of adopting other, nonhuman bodies. Rather than laying claim to individualism by escaping the contested female body entirely—a move which would refuse cultural and scientific attempts to define and catalogue the female body by appealing to a republican notion of equal, disembodied souls—the protagonist of the supernatural marriage plot instead evades the expectations associated with the human female body by metaphorically occupying alternate, supernatural bodies. Such a strategy enables female characters not only to elude the rigidly defined identity associated with femaleness, but also to avoid being trapped into a new, stereotyped identity; by affiliating themselves with a varied assortment of bodies rather than limiting themselves to a single alternative, they avoid the trap of simply replacing one easily-

defined body with another. This refusal to be pinned down manifests itself most vividly in the shapeshifting Capitola Black, heroine of Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*. This master of disguise interrogates the inviolability of gender binaries and—as we shall see—pushes the conventions of supernatural individualism to their logical extreme.

CHAPTER I

THE MAGIC SPHERE OF SYMPATHY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEN AND COMMUNITIES

This first chapter will establish some of the fundamental conventions of the supernatural marriage plot, focusing particularly on the genre's depiction of its central figure, the supernatural individualist, along with the various functions of supernaturalism, the factors which allow heroines to preserve their individualism, and the role of suitors in these marriage plots. I will focus on two texts—Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)—which highlight some of these basic features of the supernatural marriage plot; further, because marriage in *The Scarlet Letter* is thwarted and displaced onto the younger generation, this text will reveal some of the conditions necessary for a successful supernatural marriage plot.

The genre resists the demands of angel ideology by promoting female individualism—a model of self-definition that allows for self-governance rather than the submission demanded of the angel in the house and for complexity and uniqueness rather than the uniform angelic identity expected of all True Women—and by engendering sympathy for the outcast state endured by such "unacceptable" women. The supernatural language used to describe these heroines functions metaphorically to depict their individualistic, often stereotypically masculine traits, and their supernaturalism in part reflects their distinctiveness in a cultural and

literary climate in which angeldom is the expected norm. Supernaturalism also reflects the isolation visited upon these figures for their iconoclasm, especially given cultural demands that women conform to a rigid and homogeneous model of female identity.

Further, the genre deploys supernaturalism to counter the mythology of angeldom by creating its own, alternate mythology. And the sheer variety of supernatural figures who populate this alternate mythology—the elf, the witch, the demon, the imp—in itself serves as an implicit critique of angeldom. Nina Auerbach's study of British phenomena such as the Victorian mermaid craze argues that such mythologies rendered woman a "single vivid creature of seemingly endless mutations and personae" (4). But whereas Auerbach's reading of this rebellious female figure conflates angels with other supernatural beings and depicts supernaturalism simply as a reflection of woman's "mysterious strength," suppressed by "the social restrictions that crippled women's lives" in an attempt to "exorcise" their power (8), I contend that the variegated nature of supernatural heroines in fact relates to their individualism, to their direct repudiation of angeldom. The supernatural individualist is multiform, but an angel is an angel, and this distinction between the two supernatural mythologies available to women suggests the degree to which True Women are expected to be fundamentally alike, to strip themselves of their complex and distinctive individuality. As Joanne Dobson argues of domestic fiction,

> to leave individuality behind and conform in the end to ideal womanhood, was the fate of the overwhelming majority of female characters in novels by men as well as women. Both writers and readers were not only familiar with,

> but indoctrinated in, genre conventions demanding that 'womanliness' triumph over individuality. (226)

Women may achieve a form of power through angeldom, but they do so at the cost of their individualistic capacity for self-definition.

However, it is not only the angel who must contend with the loss of her humanity; her elfish counterpart, as a supernatural being herself, must sacrifice another aspect of her humanity, the very aspect which the angel is able to retain. The angel sacrifices her individualistic identity in exchange for normative status and access to human society; the supernatural individualist retains this identity, but at the cost of acceptance by those around her. Ironically, even though she is, according to the logic of supernatural marriage fiction, fundamentally more "human" than the angel in her multifaceted individuality, her blending of conventionally masculine and feminine traits, and her fallibility, she is treated as less than human and forced into isolation because of her refusal of angeldom. The fates of these opposing supernatural figures thus reveal the double bind facing Victorian women: regardless of the path they choose, they are expected to relinquish some aspect of their humanity. The only solution for the supernatural individualist is the acceptance of those around her; only if others can recognize her individuality can she become fully human.

By situating their supernatural individualists in the colonial period, an era conventionally associated with intolerance and pressure to conform, *Hobomok* and *The Scarlet Letter* implicitly interrogate their own culture's intolerance of women who refuse to conform to the homogeneous identity prescribed for them by angel

ideology. These novels depict Puritan rigidity and rationalism as an extreme version of masculinity, and use Puritanism to comment on the ways in which Victorian culture in general, and Victorian men in particular, reject individualistic women. The use of Puritanism thus allows these texts to highlight one of the fundamental features of the supernatural marriage plot: the isolation visited upon individualistic women for their repudiation of angelic conformity. However, in both of these texts, the transformation of the heroine's community through the power of sympathy allows for her ultimate reabsorption into human society.

As the texts in this chapter will reveal, the supernatural individualist can retain her individuality in an angel-obsessed culture in one of two ways. She can remove herself from that culture entirely—an option temporarily forced upon Hawthorne's Hester Prynne and temporarily chosen by Child's Mary Conant—or she can involve herself with those within her culture who accept her individuality rather than reinforcing the cultural pressure to transform herself from an individualist into an angel. Although each of the two heroines effects a community-wide transformation which allows for the absorption of individuals into the fold, the texts also center on the supernatural marriage plot's more typical solution to the individualistic heroine's problem: barring the (rather unlikely) overnight transformation of an entire community, an individualistic woman in an angelic culture can at least marry a man who will be able to view her as a fully-realized human being rather than a symbol, who will accept the reality of her identity rather than projecting onto her his own culturally-induced fantasies. As a result, male transformation is a common phenomenon in the supernatural marriage plot,

reflecting the degree to which these texts are in fact expressing a profound dissatisfaction with the state of marriage and the treatment of women in nineteenth-century America. Only by changing men, these texts insist, can the position of women be improved; further, the texts suggest that the only way to prevent the transformation of individualist into angel is through a proactive transformation of those around her. The transformation of the supernatural heroine's future husband, then, wards off her transformation. And as we shall see in *The Scarlet Letter,* the suitor's failure to transform can thwart the marriage and undermine the heroine's individualism.

The suitor's metamorphosis into a suitable bridegroom for the supernatural individualist involves, almost invariably, his acquisition of sympathy. This deployment of sympathy originates in the post-Revolutionary rhetoric of sympathy that attempted to "reconcile conservative republican values of duty to others with a liberal agenda of self-possession" and which impacted American literature well into the nineteenth century (Barnes 12, 3). Early national culture's anxieties about the stability and coherence of a democratic state were allayed by the assumption that sympathy would instill a "sense of social responsibility which might act as a check upon individual desire" (Davidson 235); further, sympathizing with others could theoretically allow Americans to "imaginatively contemplate if not actually assume one another's political perspectives," thus coalescing the nation's disparate individuals into a unified whole (Stern 5). Sympathy thus "contributes to a sentimental vision of union that eventually becomes the ideal for both men *and* women" (Barnes 13) and as a result, the notion that sympathy and emotionalism

should be universal, that men should "learn to be more like women" (Barnes xi), becomes an integral component of domestic ideology and fiction.

This universalizing of sympathy translates, in both domestic fiction and the supernatural marriage plot, into an emphasis on male sympathy as a crucial trait in a potential husband. And it seems that the reason for this overwhelming emphasis on male sympathy is an unspoken concern with countering women's legal disadvantages in marriage: if sympathy can, in theory, restrain individual desire and instill a sense of responsibility to others, then it could prevent men from taking advantage of the legal power accorded them by reminding them to consider interests other than their own. Given women's subordinate status in marriage, the desire to impose some ideological check on potential male tyranny makes sense, regardless of genre. It would seem, though, that domestic fiction emphasizes male sympathy as a means of undermining tyranny precisely because the female power they endorse derives largely from women's social and legal subordination to men. Woman's "influence," according to sentimentalists, stems from her distinctive feminine delicacy and from the rigid separation of the spheres. Augusta Evans' position in *St. Elmo* is typical of Victorian sentimentalists' anti-feminist arguments: domesticity is the only "true and allowable womanly sphere of feminine work," and the trend toward erasing distinctions between the sexes undermines "woman's throne" because "[w]oman reigned by divine right only at home" (522-23). Woman's reign, in turn, was based in "the ethic of sentimental fiction" which, according to Jane Tompkins, was "an ethic of submission"; as sentimental heroines "learn to transmute rebellious passion into humble conformity to others' wishes,

their powerlessness becomes a source of strength" ("The Other American Renaissance" 41, 44). Since woman's powerlessness was, paradoxically, integral to her power as defined by domestic ideology, constructing a means of limiting male abuses while preserving male power over women was vital.

While the supernatural marriage plot shares this vision of sympathy as a means of curbing potential masculine tyranny, it also pushes sympathy's potential much further than does domestic fiction. Rather than depicting male sympathy as the basis for a hierarchized marriage which would supposedly guarantee one form of female power in exchange for the relinquishment of another, supernatural marriage fiction depicts sympathy as an avenue through which women could achieve egalitarian marriages and, in some cases, gain access to direct forms of power—such as self-governance—that do not rely on True Womanly submission. The notion that sympathy could allow one individual to engage with, and potentially assume, the political perspective of another is translated into a male ability to assume the perspective of women, which could, in theory, allow them to recognize that women are fellow human beings with a need for "free and full employment" of their "talents" (Fuller 20), not perfectly selfless and spiritualized angels with no identity beyond that which culture has mandated for them. Where domestic fiction depicts male sympathy as a means of keeping men's (justifiable) power over women in check, the supernatural marriage plot suggests that male sympathy with women would allow them to see beyond domestic ideology's fantasies of angeldom to the human being beneath; it would allow them to conceive

of women as individuals and equals rather than as subordinates who can be worshipped only so long as they participate in an ethic of utter self-abnegation.

The two genres' deployments of sympathy differ in another respect as well. For sentimentalists, the universalizing of sympathy becomes a "bid for power" in which female values were posited as a means of undermining "the ethos of money and exploitation that is perceived to prevail in American life" (Tompkins 141, Baym xxvii). By rendering men more sympathetic and "feminine," "home and the world would become one. Then, to the extent that woman dominated the home, the ideology implied an unprecedented historical expansion of her influence"; the new world dominated by domestic values would be one "over which women exercise ultimate control" (Baym xxvii; Tompkins 141). Unlike sentimental fiction, the supernatural marriage plot does not promote universal sympathy as a means of rendering domesticity dominant and of undermining the individualism that characterizes the masculine sphere. The genre tends to promote a balance for both sexes: men should balance their pursuit of their own interests with a more selfless and sympathetic ethos, and women should balance their selflessness with an individualism that allows for self-governance and the expansion and development of the self. It should be emphasized, however, that despite the genre's interest in undermining the ideology of separate spheres and promoting a sense of the sexes' common humanity, the supernatural marriage plot does not seem to advocate a rejection of sexual distinctions entirely. Rather, its philosophy seems in line with that presented by Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844), which

promotes an individualistic model of female self-definition; she argues that traits which have been conventionally defined as "masculine" and "feminine"

> are supposed to be expressed in Man and Woman, that is, as the more and the less, for the faculties have not been given pure to either, but only in preponderance. There are also exceptions in great number, such as men of far more beauty than power, and the reverse. But, as a general rule, it seems to have been the intention to give a preponderance on the one side, that is called masculine, and on the other, one that is called feminine. (99)

Since sympathy plays such an integral role in men's acceptance of female individuality, the supernatural marriage plot typically associates supernaturalism with sympathy. Supernatural language is frequently used to reflect the connection between potential spouses, a connection which places them in a "supernatural" realm that lies within, yet apart from, the dominant culture. These texts promote an ideology to counter the dominant ideology of separate spheres: the supernatural marriage plot suggests that men and women should establish a sphere of common ground—a third sphere of common humanity—rather than occupying two rigidly separated spheres or expanding woman's influence such that it engulfs and contains the male sphere. The image of the magic ring or sphere plays an integral role in both *Hobomok* and *The Scarlet Letter.* Child and Hawthorne use this metaphor to represent the heroine's separation from the rest of her community—without sympathy to tie her to the rest of humanity, the individualist becomes an entity unto herself—as well as a figurative space in which she can achieve a connection (albeit a fleeting one in Hester's case) with the man she loves. Sympathy allows men to join women in their isolated sphere of individualism, and it also allows for a blurring of the ideological lines between masculine and feminine. In both of the texts in this chapter, the magic

sphere in which the heroine is contained implicitly expands outward to absorb the entire community into a third sphere, one which encompasses both the male and female spheres and which unites (masculine) individualism and (feminine) sympathy into one coherent whole, available to both sexes. By placing their individualistic heroines in supernatural spheres, Child and Hawthorne thus literalize the implicit theme of supernatural marriage fiction and reveal the direct connection between this genre's deployment of supernaturalism and its engagement with the ideology of separate spheres that dominated Victorian culture.

Hobomok

In *Hobomok*, the female sphere is marked by extreme selflessness and submission to male authority; further, women inhabit the realm of sympathy and emotionalism, as opposed to the male sphere of extreme rationality and emotional detachment. In Mary Conant's case, this rigid and unsympathetic male authority is embodied by her father's refusal to allow her to marry her chosen mate, Charles Brown, because of his Episcopalianism. Her individualistic desire to govern her own fate is associated throughout the text with her supernatural status, as is the isolation she experiences in a community which cannot sympathize with her unconventional qualities. This emotionally sensitive, intellectually creative Episcopalian woman finds herself stifled, frustrated, and painfully isolated in the midst of her rigid, conformist Puritan community. She lacks any intellectual companionship other than Charles Brown, and her father is a cold and rigid man who governs the lives of his wife and daughter with no sympathy for their feelings

or desires. Her isolation grows exponentially as the novel progresses: immediately after her only confidante, Sally Oldham, marries and moves away, Charles is exiled by the Puritan authorities for "fomenting disturbance among the people" (70) by promoting his faith; later, Charles is lost at sea and presumed dead shortly after her mother, whose health had been declining due to the harshness of life on the new continent, passes away. Her father's inability to sympathize with Mary in the midst of these tragedies drives her into the arms of Hobomok, an Indian who lacks the cultural and intellectual refinement of Mary and Charles, but who possesses deep reserves of sympathy and who shows Mary the kindness and tenderness that she now receives from no other source. In her desperate loneliness, she marries Hobomok, settles with his tribe, and has his son. However, although she gradually develops affection for Hobomok and learns to be content in her new life, she never stops loving or thinking about Charles. After Mary and Hobomok have been married three years, the shipwrecked Charles is rescued and returns to America. Hobomok volunteers to divorce Mary so that she can marry the man she truly loves, and disappears into the wilderness.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, "courting couples, their parents, and social arbiters vigorously debated over 'love' and over control of courtship and marriage" as ideals of marriage shifted progressively away from an economic model and toward a companionate model in which romantic love was paramount (Tracey 30). Child translates this cultural debate over self-governance in mate selection into a focal point for her novel's critique of female powerlessness. Mary's father prohibits her from choosing her own husband, and the text makes

clear that Mr. Conant's rigid perspective conforms to that of the community at large. When Mary's friend Sally Oldham admits to church elders that she spoke openly of her romantic interest in a potential suitor, the elders respond, "'we deem it unseemly for young women to pursue such like courses (indeed were she within our jurisdiction, we should give her public reproof therefore)'" (55). Mary's pursuit of self-governance in the face of such community disapproval is directly associated with her supernaturalism. Early in the novel, she defiantly engages in literal witchcraft in an attempt to determine her own marital fate rather than relying on her father's injunctions. The narrator of the tale sees Mary one night in the forest, and at first mistakes her for one of the "visitants from other worlds" he has heard so much about (13), thus establishing the connection between her rebellion against Puritan and paternal law and her otherworldly status. Mary then draws a circle on the ground, steps into the "magic ring," and performs a ritual designed to predict the identity of her future husband. The text thus makes clear the supernatural marriage plot's association between supernaturalism and individualistic autonomy by depicting Mary's desire to control her own fate in supernatural terms.

A bit later in the text, Child makes another, more subtle connection between supernatural language and female self-governance. Mrs. Conant's illness is, throughout the novel, explicitly connected with female subordination to male authority; she is dying because she obeyed her self-absorbed husband's wishes to settle in the New World. In a brief descriptive passage, the text contrasts the rebellious Mary's health with her obedient mother's sickliness, and in the process, implicitly associates supernaturalism with the autonomy which allows women to

remain healthy. As the townspeople gather to watch the departure of an English vessel, "Mary [springs] upon a jutting rock, and her sylph-like figure afforded a fine contrast to the decaying elegance of her mother, who was leaning on her arm" (16). By contrasting Mary's nonhuman status with her mother's decay, the text makes another connection typical of supernatural marriage fiction at large: it associates supernaturalism with a rejection of the kind of abject feminine selflessness that has contributed to her mother's illness.

Child further participates in generic conventions by linking supernatural language with another aspect of female individualism, Mary's intellectual development. The men of the community condescendingly reject female intellectualism, subjecting Mary to "continual diminishment" because they "regard women as foolish and sinful temptresses" (Karcher xxix). For instance, when Sally Oldham replies in jest to one of her father's religious opinions, he says she "'talks like a prating idiot, as you are,'" and he subsequently dismisses his wife's theological opinions by asserting, "'You utter the sayings of a foolish woman'" (24). Mary's father, meanwhile, trivializes Mary as a "'thoughtless child'" and refers to her artistic nature and creativity as "'vain imaginations, which profit not'" (133).

Mary's treatment by the Puritan community contrasts sharply with her experiences in the Old World, associated by the text with "the intellectual stimulation that high culture affords" (Sweet 11). Before being summoned to America to care for her ailing mother, Mary had remained in England so that she, the youngest child, could be sheltered from the harshness of the New World. After her family's emigration, Mary stayed in the home of her wealthy grandfather, and

the text associates this period of intellectual growth and exposure to art and culture with the supernatural. The text first introduces Mary as a "blooming fairy" whose "little aerial foot [had] danced along the marble saloon of her grandfather" (8, 9). Mary's time with her grandfather is referred to as "that fairy spot in her existence" (46); during this period, she is influenced by his formidable intellect to become, like him, "covetous of mental riches, and [to worship] at the shrine of genius," but "this fairy dream" is interrupted by the call to join her family in America, "a land of strangers" who prove themselves incapable of comprehending her intellectual and creative nature (78).

The fairy dream is also associated with Mary's meeting and falling in love with the intellectual Charles Brown, reflecting yet another function of supernaturalism in the supernatural marriage plot: supernatural language is associated with sympathy and connection, particularly the sympathy and connection that occur between the female individualist—isolated and often cast out because of her unconventional nature—and her chosen mate. At her grandfather's home, Mary is "the little idol of the brilliant circle," and falls in love with Charles Brown, "a graduate at Oxford, and of no ordinary note in his native kingdom" (78, 46). These two unusually superior intellects experience a profound connection upon meeting: Mary "mingled with him in the graceful evolutions of the dance, while her young heart in vain strove to be proof against the intoxicating witchery of light and motion" (78). This supernatural connection is felt by Charles as well; after Mary leaves for America, "the remembrance of the little fairy just blushing into womanhood had proved powerful enough to draw the ambitious young lawyer

from the fair hopes of distinction in England" (46). Mary's strong connection with Charles becomes even more intense in the New World because here she experiences the "loneliness of unreciprocated intellect" (91). As a result of Mary's extreme isolation in America, she

> lived only in the remembrance of that fairy spot in her existence. Alone as she was, without one spirit that came in contact with her own, she breathed only in the regions of fancy; and many an ideal object had she invested with its rainbow robe. When at length she found a being who understood her feelings, and who loved, as she imagined love, her whole soul was riveted. (46)

The couple even experiences a seemingly psychic connection: when Mary is performing her magic ritual in the forest, Charles appears because he had dreamed she was in danger (20); and later, before learning of Charles' supposed death, Mary sees the image of a sinking ship in the clouds, a "fatal omen" of the tragic news to come (115). The sympathy reflected in this supernatural connection will ultimately permit a marriage in which Mary's individualism can flourish, a pattern which, as we shall see, occurs throughout supernatural marriage fiction.

Mary's isolation in fact represents a more extreme version of the isolation and unhappiness experienced by the community's women as a whole. Not only do the Puritan men belittle female intellect, but they also view emotion as a shameful sign of "weakness" (106); they believe women are governed by their "silly heart[s]" (9), and the text implies that such misogyny allows the men to rationalize their denial of female self-governance and their insistence on female obedience to male authority. This expectation of thoroughgoing obedience to husbands and fathers forces a (typical) woman like Mrs. Conant to ignore the promptings of her "'heart'" and

"'conscience'" (74, 45) because she believes "'[it] is the duty of woman to love and obey her husband'" and that it is "'wrong . . . to violate the injunctions of [one's] husband'" (74, 46); Mrs. Conant thus embodies the ethic of submission advocated by domestic fiction.

The men's rejection of emotion, both in women and in themselves, corresponds to a profound lack of sympathy and an arrogant disregard of female concerns, both of which the text critiques as literally lethal to women; as Deborah Gussman notes, the novel's men, particularly Mr. Conant, exemplify the "danger" of an "emphasis on doctrine and reason" (65). Repeatedly throughout the novel, men dismiss their wives' complaints about the harshness of their lives and the pain they and their children have endured in the New World. The men generally seem unmoved even by the women's distress over the deaths of loved ones; a lengthy passage in which Mr. Oldham is present at a small gathering of women reflects the typical male reaction to the impact of their enterprise on the community's women and children. Referring to a frightening Indian attack the night before, Mr. Oldham says,

> "The Lord hath merely given us a jog on the elbow at this time; that we may remember the dangers wherewithal we are surrounded, and wake up our sluggish souls, that have become somewhat perfunctory in his service."
>
> "That's what my good man said, when he was dying," rejoined the widow. "Poor soul, the Indian shot him through and through, when he was digging for clams in the sands down there at Plymouth; and when I pulled out the arrow and bound up his wounds, he told me, it was all a chastisement of the Lord, in that we had fallen into rebellious ways." (44)

When Mrs. Conant and another woman at the gathering discuss the pain caused by the deaths of their children, Oldham replies, "'these are fearsome times in church

and state, when the domineering bishop of London . . . [has] power to drive God's heritage into the wilderness, where they must toil hard for a scanty bread, and that too with daily jeopardy of life and limb'" (44). The reactions of Oldham and of the widow's late husband exemplify the male tendency to transmute emotional pain into impersonal discussions of religious doctrine. And Mrs. Conant's comments during this same gathering reflect the degree to which women can internalize this perspective: "'But one must not talk of their own griefs at such a time . . . There is great commotion throughout the world; and it is plain to perceive that Jehovah is shaking the heavens above our head, and the earth beneath our feet'" (44). Mrs. Conant's behavior reflects "a submissiveness and self-sacrifice that . . . literally prove deadly" (Karcher xxxv), and as such, it represents a critique of the selflessness and obedience central to angel ideology's depiction of True Womanhood. "Learning to renounce her own desire is the sentimental heroine's vocation," and the text clearly interrogates the wisdom of such renunciation and "self-suppression" (*Sensational Designs* 176). Mrs. Conant's absolute disregard of her own emotions and conscience and her belief in utter obedience to her husband are literally killing her; this self-abnegating woman who buries her own emotions and self-interest finally dies from exposure to the hardships about which she refuses to complain.

And it is not only the women's self-abnegation that leads to such tragedies as the deaths of Mrs. Conant and her sons; it is also the selfishness of the men, a problem intimately related to the fact that men and women, in this text, occupy separate and opposite emotional spheres. The novel suggests that when women are utterly self-sacrificing, men will become utterly selfish, since they are always catered

to and never expected to make sacrifices themselves. According to the text, the fact that men are selfish and devoid of sympathy allows them to take advantage of women's selfless love. Lady Arabella, an English aristocrat who has, like Mrs. Conant, followed her husband to the New World out of love, dies along with Mary's mother. When Lady Arabella is on her deathbed, her husband makes explicit the critique of men that runs throughout the text: "'I could bear all, Arabella, . . . had I not brought you into trials too mighty for your strength. But for my selfish love, you might now be living in ease and comfort.'" According to the narrator, whose sympathies clearly lie with Mary and with the sufferings endured by the text's women,[1] Arabella and Mrs. Conant are "victims to what has always been the source of woman's greatest misery—love—deep and unwearied love" (111).

The fact that women die because of obedience and self-sacrifice serves as an implicit argument for female self-governance. Further, the text explicitly links this sort of extreme self-sacrifice and submission to masculine authority with angelic status. At one point, Mary says of her mother, "'the sicker she is, the more she seemeth like an angel'" (48). Lady Arabella, likewise, is linked with angeldom as she dies: there is an "unearthly light" on her face, and she says that she "'hear[s] the angels singing'" (110). This language clearly corresponds to conventional sentimental depictions of angelic martyrdom, but in this case, the narrator's rejection of female subordination and his depiction of the deaths as a tragic waste indicate that he is not presenting these women as role models whose angeldom is meant to inspire readers to develop similar character traits. Since these women's deaths are directly caused by their selflessness, the novel is suggesting that angeldom can

literally endanger women's lives. Further, the narrator's implicit critique of angeldom reinforces the opposition between the self-abnegating angel and the self-governing supernatural individualist.

Sally's husband, Mr. Collier, is presented as an exception to the rule of male self-absorption, and serves to demonstrate the way in which male sympathy would function to improve the lives of women; he counters Mr. Oldham's dismissal of his wife's complaints by arguing, "'surely when the hearts of stout men grow faint in this enterprise, we need not marvel that women, and young women too, should betimes think of their hardships, and complain thereof. Jacob was regardful of the weakness of the women and little ones of his land'" (25). This sort of sympathy is depicted as the source of not only greater freedoms for women, but also greater tolerance of dissenters and outcasts; at the end of the tale, the community has, along with Mary's father, one of the most severe and rigid of the Puritans, become more open and tolerant. And this change is mediated through an intensely emotional experience, through a grief great enough to open his emotional floodgates.[2] The death of his wife—and the guilt attached to it—begins the process, but does not fully force down his guard. Although he does to some degree keep his deathbed promise to his late wife that he would show more tenderness toward Mary, his feelings remain "too rigid and exclusive to sympathize with a young heart almost discouraged by surrounding difficulties" (114). And despite his promise to allow her to marry Charles Brown upon his return, Mr. Conant still lacks a genuine acceptance of the younger man; a wavering Mary makes her final decision to elope with Hobomok after her father, in a rage, almost throws the prayer book Charles

gave her into the fire. It is this final loss of Mary, the last living member of his family, that causes his transformation from a cold and intolerant man into a loving father who can welcome "with open arms" a daughter who had engaged in miscegenation with a heathen, and view her child with Hobomok as "a peculiar favorite" (149, 150). The text thus depicts the introduction of male sympathy as a crucial step toward promoting female happiness and independence.

The text says nothing explicit about the community's transformation, leading to controversy among critics of the novel. Ian Marshall argues that "we have no evidence that the Puritan society of Salem has developed tolerance enough to welcome into its midst such persons as Episcopalians, half-breeds, and wayward daughters" (7), whereas Deborah Gussman argues that Mary returns to "the more benign, more accommodating society that Child envisions for her" (68). However, there is much implicit evidence to support the latter interpretation. Apart from the fact that her father, an elder in the community, accepts her, Mr. Skelton, another cold and judgmental elder, performs the marriage ceremony uniting the divorced and "fallen" Mary to her Episcopalian groom. Further, a community that would exile an upstanding male citizen for his Episcopalian beliefs would certainly have exiled (or worse) a young woman who had married and borne the son of a heathen, along with the man who has chosen to marry this divorced woman. Yet Mary and Charles settle in the community and erect a house near Mr. Conant's. By the end of the novel, as Gussman notes, "the Puritan community consents to her, rather than she to them" (66).

It is not only the community, however, that must undergo a change in order for the supernatural individualist's nature to remain intact. Although Charles Brown is less rigid, more sympathetic, and more accepting of female intellectualism than most of the men around him, he still exhibits some of the troubling masculine traits being critiqued by the novel as detrimental to female individualism. Several passages in which Mary reveals emotional pain to Charles demonstrate the similarity between his responses and those of the Puritan men: like most of the other men in the text, Charles resorts to reasoned religious platitudes rather than attempting any sort of emotional connection with a suffering woman. For instance, when Mary begins crying about her mother's impending death, Charles replies, "'My dear Mary, . . . it is not well to be melancholy. We both ought to recollect that there is One above us who will defend us, though every earthly friend be taken'" (49). Not only is Charles responding to emotion with reason, but his advice is proven wrong by Mary's subsequent experience; when all of Mary's earthly friends are in fact taken away, the isolation is so devastating that looking to God proves inadequate and she almost loses her mind. Later, when Charles is banished from the colony, he tells Mary, "'Talk not so sadly . . . If your mother lives long, I shall again come to America, at least for a season; and if she dies, you will soon return to your grandfather, who will make us both happy'" (82). Again, his response to Mary's pain is rather rational and cold. The inadequacy of Charles' sympathy, along with the rigidity of Mrs. Conant's Episcopalian father back in England, reveals that the lack of sympathy is not a specifically Puritan problem, but a male problem; by thus

universalizing the problem, Child implies that her critique is relevant to her nineteenth-century compatriots as well as their Puritan forebears.

Charles' response to Mary's sufferings reflects on Child's contemporaries in another respect as well; the text's depiction of such attempts at consolation may represent a critique not only of masculine rationality, but also of domestic fiction's model of sympathy. Sentimental novels are bursting with the sorts of religious platitudes espoused by Charles; this doctrine of submission to divine will "belonged to the ideology of the evangelical reform movement that had molded the consciousness of the nation" beginning with the Second Great Awakening of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Tompkins, Afterword 593). In sentimental fiction, such utterances are designed to subdue the sentimental heroine's rebellion by instilling Christian forbearance; this forbearance in turn undergirds the transformation from individualist to angel by training her in "the ethic of submission" which Tompkins and others view as central to domestic fiction's project. Charles' advice to Mary bears a striking resemblance to a passage in Susan Warner's prototypical domestic novel *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), in which Ellen's mentor tells her to "'learn more of Christ, our dear Saviour, and you can't help but be happy. Never fancy you are helpless and friendless while you have Him to go to'" (176). And the Governor's response when Mary learns of Charles' disappearance at sea resembles another passage from Warner's novel, in which Ellen's mother asserts, "'though we *must* sorrow, we must not rebel. . . . Remember, dear Ellen, God sends no trouble upon his children but in love; and though we cannot see how, he will no doubt make all this work for our good'" (12). The

Governor's words, and Mary's reaction to them, further reinforce the text's interrogation of such language: "'I would fain remind you that we are only sojourners in this world until we can find a better; and that whatsoever befalleth us, is meant for our eternal good'"; although Mary "appreciated his kindness, . . . she could not attend to him" (118). By depicting such consolatory speech as powerless to touch Mary's grief, and by associating such speech with men who wish to reign in the disruptiveness of female emotion—which, if left unchecked, could thwart them in their selfish projects by forcing them to attend to the sufferings of those in their care—Child's novel suggests that these sentiments may function less to promote women's comfort than to control their behavior.

Charles' behavior also suggests additional ways in which he would prove a problematic husband. He exhibits the kind of selfishness that the text critiques in the other men, suggesting that he could ultimately endanger Mary as Mr. Conant and many other Englishmen have endangered their families. After his banishment, he leaves Mary alone in America longer than he had promised so that he can travel to the East Indies and make his fortune (the decision which causes his three-year disappearance). He had promised to return as soon as possible, but his subsequent decision to travel to the East Indies would postpone his return for a year. Although he claims he wishes to seek his fortune for Mary's sake, it is clear that Mary wishes him to return as quickly as possible to alleviate her isolation, suggesting that he is prioritizing his own interests above her happiness and well-being. He also demonstrates a disturbing inclination to engage in the kind of selfishness that ultimately kills Mary's mother. When he and Mary discuss the sacrifices Mrs.

Conant has made for love of her husband, Charles asks, "'[d]o you think you could endure so much for me, Mary?,'" and as he asks this, he gazes "with more than usual admiration on the *passive* beauty of her countenance" (49; italics mine).

This admiration of selflessness also suggests that Charles is an angel-worshipper, another potential impediment to a happy marriage for individualistic Mary, and another factor which is depicted throughout the supernatural marriage plot as potentially detrimental to its heroines. Charles later exhibits an admiration of the purity expected of angels, and reveals that he cannot love a flawed, human woman. On the eve of Charles' departure, Mary confides that she had briefly wished her mother's earthly trials were over so she could accompany him, but that she fought to overcome the "'wicked thought'"; Charles replies, "'Be ever thus, my own dear girl . . . I could not love you if you were otherwise. May the atmosphere of your mind be always so pure that a passing cloud has power wherewithal to disturb it'" (82). While Mary's thought, though understandable, is clearly wrong, Charles' reaction reveals an unsettling rigidity. His insistence on absolute purity and his inability to love a woman who succumbs to human temptation and emotion suggest not only that he would be unable to accommodate a multifaceted and rebellious woman such as Mary, but also that, without the acquisition of sympathy, he would have been unable to forgive her marriage to Hobomok.

Mary is attracted to Hobomok in large part because he has the traits which Charles lacks, just as Charles possesses the intellect, education, and culture which Hobomok lacks. He demonstrates a capacity to sympathize with her pain, and a selflessness that allows him to love her "'better than himself'" (125). In the end, the

two rivals, each incomplete on his own, are combined into one. The trauma of a lengthy captivity after being shipwrecked on the east coast of Africa allows Charles to undergo the necessary transformation into an emotional as well as intellectual being, the kind of transformation which functions throughout the supernatural marriage plot to create suitable husbands for individualistic heroines. Upon his return from the dead, he has overcome his angel-worshipping tendencies, as evidenced by his willingness to marry Mary despite her transgression with Hobomok. Central to his transformation are the acquisition of sympathy and the heightening of emotion. When he and Mary meet for the first time in three years, she assumes that he will despise her; instead, he proclaims, "'The Lord judge you according to your temptations, my dear Mary,'" indicating an empathy with the sufferings that had driven her into marriage with a man she did not love. He then raises her "to his bosom, and [weeps] over her in silence," indicating a newfound capacity to engage with her on a purely emotional level. And his sympathy in turn leads to selflessness. He, like Hobomok, insists on relinquishing his own claim to Mary, indicating that his trials have rendered him capable of selfless love. Further, Charles' utmost wish upon discovering Mary's marriage is to avoid causing her more pain than she has already endured: "'the deed is done and God forbid that my resentment should rest on her unhappy head'" (143).

Charles' transformation is depicted in supernatural terms that echo those of the forest ritual Mary performs early in the novel. When Mary conjures forth her future husband, Hobomok springs into the center of the "magic ring" with her (13). She thinks "'at first, it must be his ghost'" (20), but then realizes that he is in fact

"real flesh and blood" (14, 20). Her initial terror seems to stem from the unexpected—and socially unacceptable—connection being revealed by the ritual, as well as distress that her mate of choice was not the one to appear. Later, upon Charles' figurative return from the dead, Hobomok mistakes him for a ghost, and must be reassured that he is, in fact, "'flesh and blood even as yourself'" (138). Charles also asserts to the petrified Hobomok, "'I am a man like yourself'" (138), and later, Sally's husband—the first member of the Puritan community encountered by Charles upon his return—likewise overcomes his "doubts whether [Charles] was real flesh and blood" (144). This reiteration of Charles' embodiment suggests that his acquisition of sympathy has, from the narrative's perspective, rendered him human; the novel, in other words, depicts emotion and sympathy as human, rather than feminine, qualities. Just as Hobomok, during the forest ritual, needed to become "humanized" in Mary's eyes so that she could perceive him as a marriageable man rather than a less-than-human "savage," Charles must become "humanized" in the sense of gaining access to the emotional half of his human birthright, a birthright that has been, according to the text, relinquished by western men. Child suggests that men are, by nature, emotional beings, and that the sort of emotional stunting depicted throughout the novel can occur only through sheer force of will: Mr. Conant has always "stifled the voice of nature, and hid[den] all his better feelings beneath the cold mask of austerity" (119), and Mr. Skelton, one of the elders, argues that "'it behoves us to give little heed to natural affection, when we are engaged in the work of the Lord Jesus'" (129). In fact, Charles' assertion that he is a *man* suggests that one cannot achieve true manhood without the capacity to feel.

Further, the acceptance of Charles' human status by Sally's husband marks the exile's reabsorption into the community, the confirmation that the supernatural, inhuman outcast is in fact a human being after all. And by accepting Mary, flaws and all, Charles brings the outcast Mary back into "her own nation," which had "looked upon her as lost and degraded" (135). Mary's rehumanization reflects both Charles' rejection of angel-worship and the community's acceptance of the individualist on her own terms; in accordance with the logic of supernatural marriage fiction, supernaturalism becomes unnecessary once female individualism becomes culturally accepted.

The ritual of the magic ring plays an integral role in revealing the importance of sympathy to the acceptance—by individual men and by society as a whole—of individualistic women. By joining Mary in the magic ring, Hobomok enters into Mary's supernatural realm, the realm of the outcast female individualist. It is important to note that, despite Mary's deep love for Charles and the seemingly psychic connection they share, only Hobomok enters the magic ring with Mary. Charles appears, seemingly as a result of the ritual, but does so only after Mary begins "retreating from the woods," suggesting that he does not actually join her in the ring. Charles is excluded from the ring precisely because of what he lacks, the very trait which renders Hobomok marriageable in Mary's eyes: the capacity for sympathy. The fact that sympathy is necessary for entry into the supernatural realm with the female individualist reinforces the idea that sympathy will play a key role in men's accommodation to and acceptance of women's individualism. This text,

like *The Scarlet Letter,* depicts sympathy as the avenue to understanding between men and women.

The ritual of the ring also reveals the role of supernaturalism in Mary's marriages. Since Mary cannot sustain her individualism in her misogynistic community of origin, she chooses to leave this community behind and join Hobomok in a supernatural community of two, a magic sphere of sympathy in which she can protect her individuality and autonomy without being forced to live in isolation. David Ketterer argues in his discussion of *The Scarlet Letter* that circles and spheres can serve either "an exclusive or an inclusive function" (303); my contention is that, in both of these novels, spheres can also serve both functions simultaneously. In marrying Hobomok, Mary rejects the "social band" because she could find no sympathy within it. And for Hobomok, the act of marrying Mary means rendering himself a supernatural outcast as well: "Hobomok's connexion with her was considered the effect of witchcraft on his part, and even he was generally avoided by his former friends" (136). Since Hobomok is rejected by his friends just as Mary is rejected by most of hers, they create their own sphere of sympathy that exists outside the larger community. Thus, Mary and Hobomok establish the sort of relationship that occurs throughout supernatural marriage fiction, in which those outside of the social sphere replace the larger band of society with a smaller one: the magic circle of sympathy in which one can find solace with a fellow outcast.

Charles can enter the supernatural sphere only after he has acquired sympathy because only then does he possess the traits that will allow him to support

rather than undermine Mary's individualism. And because the magic sphere of sympathy has expanded to include the community at large, the couple need not remain in the realm of supernatural isolation that Mary shared with Hobomok. They can both be rehumanized, because the social band has, like Charles, acquired the capacity for sympathy which will allow them to accept wayward individuals like Mary and Charles without forcing them to deny themselves.

Ultimately, by depicting a husband and wife who each represents a blending of "masculine" intellect and autonomy with "feminine" sympathy and emotion, Child presents an implicit critique of domestic ideology's radical division of masculine and feminine traits, along with a critique of the self-abnegation expected of the angelic True Woman. As Child herself would argue in 1845,

> The nearer society approaches to divine order, the less separation will there be in the characters, duties, and pursuits of men and women. Women will not become less gentle and graceful, but men will become more so. Women will not neglect the care and education of their children, but men will find themselves ennobled and refined by sharing those duties with them; and will receive, in return, co-operation and sympathy in the discharge of other duties, now deemed inappropriate to women. (*Letters from New-York* 250-51)

In addition, looking at the text through a nationalist lens reveals an even more radical aspect of Child's depiction of gender in the novel. Nancy F. Sweet views the novel as an example of national narrative—texts which depict the nation's colonial infancy as a means of contemplating its future—and argues that the novel "seeks to render high culture as rightly American while also adapting it, in the character of Mary, to the rugged exigencies of American life" (117). I contend that, in the context of national narrative, Mary also exemplifies a vision for the future of gender relations. Early in the novel, one of Mary's potential suitors notes that he has often

been prompted by "human weakness" to return to England, but decides to remain in the New World because of the oppression experienced by himself and his brethren; however, he recognizes that his inclination to stay in New England may stem not from lofty ideological motives but rather from his attraction to "the childish witchery of Mary Conant" (12). And for Charles Brown, "the remembrance of the little fairy" draws him to the New World even though his emigration means abandoning a distinguished and comfortable future in England for a life of hardship and uncertainty (46). Mary thus represents a force attracting men to the New World and a counter to the hardships that would otherwise deter new settlers, and her supernaturalism is explicitly linked to these powers of attraction. By using supernaturalism to depict both Mary's individualism and her function as a beacon drawing new citizens to America, Child suggests something even more startling than an erasure of the boundary between the spheres. A woman such as Mary—individualistic, autonomous, and in possession of the masculine and feminine halves of her human birthright—might, in Child's vision, have represented the future of the republic.

The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Letter's Hester Prynne likewise represents a step toward the future. The novel suggests that, even if Hester is not in fact the "prophetess" of the "coming revelation" that will revolutionize relations between the sexes, she is at the very least a step in the right direction. Hester exerts a profound influence on the harsh, judgmental Puritan community that punishes her adultery with Dimmesdale by

ostracizing her and their illegitimate daughter Pearl, transforming it by the novel's conclusion into a more accepting community that allows the individualistic Hester to return to the fold. This transformation occurs because of a softening of the boundaries between the spheres, which in this text represent a binary opposition between "masculine" and "feminine" worldviews. Like *Hobomok*, *The Scarlet Letter* depicts masculinity as the realm of rationality and abstraction and femininity as the realm of sympathy and emotion. Hawthorne, however, employs a tighter focus; he depicts these two extremes as the two potential sources of human law, and suggests that neither the law of reason nor the law of the heart should dominate, either in the individual or in society at large. Rather, the two forms of law must balance one another in order to prevent cruelties like that visited upon Hester and Pearl.

From the outset, the novel establishes that the harshness of Hester's punishment stems from Puritan society's radical division between head and heart. The male scholar-lawgivers, and the community as a whole, have based their sense of justice on the rational abstractions of "masculine" law, untempered by the "feminine" sphere of emotion and sympathy. Hawthorne critiques the problem of excessive male rationality through his depiction of the two men in Hester's life, scholars whose mode of thinking typifies that of the community's leaders. Hester's husband, Roger Chillingworth, is depicted as the quintessential scholar, a man "chiefly accustomed to look inward, and to whom external matters are of little value and import, unless they bear relation to something within his mind" (61). Dimmesdale is even more limited than Chillingworth, in that he is not only absorbed in his own thoughts, but his thinking is further restricted by his utter reliance on

law, his need "to feel the pressure of a faith about him, supporting, while it confined him within its iron framework" (123). Because of the rigidity of thought exhibited by such scholarly men who lead the community—their self-absorption, combined with their rational tendency to focus on the letter of the law, prevent them from tempering justice with mercy—they lack the qualities necessary to deal fairly and properly with a situation like Hester's:

> They were, doubtless, good men, just and sage. But, out of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards whom Hester Prynne now turned her face. (64)

The results of this rigid detachment of head from heart are evident in the community's reaction to Hester during the opening scaffold scene: "Meager, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders at the scaffold" (50).

The text also suggests that this separation of spheres contributes to the widespread unhappiness that Hester observes among women:

> Indeed, the same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? . . . A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. (165)

One of the long hereditary habits critiqued throughout the novel is the male tendency to perceive women as abstractions, a tendency which stems from the sort of excessively rigid and theoretical thinking engaged in by the novel's male scholars.

This excessively rational mindset leads to a community incapable of seeing beyond the letter with which they have labeled Hester; they have reduced a complex human being into a mere symbol, transforming Hester from a richly multifaceted woman into a "'living sermon against sin'" (63).

As Nina Baym argues, Hawthorne suggests that "the lives of real women in society were fundamentally controlled by male fantasy about them" ("Hawthorne's Women" 261), and the text makes clear that such fantasy, in the form of the letter, literally contributes to Hester's unwomaning:

> All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline. . . . Even the attractiveness of her person had undergone a similar change. . . . Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. (163)

But in the forest scene, when she removes the letter, her smile seems to be "gushing from the very heart of womanhood" (202). And later, when she resumes the scarlet *A* in order to return from the wilderness, it is "[a]s if there were a withering spell in the sad letter[;] her beauty, the warmth and richness of her womanhood, departed, like fading sunshine; and a gray shadow seemed to fall across her" (211). Taking Hawthorne's logic a step further reveals the novel's thinly veiled critique of Victorian culture's treatment of women: the *A* with which domestic ideology labels women—*A* for *Angel*—is just as restrictive a label as *A* for *Adulteress*. Further, the text reveals that the iconography intended to distill womanhood down to its "true" essence serves in fact to strip women of the very qualities it claims to protect. The process of angel formation, which figuratively renders women spiritualized,

disembodied beings, simultaneously removes that which makes womanhood possible.[3]

The solution to this problem of dehumanizing masculine symbolism can be found, according to the novel, in the traditionally feminine quality of sympathy. Hester's ghostlike isolation, her inhabitation of "another sphere" than the rest of humankind, is linked specifically with the "forbidden sympathy" of the ghost (84). The ghost's isolation stems precisely from the fact that sympathy is forbidden it; if sympathy were permitted, she would no longer "[stand] apart from mortal interests," and "awak[en] only terror and horrible repugnance" in her attempts to interact with and gain sympathy from the humans surrounding her. Further, Pearl displays throughout the novel a "more or less complete obliviousness to the feelings of others" (Hunt 83); she is, in other words, almost utterly devoid of sympathy, and she is, not coincidentally, also the only character who actively and repeatedly draws attention to the letter (by fixating on it, throwing flowers at it, etc.). The unsympathetic, lawless child seems incapable of seeing her mother as anything but a symbol: as an infant, the first aspect of her mother that Pearl takes notice of is not her smile, but the letter (96), and later, in the forest scene, Pearl does not even recognize her own mother until she places the letter back on her bosom. Sympathy thus represents the bridge that would allow women, dehumanized by their cultural role as symbols, to reclaim the human status that has been stripped from them and to rejoin the social band from which they have been excluded.

However, the text also insists that an excess of feminine emotion and sensitivity is just as problematic as the excess of masculine thought that dominates

the community. The only sympathetic woman in the crowd during the opening scaffold scene is the "young wife," who counters the vicious, judgmental comments of the women around her by sympathizing with the pain Hester must be enduring (51). This same woman, "the youngest and only compassionate among them," is notably the only one of these women who does not survive to witness Hester's second appearance on the scaffold at the novel's conclusion (246). The feminized Dimmesdale, likewise, is depicted as the most sensitive being ever created (171), and it is this very sensitivity that leads to his physical decay and ultimate death; as Chillingworth notes, Dimmesdale possesses a "sensibility so intense, that [his] bodily infirmity would be likely to have its groundwork there" (124).[4] The narrator makes explicit the text's perspective toward excessive femininity in a passage discussing the changes Hester's trials have wrought upon her: "Such is frequently the fate . . . of the feminine character and person, when the woman has encountered, and lived through, an experience of particular severity. If she be all tenderness, she will die" (163).

By problematizing both masculine and feminine extremes, the text implies that both sexes should fall somewhere in the middle; as Donald A. Ringe argues, Hawthorne advocates a "balance" between "head and heart." The narrative suggests that both men and women should have access to the full range of human attributes rather than being restricted to their assigned spheres, a stance typical of supernatural marriage fiction. As Nina Baym argues of Hawthorne's canon in general,

> Continual intersexual symbolizing in the novels suggests the potential unity of the sexes. Woman is part of man's self, man a part of woman, both partake of a single human nature. When the hero . . . repudiates her, he is really repudiating a part of himself projected onto her and defined as "other." ("Hawthorne's Women" 257)

Further, Hawthorne's depiction of the pitfalls associated with excessive sympathy reinforces what I contend to be the text's supportive stance toward female individualism. Being too sensitive leads to literal obliteration of the self—both the young wife and Dimmesdale, the two most sensitive characters in the novel, die because of their sensitivity—suggesting that the capacity for the kind of abstract, independent thought and emotional detachment associated with the text's male scholars is necessary to women as well as to men. And as we shall see shortly, the ability to withdraw into the self serves a protective function for Hester. The text suggests, then, that without the individualistic capacity for self-absorption—exercised in moderation, of course—one literally cannot survive.

Thus, the solution to the problem of excessive masculinity is an infusion of feminine sympathy, while the solution to the problem of excessive femininity is individualism. And the text conforms to the typical pattern of the supernatural marriage plot by associating both individualism and sympathy with supernaturalism. For both Hester and Pearl, supernatural metaphors are used to reflect their uniqueness and individuality, their status as independent thinkers in a community which demands rigid conformity. Hester's letter, which the narrative imbues with a supernatural air throughout, is linked with Hester's status as a woman of unusual grandeur, self-assertion, and distinctiveness; for instance, when the Governor's servant turns Hester away from his door, she insists on gaining

entry, "and the bond-servant, perhaps judging from the decision of her air and the glittering symbol in her bosom, that she was a great lady in the land, offered no opposition" (104). And later, on Election Day, Indian observers are intrigued by the letter, "conceiving, perhaps, that the wearer of this brilliantly embroidered badge must needs be a personage of high dignity among her people" (246). The text also links the supernatural with Hester's refusal to escape her punishment by fleeing to Europe, noting that "there is a fatality . . . which almost inevitably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime" (79-80). This ghostliness represents the alternative to "hid[ing] her character and identity under a new exterior, as completely as if emerging into another state of being"; Hester thus becomes supernatural precisely because she rejects both the profound transformation of identity and the anonymity that an escape from punishment would entail. In other words, supernatural status is conferred by Hester's stubborn insistence on retaining her distinctive selfhood (79). And even though this insistence leads to a problematic ghostliness—a dilution of her full self—she does, as I shall argue shortly, retain many of her most individualistic attributes.

Pearl, the distillation of Hester's passion and freethinking, is depicted as even more supernatural than her mother; she is described throughout as sprite, elf, fairy, imp, and this supernaturalism is associated with her uncanny precociousness. Pearl has

> a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl was a human child. She

> seemed rather an airy sprite . . . that look . . . invested her with a strange remoteness and intangibility; it was as if she were hovering in the air and might vanish. (92)

The text makes repeated connections between Pearl's intellect and her supernaturalism; the narrator deploys words like "spirit" and "witchcraft" to describe Pearl's imagination (95), and refers to her "elfish intelligence" (106). Pearl also embodies the multiformity that I discussed earlier in this chapter as an antidote to and critique of the uniform identity expected of the Angel in the House: "Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children" (90). Not only is Pearl herself referred to as a variety of supernatural beings, but she also creates an array of imaginary people in her play: "It was wonderful, the vast variety of forms into which she threw her intellect" (95). However, Pearl's variegated nature coheres into a core identity through a "trait of passion, a certain depth of hue, which she never lost; and if, in any of her changes, she had grown fainter or paler, she would have ceased to be herself" (90). As Daniel Cottom notes in his discussion of the Puritan world's monochromatic religiosity, "that which disappears from such a world is that which most strongly characterizes Hester's needlework, her character, and her child: a marked sense of difference, of heterodox variety" (51); Pearl's variegated nature opposes not only the pallid, colorless world of Puritanism, but also the pallid, colorless realm of angeldom. Further, by insisting that Pearl's passion represents a central component of her identity, without which she would cease to be herself, the text critiques the "self-willed act of conquest of one's own passions" central to domestic fiction's promotion of feminine submission (*Sensational Designs* 162). And Pearl's fundamental

coherence indicates that the supernatural individualist's variegated nature nonetheless allows for a stable sense of self, that her metaphorical multiplicity reflects an identity which is complex but unified.

As in many supernatural marriage plots, the supernatural also serves as a space that both reflects the female individualist's isolation and protects her individualism from the pressures of angeldom. In particular, the magic circle—the band that surrounds and isolates Hester and Pearl because of the seemingly supernatural power of the letter—reflects the duo's painful seclusion even as it preserves their individuality from those who would crush them into conformity. The letter has "the effect of a spell, taking [Hester] out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself" (54). Hester is relegated to a "magic circle of ignominy" (246), which serves as a "forcible type of the moral solitude in which the scarlet letter enveloped its fated wearer" (234). However, her isolation is enforced not only by the "instinctive withdrawal of her fellow-creatures," but also "partly by her own reserve" (234), revealing that supernatural solitude serves in part as a self-imposed means of protecting her individuality. While the narrator depicts Hester's rejection of the community as, in part, a problematic reflection of pridefulness which must be overcome by her acquisition of communal sympathy, he also suggests that this standoffishness serves her well; this self-possession allows her to survive while weaker beings like Dimmesdale and the young wife perish. For instance, the self-possession she exhibits during the scaffold scene—depicted likewise as an ability to withdraw from the world—is figured in

supernatural terms, and serves to protect her selfhood in the face of great emotional pain:

> there were intervals when the whole scene, in which she was the most conspicuous object, seemed to vanish from her eyes, or at least glimmered indistinctly before them, like a mass of imperfectly shaped and spectral images. . . . Possibly, it was an instinctive device of her spirit, to relieve itself, by the exhibition of these phantasmagoric forms, from the cruel weight and hardness of the reality. (57)

Further, the letter—the punishment meant to strip Hester of her individuality and reduce her to a symbol—is appropriated by Hester, transformed into an embodiment of her individuality, and wielded as a talismanic source of protection. Hester's embroidery of the letter allows her to wear it "proudly as an item of seduction" by "rework[ing] the letter into a brilliant jewel (Schwab 184); she thus renders it an insistent and perpetual reminder of her distinctive (and in the eyes of the community, troublesome) selfhood. The supernatural letter, like her supernaturalism in general, represents her refusal to submit to the community's attempts to strip her of her vivid identity through humiliation and ostracism.

Likewise, Hester's similar adornment of Pearl not only serves to proclaim Hester's individuality—her love of ornamentation and her passionate temperament are on constant display in both her letter and her child—but also reflects, and even heightens, the child's individuality. Pearl is a being of intense passion and energy, characterized by "vigor" and "vivacity of spirits," and the flame-like hues of her garments mirror her temperament (184). Further, the clothing combines with Pearl's natural beauty to create an "absolute circle of radiance around her" (90), suggesting that Pearl's natural vibrance is enhanced, not diminished, as it would be were she

transformed into a symbol. The circle of radiance also suggests that Hester has, by rendering Pearl the letter in miniature, imbued her daughter with the letter's supernatural protection.

In addition to its association with this painful yet protective isolation, the supernatural is also associated with the kind of sympathetic connection which can, in its own way, help to protect individuality. The magic circle, like the broader supernatural realm to which it belongs, not only protects the individualism of those isolated within it but can simultaneously serve as a zone in which outcasts can band together to find comfort and acceptance in one another's sympathy. In other words, supernatural metaphors throughout supernatural marriage fiction are associated with both of the seemingly opposing components necessary to free women from the restrictions of angeldom: the isolation of self-possession provides a protective shield, while sympathy allows others to accept women's individualism.

The most striking example of this linkage between supernaturalism and sympathy occurs in the forest scene, in which Hester and Dimmesdale are finally able to meet on the same plane. The process they undergo in order to achieve this connection is significant, as it unpacks the process of crossing into another state of being that we see repeatedly—and typically in shorthand—throughout the supernatural marriage plot:

> It was no wonder that they thus questioned one another's actual and bodily existence, and even doubted of their own. So strangely did they meet, in the dim wood, that it was like the first encounter, in the world beyond the grave, of two spirits who had been intimately connected in their former life, but now stood coldly shuddering, in mutual dread; as not yet familiar with their state, nor wonted to the companionship of disembodied beings. Each a ghost, and awe-stricken at the other ghost. . . . It was with fear, and tremulously, and, as

> it were, by a slow, reluctant necessity, that Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne. The grasp, cold as it was, took away what was dreariest in the interview. They now felt themselves, at least, inhabitants of the same sphere. (189-90)

Dimmesdale crosses from the human sphere of community into Hester's isolated supernatural sphere, the only realm in which her individualism can coexist with her womanhood. Like Hobomok, Dimmesdale enters an isolated supernatural realm with his mate in order to create a private circle of sympathy. But unlike Charles Brown, who crosses over to the land of the dead and undergoes a transformational rebirth, Dimmesdale fails to undergo the sort of permanent change that would allow him to accept Hester on her own, individualistic terms. And unlike Hobomok, Dimmesdale fails to establish a complete sympathy with Hester, even during this moment of supernatural communion. Rather, he continues projecting his symbolic fantasies of womanhood onto her. When he first sees Hester in the forest, he does not recognize her, wondering whether she is a real woman or a "spectre"; then, "he ma[kes] a step nigher, and discover[s] the scarlet letter" (189). Like the rest of the community, Dimmesdale can recognize Hester only as a symbol.

And it is Dimmesdale's failure to perceive Hester's full humanity, his inability to change as Charles Brown did, that leads to the failure of this supernatural marriage plot. The Forest Scene demonstrates the potential for a successful supernatural marriage plot by showing that Hester could, with Dimmesdale's acceptance, regain her full womanhood without having to relinquish her individualism; as I discussed earlier, Hester is able temporarily to regain her femininity when she removes the letter in the forest. The reasons for the

supernatural marriage plot's failure in this case demonstrate the elements that are, as a rule, necessary for the successful completion of this type of plot.

In general, the supernatural individualist can retain her individualism only if her prospective groom is capable of sympathy; in this case, marriage to an untransformed Dimmesdale would ensure that Hester's individuality would be undermined by her symbolic status and by his selfish inability to perceive her as an entity in her own right. It becomes clear during the Forest Scene that his desire to be with Hester stems from the overweening self-absorption which has been documented by critics such as Nina Baym, Kenneth Pimple, and Erika Kreger and which plagues him to his death.[5] He demonstrates no interest in Hester's companionship for its own sake, but rather views her in terms of what she can do for him: "'Neither can I live any longer without her companionship; so powerful is she to sustain,—so tender to soothe!'" (201). His true perspective on Hester soon becomes overt, when he tells her, "'thou art my better angel'"; clearly, he cannot see any identity beyond that of the *A*. And his inability to see beyond Hester's letter attains the level of public spectacle during the final scaffold scene, when he refers to Hester in purely symbolic terms and uses her symbolic status to gain sympathy for himself as "'the one sinner of the world'" rather than attempting to alleviate her suffering by humanizing her in the public's eyes:

> "Lo, the scarlet letter which Hester wears! Ye have all shuddered at it! Wherever her walk hath been,—wherever, so miserably burdened, she may have hoped to find repose,—it hath cast a lurid gleam of awe and horrible repugnance roundabout her. But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered!" (254-55)

In the end, he still views Hester and Pearl as emblems of sin, examples to be trotted out before the public. And not only is he incapable of seeing Hester as a human being, but he also remains unable to think of anyone but himself. Although he does bring Hester and Pearl onto the scaffold with him, he never overtly announces his connection with his family, indicating that his familial ties remain, to the end, subsumed by his selfish concern for his own reputation. His inability to temper abstract thought with genuine sympathy for others—even those closest to him—would clearly make him a disastrous husband and father.

Despite Hester's evasion of a potentially oppressive marriage, some critics perceive the novel's conclusion as deeply problematic for Hester, arguing that she ultimately relinquishes the individualism and intellectualism which the novel purportedly deems the sole purview of men. Daniel Cottom, for instance, argues that the novel critiques female intellectualism by suggesting that, if women enter the realm of thought and do battle with the world, they must either become witches (as does Mistress Hibbins) or be unsexed (62, 64). Ellen Weinauer focuses specifically on the issue of witchcraft, arguing that the text registers its "discomfort about female (self) ownership" by participating in a historic tradition linking witchcraft accusations with women who threatened the exclusivity of male property ownership (15). Gabriele Schwab argues that the novel's conclusion is "unsatisfying, if not disturbing" because of the text's supposedly unsympathetic perspective toward Hester's intellectualism (191). Like Cottom, she points to the narrative linkage between Hester's unwomaning and her turn toward pure intellectualism as evidence that the narrator "constantly chastises Hester's development" (188). And on the

surface, the fact that supernaturalism in this novel takes on a particularly negative cast—at times, the text associates supernaturalism with outright evil—would seem to support this position. I, however, align myself with critics such as Nina Baym and Donald A. Ringe, who argue that the narrator is sympathetic to Hester's individualistic development and intellectual activity. Specifically, I contend that the novel's linkage between supernaturalism and evil does not reflect a denigration of female individualism because the text is in fact associating evil supernaturalism with an *excess* of individualism, with the "sin" of becoming a law unto oneself. In other words, since supernaturalism is linked to individualism, it takes on a negative cast when individualism is, in the eyes of the text, taken to an unhealthy and problematic extreme.

All four of the main characters in fact engage in this problematic degree of individualism: Chillingworth loses touch with human law by becoming monomaniacally obsessed with tormenting Dimmesdale; Dimmesdale does so in the forest with Hester by choosing to escape the community and live as though they are married; Hester does so in her "latitude of speculation" during which she "wander[s], without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness" (199), and Pearl's entire essence is one of lawlessness. The fact that both male and female characters engage in—and are rendered problematically supernatural for—this sin of lawlessness indicates that the novel is not castigating female individualism, but rather interrogating excessive individualism for members of both sexes. The minister in a maze is just as problematic as Hester in her radical thinking. Dimmesdale and the other male scholars are critiqued as too bound by the iron

framework of law, but the opposite extreme is problematic from the novel's perspective as well. Just as one cannot make adequate decisions without a balance between head and heart, one also cannot make adequate decisions without a balance between self and society. As Nina Baym notes, the narrator is rejecting not Hester's intellectualism, but her radicalism; rather than "brood[ing] on the overthrow of society," she must "come to accept the human community, however imperfect, as the necessary habitat of the individual" ("Significance of Plot" 58).

Lawlessness, then, is associated with demonic supernaturalism: Chillingworth's obsession with revenge has transformed him from "'a man thoughtful for others'" into "'a fiend'" (172-73), and Dimmesdale, because of his "deliberate choice" to reject human law by running away with Hester, temporarily develops "sympathy and fellowship with wicked mortals and the world of perverted spirits" (222). Pearl's case is more complex, and demonstrates the narrative's split perspective on supernaturalism. Throughout the text, the narrator depicts Pearl as both a mischievous, appealing elf and as a demonic imp; his demonic references to Pearl arise in response to her lawlessness and lack of sympathy.[6] For instance, when Hester tells Pearl that her Heavenly Father sent her here, Pearl responds by touching the scarlet letter and replying that she has no Heavenly Father, demonstrating a lack of regard for both divine law and human institutions; the narrator questions whether she was moved to this response by the promptings of "an evil spirit" (98). And when Hester looks at Pearl and is painfully reminded of her sin (as she does repeatedly), "It was as if an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery" (97). In the following passage,

during which Pearl shows Hester her reflection in a suit of armor, elfishness becomes demonic when magnified, just as individualism becomes problematic lawlessness when exaggerated:

> the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance . . . Pearl pointed upward, also, at a similar picture in the head-piece; smiling at her mother, with the elfish intelligence that was so familiar an expression on her small physiognomy. That look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Prynne feel as if it could not be the image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl's shape. (106)

Chillingworth neatly demonstrates the text's linkage between lawlessness and problematic supernaturalism in his attempt to comprehend Pearl:

> "There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child's composition . . . What, in Heaven's name, is she? Is the imp altogether evil? Hath she affections? Hath she any discoverable principle of being?" (134)

Losing touch completely with human opinions—becoming thoroughly individualistic—thus leads to the potential for evil.

But at the end of the novel, when Pearl has become humanized through the acquisition of sympathy—the law, or governing principle of her being, which she had previously lacked—the narrator changes his position on her supernatural status to reflect her transformation from a pure individualist into an individualist who acknowledges the needs of others and the laws of society. He now rejects the epithet "demon" for Pearl and demonstrates his preference for referring to her as "elf-child": "So Pearl—the elf-child,—the demon offspring, as some people, up to that epoch, persisted in considering her—became the richest heiress of her day, in the New World" (261); he then refers to her as "elf-child" again on the following page.

This linguistic shift underscores the fact that Hawthorne has been, throughout the text, making clear distinctions among supernatural types.

Further, the fact that Pearl and Hester remain in this supernatural state at the novel's conclusion further supports my position that the narrator implicitly endorses female individualism; had Pearl or Hester been transformed into angels, the metaphors surrounding them would have changed correspondingly. Pearl, the elf-child, has made a home for herself in the "unknown region" (262), while Hester returns to the community as a ghostlike woman in grey who may have entered her long-shut cottage by "glid[ing] shadow-like through [the] impediments" of wood and iron" (261). However, there remains a distinction between Hester's and Pearl's supernaturalism, a distinction which, as it has throughout the text, mirrors their respective levels of individualism. Hester's drab ghostliness reflects both her isolation—her "forbidden sympathy"—and the forced abandonment of her womanhood;[7] the fullness of her selfhood has been distilled down to the vibrancy of the letter. Pearl, on the other hand, remains elfish, a state of being which has, throughout the text, been associated with her mischief, intellect, and vibrancy.

Thus, contrary to critics who insist that Hester, and the text as a whole, reject female intellectualism, I contend that Hester in fact chooses a contemplative path. Her remaining years are not only "toilsome" and "self-devoted," but also "thoughtful," indicating that she has not, as so many critics argue, abandoned the life of the mind (263). Rather, she has rejected the life of lawlessness; she remains a sharp critic of society—the counsel she provides the women of her community continues her longstanding pattern of exploring the problematic relations between

the sexes—but one who operates from within, rather than from without. Hester's fate is indeed distressing, but the disturbing effect serves to further the novel's critique of domestic ideology, not to present a reactionary rejection of individualistic female development. She indeed relinquishes a part of herself—her womanhood—in order to push society further down the path of reform, but she does so only because her community, despite its progress, still considers femininity and intellectualism to be mutually exclusive.

Erika Kreger contends that Hester is in fact a domestic heroine who undergoes the rebellious girl's usual transformation into angel in the house: "In T*he Scarlet Letter,* as in *The Lamplighter* and *The Wide, Wide World*, the heroine's moral victory depends upon her vanquishing all individualistic desire" (333). And Hester's concern with reform and devotion to counseling the community's women at the novel's close place her within the tradition of domestic fiction, in which women are permitted to oppose injustice only so long as they do so purely for the sake of others rather than on their own behalf; the ideology of benevolence was completely consistent with the ideology of domesticity in its demand "that women sacrifice their own interests in order to promote the interests of . . . society at large" (Hoffert 34). But although Hester does acquiesce to domestic ideology's expectation of female selflessness, the depiction of this acquiescence differs radically from sentimental fiction's depiction of angelic transformation. As we shall see in Chapter III, supernatural marriage fiction uses ghostliness to depict rebellious women who have been coerced into angeldom by the pressures of angel-worshipping husbands and the demands of domestic ideology. Ghostliness, in these texts, represents the

limbo in which women who are forced into angeldom, but who continue to resist it, become trapped. In this context, then, Hester's lingering supernaturalism reflects her lingering rebelliousness, and confirms that she has not in fact become an angel in the house. And by taking up the letter, which has always symbolized her vibrant, passionate—and "sinful"—identity, she symbolically refuses the purity and emotional restraint demanded of the angel.

Although Hester seems freely to choose the path of angeldom, I contend that her choice in fact centers on the preservation of her identity, and that a partial conversion to angeldom is the price she pays for this choice; as with her intellectualism, her community's prescribed notions of proper female identity force her to relinquish certain traits in order to preserve others. As I argued earlier, Hester refuses to evade her punishment by escaping to Europe because to do so would involve "hid[ing] her character and identity under a new exterior"; rather than relinquishing the dark parts of her experience and her nature—which are antithetical to angeldom but which comprise an indelible part of who she is—Hester chooses to retain a coherent and complete sense of identity. The price she pays for clinging to her shadings of dark and light—to the fullness of her humanity—is the relinquishment of sexuality and self-interest, both of which render her palatable to her community by conferring upon her the veneer of angeldom. And the text clearly depicts the resulting constriction of Hester's nature as a tragic loss. Chillingworth, when contemplating her situation, feels pity, but is

> unable to restrain a thrill of admiration too; for there was a quality almost majestic in the despair which she had expressed. "Thou hadst great

> elements. . . . hadst thou met earlier with a better love than mine, this evil had not been. I pity thee, for the good that has been wasted in thy nature!" (173)

This sense of loss and waste further suggests that, rather than acquiescing to domesticity, Hester has been coerced into it; as Nina Baym observes, Hester "has learned that no woman, as society now stands, can be truly free" ("Passion and Authority" 186), and the restrictive existence she enters at the novel's conclusion only underscores the text's critique of domestic ideology.

Further, Hester assesses Pearl's character late in the novel, and this assessment—which, like Chillingworth's, is not bracketed by any signs of the narrator's skepticism—seems to represent the novel's encapsulation of female nobility:

> In the little chaos of Pearl's character, there might be seen emerging . . . the stedfast principles of an unflinching courage,—an uncontrollable will,—a sturdy pride, which might be disciplined into self-respect, and a bitter scorn of many things which, when examined, might be found to have the taint of falsehood in them. She possessed affections, too, though hitherto acrid and disagreeable, as are the richest flavors of unripe fruit. With all these sterling attributes, thought Hester, the evil which she inherited from her mother must be great indeed, if a noble woman do not grow out of this elfish child. (180)

This portrait of noble womanhood, which blends intellectual skepticism, willfulness, and deep affection, implicitly challenges True Womanhood's submission to worldly authority and its rejection of unconventional thinking, rebelliousness, and pride.

While the community has clearly made progress—their contempt for Hester has softened into a grudging acceptance—Hester nonetheless remains an outsider. They accept her as a wise and revered counselor, but not as the multifaceted—and sexual—woman that reemerges briefly in the Forest Scene. Hester has given the community a decided push in the right direction, but the sharp contrast between the

full, vibrant womanhood that Hester evinces in the Forest Scene and the grey ghostliness to which the community restricts her reveals just how much work must be done before "the coming revelation" can "establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness" (263). Hester has exerted a profound influence on her community, but her ultimate fate is depicted as a muted victory. Hester chooses to further the cause of this coming revelation—even though it means sacrificing her womanhood—in hopes that future generations will not be forced to make such sacrifices.

Pearl's fate, meanwhile, is shrouded in mystery, but the narrative strongly suggests that she has married and had a family, that she has fulfilled her "pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it" (256). The text also indicates that Pearl's individualism remains intact. She retains not only her elfishness, but also the love of color and ornamentation that have throughout the novel reflected the fullness of her individuality: she makes beautiful ornaments for her mother, and Hester ensures the continuance of Pearl's colorful legacy by embroidering a lavish baby-garment for Pearl's child (262). Thus, although Hester's marriage plot fails, the second generation corrects the mistakes of the first. And the fact that she remains a vibrantly-colored elf-child despite her marriage indicates that she has found happiness in the human world while at the same time retaining her elfish individualism. This successful integration of female individualism into marriage further suggests that she has found a husband who accepts her individualism—who has, in the parlance of the supernatural marriage plot, crossed over into Pearl's elfish

realm. The fact that she remains elfish rather than becoming human like Mary Conant indicates that she and her husband have fashioned a private supernatural sphere in which Pearl's individualism is accepted, suggesting that the rest of the world—in keeping with the novel's critique of Victorian society—has not yet caught up with them. The "coming revelation" may not be at hand, but the novel, like other supernatural marriage plots, insists that women such as Pearl can find their own private happiness within the protective sphere of supernaturalism.

CHAPTER II

"SHE REFUSED TO EXPLAIN ME NATURALLY": SUPERNATURAL WOMEN AND THE HAZARDS OF FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

As we have seen in Chapter I, the success of the supernatural marriage plot can hinge entirely on the potential groom's capacity to change into the kind of husband who can exhibit sympathy and perceive his mate as a fully-realized individual rather than an angelic fantasy figure. Likewise, the texts I will explore in this chapter convey the importance of such male transformations to the establishment of equitable marriages. However, in addition to revealing the marital inequities caused by problematic aspects of Victorian male development, these novels also focus on the cultural pressures that influence female development, on the hurdles that can prevent women from maintaining their individualism as they enter into adulthood and marriage in a culture that promotes angeldom as its ideal.

Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) and Augusta Jane Evans' *St. Elmo* (1866) both employ supernatural language to depict strong-willed, highly intelligent women who fall in love with deeply flawed men, men who must rid themselves of these flaws in order to become appropriate husbands. The men's transformations, however, are not in themselves sufficient for the establishment of equal marriages; where *The Morgesons'* Cassandra retains her girlhood "supernatural" individualism in her marriage to Desmond, *St. Elmo's* Edna Earl transforms into an angel in preparation for her marriage to that novel's title

character. Comparing these two texts, which are rather similar in terms of overall plot but radically different in their philosophies, their uses of supernaturalism, and the ultimate fates of their heroines, reveals some of the ideological origins and functions of supernatural language.

As I discussed in Chapter I, supernatural language in these texts is often associated with unconventional, individualistic women and serves to depict their uniqueness and isolation in a culture that embraces the ideology of angelic True Womanhood. But the question remains: why did these authors specifically choose *supernaturalism*, as opposed to some other medium, to depict women who do not conform to conventional femininity? A key to answering this question lies in the fact that both *The Morgesons* and *St. Elmo* are in fact participating, to differing degrees, in the conventions of domestic fiction. As many critics have noted, the domestic novel typically begins with a willful girl who must learn to become a True Woman. Susan K. Harris, for instance, observes that "[u]nruly childhoods in themselves were not atypical in women's fiction" ("Stoddard's *The Morgesons*" 11). Sabina Matter-Seibel, in her discussion of *The Morgesons,* argues that despite the novel's idiosyncrasies and rebellious stance, Stoddard was in some ways writing a domestic novel:

> Even the fact that [Cassandra] is not a good girl, but a rather sassy romp, points to a conventional opening. The tradition of the high-spirited tomboy who will have to learn to submit gracefully to worldly and godly authority was well known to readers who were familiar with Louisa May Alcott's Jo in *Little Women* (1868) and Susan B. Warner's Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide, Wide World* (1851). (21)

In the context of domestic fiction, then, the willful girl—and the author telling her story—is confronted with her seemingly inevitable transformation from

individualistic human being into supernatural angel. If the author wishes to interrogate or resist this convention, he or she must find some way to contend with this inevitability, and the best way of resisting a supernatural transformation is through supernatural means. By proactively transforming the willful girl into another form of supernatural being, the author provides her with the tools she needs to combat the supernatural influence of angeldom as she grows to maturity.

More significantly, authors interrogating the domestic novel tradition are engaging with a specific worldview, and as such must play by a specific set of rules. In particular, proponents of domestic ideology advocated "the institution of the kingdom of heaven on earth," and insisted that the establishment of this kingdom, and the resulting transformation of society, depended on women's angeldom (*Sensational Designs* 141). Domestic ideology thus envisions a world in which angelic supernaturalism is the norm, in which the supernatural is natural because most women are angels and the real world has become a version of heaven; as Nina Auerbach notes, "[t]he 'normal' or pattern Victorian woman is an angel, immune from the human condition" and "exclu[ded] from her human birthright" (64). Since the goal of many domestic novels is the transformation of the individualistic girl into the normative angel—a transformation which will adapt her to the supernatural realm of heaven on earth—her only chance of survival is to incorporate herself into the supernatural realm on her own terms, to combat the supernatural power of the angel by claiming other forms of supernatural power as her own. And since domestic ideology posits a world that is *already* supernatural, authors who wish to

explore this ideology must likewise adapt this supernatural realm to suit their own ends.

It is important to note that although domestic fiction implicitly positions itself in the supernatural realm, it does not deploy supernatural language in depicting its setting; although it tracks the evolution of human girl into supernatural being, it does not depict this transformation in supernatural terms. Domestic ideology is borne of supernaturalism, but the genre which constructed itself around this ideology exhibits a striking absence of the supernatural. Supernatural language is, for instance, practically nonexistent in Susan Warner's hugely popular domestic novel *The Wide, Wide World*; even the word "angel" appears only twice, surprising given Ellen Montgomery's status as "the genre's most submissive heroine" (Baym xxxix). The dearth of supernatural language in a genre devoted to the creation of supernatural beings may, on the surface, seem incongruous, but it is in fact consistent with domestic ideology's normalization of angeldom. If the world is a heaven on earth populated by female angels, then the supernatural becomes invisible—it is everywhere, and as such does not need mentioning. Further, to depict angeldom as supernatural would be to undermine domestic ideology's insistence that it represents *True* Womanhood, to explode the fantasy that angeldom is innate. The supernatural marriage plot, meanwhile, does just that; it makes visible that which domestic fiction renders invisible, and in so doing, presents an implicit critique of domestic ideology's claim to normativity. While domestic fiction depicts the transition from girl to angel as a natural, inherent part of growing up female, the

supernatural marriage plot reveals the supernatural underpinnings that domestic fiction wishes to conceal, and thus reveals the angel to be unnatural.

The dearth of supernatural language in domestic fiction also helps to establish the supernatural marriage plot as a genre in its own right. Not only do the domestic novel and the supernatural marriage plot respond very differently to angel ideology, but these divergent responses—which I will explore in more detail later in the chapter—are linked with distinct and recognizable conventions. The comparison of the two texts under consideration in this chapter—a supernatural marriage plot that includes elements of domestic fiction (*The Morgesons*) and a domestic novel that incorporates elements of the supernatural marriage plot (*St. Elmo*)—further reveals the degree to which we are in fact examining an ongoing dialogue between two genres, both of which arose in response to the questions posed by angel ideology, and both of which seek to transform the world around them. Domestic fiction, as Jane Tompkins argues, "represents a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view," a revolutionary attempt to reform the world by replacing the masculine values of the marketplace—which domestic novelists viewed as corrupt—with the feminine values of home (*Sensational Designs* 124, 145). Writers of sentimental fiction appropriated their culture's value system to their own ends, redefining the terms of domestic ideology such that the restrictions placed on women ultimately enhanced female power; the True Woman has the power to influence everyone within her sphere, as well as the power associated with a heightened spirituality which links her with the divine. By defining domesticity and submission as sources of both worldly and divine power, these texts allowed women

"both to fulfill and transcend their appointed roles" (*Sensational Designs* 161). The supernatural marriage plot, on the other hand, serves as a means of redefining the roles themselves, of interrogating and revising Victorian culture's very definitions of marriage and femininity. Rather than valorizing a rigid and limited definition of femininity which "asked women to restrain their selfish impulses and subordinate their own personal desires and needs to the needs of their households, husbands, and children," supernatural marriage fiction envisions a world which permits women access to the "masculine" half of their human birthright, and aligns itself with early feminists in its allegiance to the "principles of individual self-interest" (Hoffert 34). This genre's vision of reform allows for the possibility of direct, rather than indirect, forms of female power, and imagines, like Hester Prynne, a "coming revelation" which would permit women to achieve power without having to relinquish their human status and individualism.

The Morgesons

The Morgesons, in particular, employs supernatural language to catalogue the various dangers awaiting individualistic girls as they mature into womanhood. The novel presents its heroine/narrator, Cassandra Morgeson, with a variety of potential female and marital role models. The fact that she is confronted with an array of potential hazards—and the fact that she is the only one of the novel's numerous female characters who reaches adulthood with her individualism intact—speaks to the grave difficulties facing women in a culture that promotes True Womanhood and the inhuman state of angeldom as its ideal.

The novel depicts experience as central to female education, and contrasts the development of Cassandra, who is educated through various extended trips away from her provincial town, with that of her sister (and double) Veronica, who refuses to leave the house for much of her life. The most notable of Cass' experiences is her near-affair with her married cousin Charles Morgeson, a Byronic man who simultaneously frightens and attracts Cass. Before their affair is consummated, Charles is killed in a carriage accident in which Cass is also involved. She barely survives the accident and emerges with scars, but her experience with Charles ultimately leads, not to punishment, but to a greater awareness of herself and the world around her. This experience also prepares her for a relationship with her future husband, the Byronic Desmond Somers, an alcoholic who decides to rid himself of his vices through an extended stay in Europe. While Des takes responsibility for his own salvation from the family curse, his brother Ben expects that his marriage to Veronica will magically cure him. Ben's refusal of adult responsibility, combined with Veronica's refusal of adult femininity, leads to Ben's death from delirium tremens, the birth of a mentally impaired baby, and Veronica's decline into a near-catatonic stupor.

Ben's expectations of Veronica correspond faithfully to the conventions of angel ideology: the angelic woman, defined as "morally superior" (Woloch 122), is expected to use her "'personal and moral influence' to sway 'the hearts and consciences of all with whom in private life [she] stand[s] connected'" and to save the morally weaker man from himself (Sarah Hale, quoted in Boylan 162). The unrealistic expectations associated with angel ideology interfere with men's ability

to see women as flawed, complex human beings, and undermine women's capacity to develop as individuals. If the heroine is to retain her individuality, then, she must select a mate who is capable of seeing her as an individual rather than an archetype. Cass demonstrates a keen awareness of the dangers facing women in marriage, an awareness stemming from her experience with Charles and her observations of numerous married couples (which I will discuss in more depth later): when her father asks her what men require of women, she replies, "'They require the souls and bodies of women, without having the trouble of knowing the difference between the one and the other'" (221). Her experiences enable her to choose a husband who will allow her individuality to flourish rather than subordinating it to his angelic fantasies.

Desmond's rejection of angeldom becomes clear almost immediately, in that his initial attraction to Cass stems from the visible signs of her encounter with Charles; later in the novel, before their long separation, he writes, "'I am yours, as I have been, since that night I asked you "How came those scars?"'" (227). Desmond has had similar experiences with illicit love, and when telling Cass his story, he insists that she must "'not conjure up any tragic ideas on the subject. She is no outcast. She is here to-night; if there was ruin, it was mutual'" (199). Des thus demonstrates a refusal of gendered double standards and a respect for women who demonstrate self-awareness and strength of character; further, this position reflects the text's ideological alignment with the woman's rights reformers of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, whose Declaration of Sentiments included the resolution "'that men be held to the same standards of moral behavior as women'" (quoted in

Hoffert 3). Desmond's views contrast sharply with those of his brother Ben, who failed to win Cass' affections before turning to the more "'delicate, pure, [and] ignorant'" Veronica. His assessment of Cass reveals some of the profound ways in which angel ideology impacts men:

> unlike most women, you understood your instincts, . . . you dared to define them, and were impious enough to follow them. You debased my ideal, you confused me, also, for I could never affirm that you were wrong; forcing me to consult abstractions, they gave a verdict in your favor, which almost unsexed you in my estimation. I must own that the man who is willing to marry you has more courage than I have. (226)

According to his "'ideal,'" a woman who is aware of and responsive to her sexual desires must, ironically, be viewed as "'unsexed'"; further, when confronted with an individualistic woman, the man who accepts angel ideology becomes distressed and confused, and ultimately rules her out as a potential mate.

The novel also suggests—like the texts in Chapter I—that in order to be viewed as a suitable husband, a man must not only reject fantasies of angelic womanhood, but must also develop his capacity for emotion and sympathy. In this case, Des has a cruel and violent streak—he kicks a dog during Cass' first encounter with him—which must be overcome in addition to his alcoholism. The demonic, animal-like Desmond does demonstrate occasional hints of softness and gentility to counterbalance his sensuality and brutality, but his two sides are so polarized that they lead Cass to wonder, "which was the real man?" (184). While Cass clearly finds his animal nature captivating, she also finds his kind, gentlemanly side attractive, and clings to the occasional "spark[s] of humanity" that he exhibits (192). The explicit goal of Desmond's transformation is to rid him of his alcoholism; the implicit

goal is to cultivate his "feminine" traits and to integrate his two warring sides, to undermine his Byronism so that he can acknowledge, rather than overpowering, Cass' individuality. And his metamorphosis is, in its supernaturalism, typical of male transformations throughout the supernatural marriage plot. When he, at the novel's conclusion, returns from his stay in Europe after the hellish ordeal of contending with his alcoholism, he is spectral: he appears seemingly out of nowhere, his voice is "deathly faint," and "a mortal paleness [has] overspread his face" (250, 251). And like the transformed suitor in *Hobomok,* Charles Brown, Desmond's foray into the supernatural realm concludes with a return to humanity. But in this case, the return from spectrality to humanity is brought on not by community-wide acceptance, but by a reunion with his beloved, a return to the private circle of acceptance in which outcasts can be themselves: "'I murmured loving words to him, till he drew a deep breath of life and strength'" (251).

Through her choice of Desmond, Cassandra goes a long way toward retaining her individualism: Desmond's development of sympathy and civility will undermine his domineering tendencies, and his rejection of angeldom will enable him to see her as she is, not as some impossible fantasy figure. However, as the novel reveals, Cass must also navigate her way through an obstacle course of cultural pressures and ideologies; she, too, must reject angeldom, and this process is inextricably linked with her supernatural status. The novel opens with Aunt Merce's assessment of Cass as she climbs a chest of drawers to reach her favorite book: "'That child . . . is possessed'" (5). As Susan K. Harris and Stacy Alaimo note, the accusation of possession, which occurs throughout the novel, refers to Cass' *self-*

possession, to the fact that "she knows exactly what she wants and attempts to get it" (Alaimo 31). The novel, then, directly links supernatural language with female individualism; Cass is labeled demonic—in other words, anti-angelic—precisely for her "unfeminine" activity and self-assertion.

The text expands on this connection between "unfeminine" impulses and devilishness later, after Cass' mother dies and she takes over the running of the household. To further add to her new responsibilities, the childish Ben and Veronica have made it clear that they expect Cass to remain with them and care for them after their marriage. When faced with the prospect of giving up on her dreams (including the dream of marrying Desmond) and living entirely for others, she tells Veronica that she needs help maintaining her resolve because she has "'contrary desires,'" the source of which is "'a devil named Temperament'" (219). In other words, Cass' very nature finds the idea of utter selflessness distasteful, and as such, her temperament can, in the context of angel ideology, only be viewed as a competing—and disruptive—supernatural force.

Cass' mother, Mary, demonstrates a similar inability to conceive of Cass' temperament in anything but supernatural terms. After leaving school, Cass expresses a need for activity and, in frustration, asks her mother what she should do. In reply, Mary reflexively mouths the sort of platitude one could find in most domestic fiction: "'Do,' she answered in a mechanical voice, 'read the Bible, and sew more'" (64). Her inability to transcend the simplistic answers offered by domestic ideology not only belies the reality of her own rebellious girlhood, but also

eliminates any possibility of genuine connection with her daughter and renders her incapable of offering Cass any useful, real-world advice:

> What could we be to each other? . . . I saw she was saddened by something regarding me, which she could not explain, because she refused to explain me naturally. I thought she wished me to believe she could have no infirmity in common with me—no temptations, no errors—that she must repress all the doubts and longings of her heart for example's sake. (64)

In addition to critiquing the source of a tragic disconnect between mother and daughter, this passage also makes explicit one of the implicit functions of supernatural language in the supernatural marriage plot. In a culture which views angeldom as normative, individualistic women are labeled supernatural precisely because their culture conceives of them as *un*natural. Where the supernatural angel is perceived as human, the supernatural individualist is perceived as inhuman, a distinction being overtly rejected by this passage. The fact that her mother *refused* to explain her naturally implies that a natural explanation is in fact possible, but is rejected out of hand. Further, the fact that domestic ideology is espoused "mechanical[ly]," and that it undermines rather than strengthens the mother-daughter bond it claims to valorize, exposes it as the true source of unnatural and inhuman behavior.

Despite the fact that for others (and occasionally for Cass herself), supernatural language is often used to criticize her behavior and character, Cass depicts her supernatural status in a predominantly positive light. For instance, after returning from her time away at school, where she was sent to be "tame[d]," Aunt Merce asserts that she is "still 'possessed'" (27, 60). The paragraph immediately following this assessment provides an example of the powers conferred upon her by

her lingering self-possession: "'Locke Morgeson's daughter can do anything,' commented the villagers. In consequence of the unlimited power accorded me I was unpopular" (60). Despite her unpopularity, though, she becomes the community's trendsetter; her "whims were sneered at, and then followed" (60-61). The witchlike power attributed to this "'tall enchantress'" thus proves a double-edged sword: although she is disliked and to some degree ostracized by the community, they nonetheless become her slavish imitators (160). Her self-possession causes people to emulate her even as they find her unsettling, and despite the isolation associated with her supernatural status, Cass revels in the power it confers upon her: "Of course I was driven from whim to whim, to keep them busy, and to preserve my originality, and at last I became eccentric for eccentricity's sake" (61). While her supernatural status grants her a satisfying power over others, it serves an even greater purpose through the power it gives her over *herself*: her self-possession allows her to maintain her integrity and individuality even in the face of harsh criticism from those around her. As Susan K. Harris argues, the "childhood disorderliness" and willfulness which others associate with possession are the very traits which allow for "self-preservation" and which, later in the novel, render her "the only character capable of holding the household together after her mother's death and her father's business failures" ("Stoddard's *The Morgesons*" 17).

In addition to self-possession, the novel links supernatural language with another "unfeminine"—and empowering—aspect of Cass' individuality. Cass repeatedly describes herself as "an animal," a description suggesting a werewolf-like blurring between human and beast. This suggestion of supernatural animalism

becomes particularly evident in a midnight encounter between Desmond, his mother, and Cass in which the three of them seem literally transformed into snarling beasts:

> "What are you doing here?" she asked harshly, but in a whisper, her eyes blazing like a panther's. . . .
> The blaze in her eyes kindled a more furious one in his; he stepped forward with a threatening motion.
> Anger raged through me—like a fierce rain that strikes flat a violent sea. I laid my hand on her arm, which she snapped at like a wolf. (186)

Not only does Cass' animal status form part of the connection she feels with the animal-like Desmond, but it also reflects the fact that she is "robust in health—inattentive, and seeking excitement and exhilaration" (27). Her physical and emotional activity, like her self-possession, situate her in diametric opposition to the angel; the hyper-embodied Cass, blooming with health and craving activity, contrasts sharply with the ethereal, housebound angel. During her stay with Charles and his wife Alice, Cass for the first time is forced to confront the so-called abnormality of her animal nature when she sees the discrepancy between her ravenous appetite and the small appetites of her hosts: "'Mother,' I said afterward, 'I am afraid I am an animal. Did you notice how little the Morgesons ate?'" (71). Her self-doubt disappears, however, once she escapes Charles' magnetic influence and returns home; once again, her self-possession allows her to preserve herself from the influence of angeldom. Ultimately, then, the qualities associated with supernatural language—her self-possession, her confidence in her own judgment, her active nature—prove to be the very qualities which allow her to ward off angelic status; one form of supernaturalism thus serves to combat another.

Cass' sister Veronica, whose temperament and development contrast sharply with those of Cass, is also depicted in supernatural terms. The text refers to her throughout as "elfish," and I contend that this elfishness refers to a liminal state between devil and angel, between an unconventional temperament which tries to resist adult femininity and the angeldom which she ironically enforces upon herself through that very resistance. Ver and Cass deploy very different strategies to resist angelic status, in large part because their temperaments are so inherently different. Where Cass is healthy, sensual, and ravenously appetitive, Ver is sickly, ethereal, and anorexic; where Cass grows and matures through experience in the world, Ver's agoraphobia renders her a perpetual child; where Cass is literal-minded and realistic, Ver is romantic and imaginative (14). Her highly-developed imaginative powers—repeatedly figured as a supernatural ability to see into the world beyond—provide her with a means of escaping the real world, which threatens her identity with the restrictions of adult femininity.[1] This escape into the realm of fantasy not only contributes to her elfishness, but it also enables her to withstand another of her evasive maneuvers, her refusal to confront the world of adulthood by refusing to leave the house.

Apart from the overall aura of elfishness attaching to Ver, her elfishness becomes most prominent during her frequent childhood illnesses. In general, her illnesses seem to serve as a concession to the cultural demands of True Womanhood; as the servant Fanny notes, "'She is like the Old Harry before she has a turn, and like an angel after'" (147). In other words, Ver's illnesses coincide with expressions of

temper or willfulness on her part, and seem to represent an attempt to tame her devilish nature and force herself into the angelic role her culture expects of her.

But her illnesses also represent a more complex and conflicted reaction than they would at first appear. For instance, the illness which occurs after the birth of their younger brother Arthur seems, at first blush, like a simple reaction against her anger at the intrusion into the family of a male heir (the unfair financial treatment of daughters is discussed by the household servants after his birth); Ver "cr[ies] out with passion" as she testily informs Cass of the new arrival, and her illness thus seems to represent yet another attempt to reign in her unruly emotions (25). This particular illness, however, seems to represent not only a concession to, but an attempted evasion of, femininity, "the hysterical reaction of a young woman who does not want to grow up and face her anger at her severely restricted life" (Matter-Seibel 31). She takes ill before mother has even left her room, suggesting a correspondence between Mary's confinement and Veronica's. Veronica, then, is reacting against the corporeal demands of adult femininity, and repudiating her body serves as a rejection of those demands: "She had no strength, no appetite, and looked more elfish than ever" (26). The fact that illness for Veronica represents a rejection as well as an acceptance of True Womanhood becomes even clearer in the details of her recovery: "One of her amusements was to cut off her hair, lock by lock, and cut it short before she was well enough to walk about" (26). The seeming connection between the excision of a key cultural symbol of femininity and her recovery from illness suggests, again, that her disorders represent a conflicted

response to the cultural demands of womanhood. Her elfishness, as this example indicates, seems to represent the evasive function of her disorders.

Her illnesses subside (though they do not disappear entirely) just as her imaginative capacities come to fruition, which also coincides with puberty and with the advent of her agoraphobia (59-60). As a child, Ver was torn between her temperamental, mischievous nature and the demands of angel ideology; as she grows older and finds techniques for escaping these demands, the illnesses are no longer necessary. Her elfishness remains, though, in the form of her stunted emotional development, another stratagem employed by Ver to defend her individuality from the demands of True Womanhood. For instance, Ver exhibits a great deal of distress in the weeks leading up to her wedding (she plans to wear black, and has trouble believing that she is to be married); as she dresses on her wedding day, Ver looks at Cass "so childly, so elfish, so willful, and so tenderly, that I took [her face] between my hands and kissed it" (240). Ver's elfishness is thus linked with both her devilish willfulness and her childishness, providing further evidence that, in supernatural marriage fiction, the supernatural represents both the individualistic temperament that must be protected from angeldom and the tactics used to effect that protection.

However, as the novel's conclusion reveals, Ver's supernatural tactics fail where Cass' succeed; at the end of the novel, after Ben's death and the birth of their impaired baby, Ver's "eyes go no more in quest of something beyond. A wall of darkness lies before her, which she will not penetrate" (252). She has lost the "supernatural" capacity to escape her angelic, housebound state by entering an

imaginative realm, and without this escape, she descends into a deathlike angeldom. Elfishness, then, represents in this text a failed attempt to avoid angeldom, and the reason for this failure lies in the fact that the tactics associated with it—the disembodiment of anorexia and the purity of ignorance—are in fact more extreme versions of the angelic qualities Ver is trying so desperately to avoid. Ver's attempt to elude angeldom in fact renders her hyperangelic in her utter confinement to the private sphere and her utter ignorance of the outside world. Further, the other component of Ver's elfish attempt to evade angeldom—her rejection of adult femininity through a state of perpetual childhood—fails as well, precisely because this elfish rebellion is associated with an anti-individualistic emotional and psychological stunting. Because she rejects individualism's ethic of full self-development, Ver cannot lay claim to the individualistic identity which, in these texts, represents the alternative to angeldom.

Further, Ver's supernaturalism, rather than preserving her humanity as Cass' does, serves only to undermine it. After accepting Ben's marriage proposal, "The light revealed a new expression in Verry's face—an unsettled, dispossessed look; . . . she seemed hardly aware that she was eating like an ordinary mortal" (159). The only time Ver exhibits the appetites of an ordinary human is when she is "dispossessed," temporarily stripped of her supernatural status. Her supernaturalism resembles angeldom too closely to be of any real service to her cause.

Her supernaturalism resembles angeldom in another dehumanizing respect as well. As I argued earlier, the supernatural individualist in these texts is depicted

as a one-woman pantheon of supernatural beings rather than a single type, and the multitude of options available to this character reflects and enables her multifaceted, individualistic subjectivity. Ver, on the other hand, is described almost exclusively as elfish; apart from a couple of references to her devilishness (Fanny compares her to Old Harry; Cass calls her "impish" early in the novel), Ver, like the angel, has only one supernatural form available to her. As a result, Ver's identity, like the angel's, is severely constricted; she allows herself only a limited existence, and experiences fullness and variety only in her fantasy realm.

The failure of Veronica's and Ben's marriage stems directly from this immersion in the world of fantasy. Ben, with his conventional angelic expectations of Veronica, is living fully in the fantasy realm created by angel ideology. He literally expects that, once they are married, they will occupy the promised kingdom of heaven on earth. He refers to their future life as "'our paradise'" "'in an enchanted palace'" (200, 242), and says that Veronica's "'delicate, pure, ignorant soul suggests to me eternal repose'" (226). For Ben, eternal repose signifies the kind of peace and stability which an angel in the house would provide, and which would magically alleviate his alcoholism. But the words, connoting the stasis of the grave, also suggest how life with an angel will be in reality. Veronica, as a True Woman should, hides from the sensuality and activity of life and entombs herself in a perpetual childhood, contributing to the living death (and ultimately for Ben, the literal death) which their lives become.

Veronica, meanwhile, is living in a warped version of the heavenly kingdom occupied by Ben—she tries to resist by fabricating her own competing fantasy realm,

but because she lives her real life as an angel would, she succeeds only in entrenching herself deeper in the realm of angeldom. Stoddard critiques the angelic supernatural realm depicted as normative by domestic ideology, suggesting that it is a fantasy land believed in and inhabited by children who are ill-prepared to deal with the realities of a world in which the best one can expect, as Cass concludes near the end of the novel, is that "if *to-day* would go on without bestowing upon me sharp pains, depriving me of sleep, mutilating me with an accident, or sending a disaster to those belonging to me, I would be content" (232). Cass' mature grasp of the harsh and uncertain nature of life provides her with the tools she needs to survive in the real world and to retain her individuality.[2]

The disastrous marriage of Ben and Veronica is one of many bad marriages in the novel, marriages which serve as counterpoints to the "equal and complete" union of Desmond and Cassandra (Zagarell 53) and which suggest that a lack of closeness and compatibility between husband and wife was the rule rather than the exception in Victorian America. In discussing the scholarly debate over the intimate female relationships so common in the nineteenth century, Carol Smith-Rosenberg notes that many critics view the female world as

> the artificial product of the unnatural separation of the sexes rooted in Victorian prudery. The industrial revolution, they continued, by separating work from residence, had thrust men out into the world of business and isolated women within a fortified domesticity. Victorian sexual norms completed the isolation of women and men. . . . Young women and men, strangers socialized to have different personalities and to live in alien spheres, met during well-chaperoned forays—an artificiality that would continue throughout their married lives. (31-32)

Joseph Allen Boone, in his study of the marriage plot, argues that despite changes in the status of women and relations between the sexes beginning in the twelfth century, there remained beneath the surface

> a curiously static, transhistorical conception . . . of man and woman as hierarchical "opposites" [which] persists in cultural iconography and in literary language, archetype, and "story." Whether cast in terms of antagonistic polarity, masked in the rhetoric of complementary balance, or celebrated as "companionate" harmony . . . the notion of sexual attraction as fundamentally opposite, rather than simply different, sexual beings has infiltrated nearly all fictional conventions for representing romance. (32)

Stoddard implicitly critiques this portrayal of men and women as complementary and unequal opposites by depicting it as the source of the many inadequate marriages in the text. Incompatible couples who divide their lives rigidly into opposing spheres and who show little interest in one another abound in the novel, giving the impression that such marriages are epidemic in Victorian culture.

Cassandra's parents clearly live separate lives, and this disjunction seems largely attributable to the ideology of separate spheres. For instance, mother "had no assistance from father in her ideas [regarding housekeeping]. It was enough to know that he had built a good house to shelter us, and to order the best that could be bought for us to eat and wear" (23). He refuses to participate in any aspect of home life, including parenting. When mother has a particularly bad day with Cass and Ver, her distress at being "'so tormented by these terrible children'" is met with this response: "Father took his hat and left the room" (12-13). There seems little common ground between them; where he sees "nothing beyond the material," she is "indifferent to the world" (24, 17). The spheres are kept utterly separate in this

marriage, and this separation obviously engenders the severe emotional disconnect that exists between husband and wife.

The relationship between Cousin Charles and his wife Alice further exaggerates the disconnect associated with the doctrine of separate spheres, and critiques dissimilarity between husband and wife as a source of marital unhappiness. Charles and Alice have "little love" for one another (74), largely because they are utterly incompatible. They have only one thing in common—their interest in living well—and beyond that, neither ever shows any "interest in the other's individual life" (74). Charles, in fact, focuses almost exclusively on the material; ownership seems to be his sole passion. As Alice notes with some vexation, "'his heart is with his horses and flowers [his two hobbies]. He is more interested in them than he is in his children'" (76). Like Cass' father, he shows more interest in the trappings of a well-appointed home and the status that comes with these signs of material success than in an emotional connection with his home and family. While he does participate to an unusual degree in the running of the household, he does so not from a sense of connection with his wife, but because of his controlling nature, his fastidiousness, and his concern with status. His role in the household is described as "appl[ying] his business talent to the art of living"; thus, his role in the domestic sphere is merely an extension of his masculine role in the world (76). Alice likewise appreciates the domestic trappings and signs of status that please Charles; in fact, this is the only area in which there is any "sympathy" between them (76). Alice responds to their disjointed marriage by immersing herself wholly in her proper sphere, to such an extent that she is hardly seen around the

house: "She was almost exclusively occupied with the children—their ailments or their pleasures—and staid in her own room, or the nursery" (75). And Cass suggests that her behavior represents a means of compensating for the lack of connection with her husband: "Her ideas of love ended with marriage; what came afterward—children, housekeeping, and the claims of society—sufficed her needs. If she had any surplus of feeling it was expended upon her children" (74).

It is clear that a relationship between Cassandra and Charles would be just as devoid of love and sympathy as the relationship between Charles and his wife. Cassandra's attraction to Charles is based not on similarity and connection, but on his paternalistic, Byronic magnetism: "'Is he really related to me? . . . we are wholly unlike, are we not?'" (85). This utter dissimilarity baffles her, since "'he influences [her] so strongly.'" Where he is fastidious, rigid, and orderly, she is willful and "'lawless'" (60); where she embraces her animal nature, his disdain for such traits causes her to question herself (71). She becomes "afraid of Cousin Charles" because of his ability to convey to her, without a word, every defect he detects in her; she falls into the habit of trying at all times to please him, a habit which would ultimately strip her of her self-possession and sense of individuality, as it has with Alice (74). After Charles' death, Alice's behavior changes radically, indicating that her marriage to the subtly domineering Charles has caused her to suppress her true nature. She tells Cass, "'I am changed. When perhaps I should feel that I have done with life, I am eager to begin it,'" suggesting that marriage to Charles was a kind of living death from which she has now been liberated (125). Clearly, then, if Cass were to choose such a man as her husband, her choice would prove disastrous to her

individualism; she would have to deny herself in such a relationship, both in the sense of suppressing her sensual appetites, of which he disapproves, and in the sense of having to be a different person around him. Her experiences with Charles prepare Cass for her relationship with Desmond by teaching her that she must demand he change his Byronic ways before their marriage, not after.

Ben's and Veronica's marriage takes to an extreme the problems associated with the rigid separation of the sexes, as well as focusing on the problems associated with a lack of compatibility. Their relationship is based more on fantasy—particularly Ben's angelic fantasies about Veronica—than on a real intimate connection. Ben's desire that Cass remain in their lives forever reflects not only the couple's childlike inability to care for themselves, but also the fact that they cannot function without an intermediary. When Ben asks Cass whether Veronica will ever understand him, she replies, "'Veronica probably will not understand you, but you must manage for yourself . . . I will have no voice between you'" (160). Veronica shares Ben's assessment that they have little connection; when her father asks her if she and Ben "'know each other,'" she replies, "'We do not know each other at all. What is the use of making *that* futile attempt?'" (162). The fact that the couple decides to marry despite a mutual realization that they have little in common reflects the degree to which their relationship is based in fantasy.

The layout of their house, in which Ver takes one half and Ben the other, further reflects the opposition in their relationship. And the partitioning of their home embodies the separation of spheres expected by their culture and enacted in their marriage: "The house of their married life is a proper edifice for [their]

polarization, with Verry's half facing the land and Ben's the sea," the symbol of life and activity in the novel (Zagarell 51). Ben, in other words, engages with life and the world while Ver embraces a thoroughgoing domesticity; however, this conventional gender division—which should, according to angel ideology, translate into an ideal marriage—leads to disaster. The lack of understanding between them stems from Veronica's utter domestication combined with Ben's refusal to engage with Veronica as anything but a fantasy figure. Veronica embraces an extreme, all-encompassing domesticity; she imprisons herself not only inside her home, but inside her own head, and in so doing, rejects intimate interaction with others. Ben, meanwhile, conceives of her as an idealized angel; even if Ver were capable of connection, Ben would be incapable of reciprocating. Thus, by making a direct correlation between the couple's inability to know one another and their rigid institutionalization of gender roles, Stoddard critiques domestic ideology as inimical to happy marriages.

In her depiction of Desmond and Cassandra, Stoddard replaces the idealization of men and women as complementary opposites—an expectation which leads to the multitude of bad marriages in the novel—with a new definition of marriage, one which is based in similarity and equality. She thus—in keeping with the ideological perspective of supernatural marriage fiction—aligns herself with early woman's rights reformers, given that "'more congenial marriages' [were] a major feminist goal" (Woloch 277). Not only do Des and Cass, as I argued earlier, reject gendered double standards and the unrealistic expectations of angel ideology, but they are also very much alike, so much so that Cass tells Ben, "'Can you

remember that Desmond and I influence each other to act alike? And that we comprehend each other without collision?'" (226). Their profound similarity is depicted largely through the use of supernatural language. Des, like Cass, is depicted as an animal: early in their relationship, Cass looks at Desmond and "speculate[s] on something animal in those eyes" (183), and later, their mutual animality is underscored by the werewolf-like nocturnal encounter between Cass, Des, and his mother. And where Cass is possessed, Des is repeatedly associated with the demonic. The novel's linkage of supernaturalism with compatibility is further evidenced by the fact that none of the text's many problematic marriages are depicted in supernatural terms; Ver is the only other supernatural bride in the novel, and her incompatible groom is depicted as nonsupernatural, reflecting the lack of connection—the opposition, in fact—between a husband and wife who occupy different worlds. Depicting Desmond as supernatural not only underscores the singular compatibility between him and his future wife, but it also reflects the fact that a man who loves such an unusually individualistic woman is going to be rather unique himself. Further, the text's depiction of the disastrous marriage between an angel-worshipping man and a supernatural individualist highlights a larger pattern that pervades supernatural marriage fiction. As we have seen in *Hobomok* and *The Scarlet Letter*, the suitor's repudiation of angel-worship is implicitly depicted as crucial to a successful marriage for the supernatural individualist; Stoddard, by actually following through with such a marriage and examining its aftermath, renders explicit this generic convention.

Des and Cass fashion a marriage unique in their society, one which is based in closeness and compatibility and which promotes the preservation of Cass' individualism rather than undermining it. However, most feminist critics, while admiring the degree to which Cass is able to forge her own, individualistic path, are nonetheless troubled by her movement toward domesticity after her mother's death. Particularly troubled is Stacy Alaimo, who perceives the novel as "a feminist tale that dramatizes and protests the heroine's fall from a wild childhood into a restricted, self-denying feminine adulthood" (30). Sandra Zagarell, while admiring Cass' individualism, nonetheless laments "the end of unfettered girlhood" (47). Sybil Weir's essay suggests the degree to which Cass' triumph is muted by "repressive" "social institutions" (439); Dawn Henwood, likewise, addresses the conflict between Cass' "sublime communion with her husband" and her need to "forfei[t] any hope she once held for spiritual transcendence" (60). While Louise Penner rightly argues that Cass' final retreat into domesticity potentially represents a strategy for preserving the self, and that this decision to retreat "is neither entirely positively nor negatively valenced," it is clear that Penner herself leans strongly toward seeing the conclusion as problematic (141, 144). I agree that the novel depicts domesticity and conventional femininity as potentially constricting, and that the text suggests that something is lost through Cass' absorption into domesticity. However, I also contend that the novel depicts domesticity as significantly less constraining for Cass than other critics have argued, and that Cass in many respects actively welcomes her feminine role. The sense of descent and restriction detected by other critics, in my view, stems from Cass' struggle to accommodate herself to

domesticity without losing herself, from her conflicted feelings as she undergoes the process of transformation from irresponsible girl to adult woman. While the ending is not unequivocally positive, and while Cass does have to relinquish certain freedoms by the end of the novel, her feelings of frustration and entrapment reflect the difficult and complex process of adjusting to her new role, of finding an appropriate balance between her duty to others and her duty to herself.

Cass does not depict domesticity as utterly problematic, and seems in fact to *enjoy* aspects of homemaking; during her stay with Alice, for instance, she learns to neaten and fold, and ultimately "beg[ins] to see beauty in order" (75-76). And as Sabina Matter-Seibel argues, Cass "enjoys her newly acquired competence" "while trying out different ways of running the household" (35). It is not marriage or domesticity that distresses Cass so deeply in the last section of the novel; rather, it is her sense that domesticity is an all-or-nothing proposition, that she must, as Aunt Merce says with trepidation, "'give up [her]self'" (215). Aunt Merce's comment indicates that Cass' anxieties are justified, that such utter immersion in domesticity represents the norm, not the exception. The many women around her—her mother and Alice, in particular—for whom domesticity represents a complete loss of self underscore the dangers facing Cass. And her anxieties are further bolstered by the specific demands being placed on her, by Ben's and Veronica's selfish expectation that she serve a supplemental role in their marriage rather than participating fully in one of her own.

Despite this threat of being subsumed by domesticity, Cass manages to emerge from the period between her mother's death and her marriage to Desmond

with her individuality intact. However, she does so only through a difficult struggle, during which she feels torn between her sense of obligation to her sister and her sense of entrapment in a life of utter self-sacrifice. Throughout this section of the novel she is attempting to determine where legitimate duty ends and unnecessary self-abnegation begins, and as she does so, she exhibits deep, albeit subtly expressed, conflict over her potential role in Ben's and Veronica's lives. For instance, despite her earlier insistence that she will not participate in their marriage ("'I will have no voice between you'" (160)), she off-handedly agrees to serve as a stand-in for Ver during one of Ben's fantasies about their future life:

> " . . . I'll have a boat"
> "I shall never go out with you."
> "Cass will. I shall cruise with her, and you, in your house, need not see us depart . . . Will you go?" he asked.
> "Of course," I answered, going downstairs. (225)

Cass also struggles with an oppressive sense of inevitability; to some degree, she sees herself as trapped in the life laid out for her by Ben: "[Ben] had defined my limits, he would, as far as possible, control me without pity or compassion . . . The end of it all must be for me to assimilate with their happiness!" (226-27).

The period following Ben's and Veronica's marriage is in some respects the most frustrating for Cass because of the profound sense of stagnation she experiences: "I remain this year the same. No change, no growth or development! The fulfillment of duty avails me nothing; and self-discipline has passed the necessary point" (243). Stacy Alaimo attributes this frustration to the stifling nature of domesticity and argues that "duty and discipline have hampered her growth, not encouraged it" (35); it is important to note, however, that this episode occurs during

a particularly frustrating—and temporary—period for Cass. The newly married Ben and Veronica are living in Cass' house, awaiting the completion of their own, and she has no idea when, or if, her beloved Desmond will return. Her frustration, then, represents not a commentary on the remainder of her life, as Alaimo claims, but rather a reaction to a difficult period during which her life is not her own. Further, as Cass insists here, there exists a *limit* to self-discipline, and she recognizes that she has passed from the necessary to the excessive. This assertion, I contend, represents a new stage in the development of Cass' ability to balance self-possession with selflessness. Whereas previously she felt conflict and confusion, she is now able to articulate a clearer sense of her boundaries. Stoddard thus details the psychological process of adjustment which permits a supernatural individualist to protect her autonomy in the face of angelic pressures.

When Ben's house is finally complete and the couple moves, Cass feels a sense of liberation: "The day they moved was a happy one for me. I was at last left alone in my own house, and I regained an absolute self-possession, and a sense of occupation I had long been a stranger to" (248). Her happiness, though, is marred by "the yearning, yawning empty void within me" (250), a void which Alaimo attributes to the emptiness of domestic life (35). However, almost immediately after Cass describes this void, Desmond returns, suggesting that his absence, not a "smothering identification between Cass and the house" (Alaimo 35), is the source of her pain. Even more significant is the fact that her sole ownership of the house "oppressed [her], almost, there was so much liberty to realize" (248). This statement undermines a reading of the novel in which clinging to unfettered girlhood and

absolute liberty would represent the most satisfying conclusion to Cass' story and the only means of safeguarding her individuality. As Cass here discovers, too much individualism, too much independence, is almost as oppressive as not enough. The balance between caring for others and preserving the self runs both ways; while a life of utter selflessness is frustrating and stifling, a life of utter self-absorption is unsatisfying, out of balance, and above all, lonely.

Many critics (including Buell and Zagarell, Alaimo, and Penner) argue that Cass and Des ensconce themselves in the domestic realm at the end of the text, and I agree that there is a claustrophobic tone to the novel's closing paragraphs. It seems clear that the couple are living their own, idiosyncratic lives, largely because they will never be absorbed into an accepting community—even Desmond's family refuses to accept the match, and the outside world, which has always set them apart, seems to have disappeared entirely. In the end, they seem to be preserving their "supernatural" marriage in the only way they can: by retreating from the "real" world of angeldom. However, there are hints, which other critics have not discussed, that Cass' life at the story's conclusion is not nearly as restricted as it might seem. Shortly after their marriage, Cass and Des go to Europe for two years, suggesting that Cass' previously circumscribed life in her dull and provincial hometown of Surrey has in fact opened up vastly. Throughout the novel, Cass contrasts the excitement to be had in the various towns she visits with the stifling quality of Surrey; their extended stay in Europe suggests that, in her marriage to Desmond, she has reclaimed the excitement—and growth—that comes with travel and experience and that she had enjoyed throughout her formative years. And after

they return from Europe, Cass hints that her old house is not their year-round home: "These last words I write in the summer time at our house in Surrey, for Desmond likes to be here at this season" (252).

The atmosphere of despair that haunts the novel's final paragraphs stems, I think, less from a sense that Cass has reconciled herself to "a life of diminished scope" (Buell and Zagarell xvii) than from the larger sense that life is difficult, painful, and beyond human control. This realistic perspective toward life develops in Cass over the course of the novel, and is confirmed when she and her husband return home from Europe to face the death of Ben, the widowhood and spiritual entombment of Veronica, and the retardation of Veronica's infant. However, this air of despondency is counterbalanced by the sense of profound communion between Cass and Des. After Ben falls dead before their eyes, they "mutely questio[n]" each other, suggesting that "the emotional and psychological bond between Cassandra and Desmond [is] so strong that the pair communicates at a level beyond the limits of language" (Henwood 60). Despite the reality that life is uncertain, that tragedy and death abound, that not even the domestic realm can promise security or stability, Desmond and Cassandra are at least able to "[cling] together" and to derive comfort from their deep bond. This, the novel suggests, is perhaps the best that any of us can hope for.

St. Elmo

The Morgesons' assertion that a marriage of like minds represents a viable way of contending with the tragedies of life is replaced in *St. Elmo* by the endorsement of

the sort of conventional, oppositional marriage rejected by Stoddard's text. However, *St. Elmo* should, by all rights, have promoted the type of marriage experienced by Desmond and Cassandra: the novel depicts a couple who are similar in intellect and temperament and a unique, supernatural woman who has the self-possession to follow her own path despite the world's opposition. In the end, however, the supernatural Edna Earl is transformed into an angel, preparing her for a conventional, hierarchical marriage with St. Elmo.

The orphaned Edna has been raised since infancy by her grandfather; when he dies, leaving her alone in the world, neighbors offer to take her in. She, however, decides to move away and earn her own living in a factory, in part because she does not want to accept charity, and in part because she—who has been enamored of learning from an early age—desires a good education. Her plans are thwarted by her involvement in a train wreck, and the injured Edna is taken in by the wealthy Mrs. Murray, who decides to have Edna educated by the pious, intellectual Mr. Hammond. Mrs. Murray's son, St. Elmo, was once a brilliant, loving, and extremely religious young man, but the betrayal of his fiancée, Agnes, with his best friend, Murray Hammond, embittered him, causing him to turn away from religion and toward a life of vengefulness and debauchery. Edna is immediately repulsed by his cynicism, his misogyny, and his rejection of Christianity, but ultimately falls in love with him. She, however, refuses his proposal of marriage, realizing that he must look to Christ, not her, for his salvation, and believing that she has a duty to God to reject an ungodly man. She moves to New York to pursue her writing career and to escape the constant temptation of being near St. Elmo. She works incessantly, and

her overwork takes a toll on her health, but she nonetheless rejects all offers of help, and refuses to slow down. She achieves great success with her writing, and is admired widely as a spokesperson for the ideals of True Womanhood. However, she is finally wooed away from the work that is killing her by St. Elmo, who has reformed and become a minister. When they marry, St. Elmo insists that she renounce writing forever, and she seems permanently to suppress the intellect that had formed a strong basis for the couple's attraction in the first place.

Evans' novel seems, like *The Morgesons,* to emphasize the importance of compatibility in marriage. When Edna fears that an attraction is developing between St. Elmo and the decidedly unstudious and frivolous Gertrude, she reacts with disgust, finding it

> so strange that the heart of the accomplished misanthrope—the man of letters and science . . . should surrender itself to the prattle of a pretty young thing who could sympathize in no degree with his pursuits, and was as utterly incapable of understanding his nature, as his Tartar horse or his pet bloodhound. (275)

Gertrude forms the basis for a subsequent critique of marital incompatibility as well. When Gordon Leigh, a suitor rejected by Edna, decides to marry Gertrude out of spite, the marriage is depicted as disastrous; as everyone had predicted, Gordon quickly tires of her. Even St. Elmo shows compassion for Gordon's plight, and demonstrates a belief in the importance of comparable intellects in a marriage: "'Poor devil! Before a year rolls over his head he will feel like plunging into the Atlantic'" (423).

Unlike the mismatched Gordon and Gertrude, Edna and St. Elmo are quite similar in temperament and interests. In addition to their notable intellects, they

share a fascination with classical languages and mythology. Their mutual interests, in fact, are so unusual that St. Elmo's cousin assumes Edna must be deceiving him to gain access to his money: "'Your own penetration will show you how unnatural it is that any pretty young girl like Edna should sympathize so intensely with my cousin's outré studies and tastes'" (198). The fact that their tastes are considered so extraordinary suggests an extreme and unusual level of compatibility.

However, the novel's promotion of such marital compatibility seems to be reversed by its conclusion, in which marriage to St. Elmo rescues Edna from the chronic illness—characterized by paleness and spells of unconsciousness—brought on by her literary toil. After their marriage, St. Elmo declares that their future will consist of "'[l]oving each other, aiding each other, serving Christ'" (565), but this suggestion of marital mutuality is belied by Edna's state during and after their wedding:

> The orphan's eyes were bent to the floor, and never once lifted, even when the trembling voice of her beloved pastor pronounced her St. Elmo Murray's wife. The intense pallor of her face frightened Mrs. Andrews, who watched her with suspended breath, and once moved eagerly toward her. Mr. Murray felt her lean more heavily against him during the ceremony; and, now turning to take her in his arms, he saw that her eyelashes had fallen on her cheeks—she had lost all consciousness of what was passing. (562)

Edna certainly does not enter into this marriage as an equal partner; she is, in a very real sense, absent from her own wedding. Edna has been so stripped of her individuality that she barely even exists, and she spends the last few pages of the novel in a state of childlike weakness. Immediately after St. Elmo proclaims, "'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!'" (562),

Edna states that she is "'perfectly well again.'" His articulation of "the sentimental convention of marriage" (Johnson 17) is thus presented as her "cure," but she is still so weak that St. Elmo must carry her back into the church, calling into question whether Edna will return even to a semblance of her former self. But in fact, a return to her former self would be antithetical to the cure offered her; she must remain in this weakened, dependent state so that St. Elmo can "'take care of the life [she had] nearly destroyed in [her] inordinate ambition'" (562). The individualist who had insisted on earning her own way despite fatigue, illness, and numerous offers of help finally claims her feminine "birthright of quiet, life-long happiness in the peaceful seclusion of home," but the peace offered by domestic angeldom comes at the cost of her self-possession (238).

Further, the narrative suggests that Edna will not regain the intellectualism which made her so compatible with her husband in the first place, because this renunciation of the intellectual life represents another aspect of her cure. After her illness was first diagnosed, Edna's doctor insisted that the only treatment for her ailment is to "refrain from study" and "above all things, do not tax your brain" (436); this prescription, combined with St. Elmo's pronouncement after their marriage, suggests that Edna will renounce entirely her intellectual life, not just her literary career. In fact, her final incarnation is linguistically linked with the silly and weak-minded Gertrude, who earlier had been used to insist on the importance of intellectual compatibility in a marriage. Gertrude is repeatedly referred to as a pet: her husband Gordon says that he can at least "pet Gertrude" to compensate for all that is lacking in their relationship (423), Edna loves Gertrude "as she would have

petted a canary or one of the spotted fawns gamboling over the lawn" because she "found it impossible to make a companion" of the frivolous girl (272), and Mr. Hammond refers to her as a "pretty pet, not a companion in the true sense of the word" (498). But after her marriage, Edna's new husband refers to her in the same terms, telling her that her readers must "'whistle for a new pet'" now that she "'belong[s] solely to [him]'" (562). Edna's illness links her with Gertrude as well. Gertrude "hated books and turned pale at the mention of study" (272); Edna's spells, brought on by any kind of mental exertion, cause her literally to become pale. Given her doctor's prescription and her husband's enforcement of it after their marriage, there seems little to prevent Edna from degenerating into a Gertrude, a mere pet rather than a genuine and equal companion to her husband.

Most critics of *St. Elmo* have depicted this final rejection of her hard-won career and transformation into a subordinate wife as out of keeping with the rest of the novel. The seemingly odd conclusion represents, at the very least, a product of the inherent conflict within Evans' worldview; she "cannot escape the ambivalence of promoting women's intellectual autonomy while simultaneously endorsing the male right to control the public sphere" (Johnson 17). According to Nina Baym, Evans

> is operating at the limits of what is seemly in women and consistent with their innate femininity; her work accordingly reflects a greater degree of tension and conflict than other woman's fiction. . . . Precisely because she is ambivalent and self-contradictory, Evans' books appeal to the doubts and vacillations experienced by many women who were learning to conceive of themselves, for the first time, as no less human than men. (278-79)

Susan K. Harris and Anne Goodwyn Jones go further, arguing that the novel's conclusion represents a complete contradiction of all that has come before. Harris in particular argues that the text has done such a thorough job of depicting Edna's love of her work and her insistence on continuing this work at all costs and despite all temptations to abandon it, that her willingness to relinquish it so readily seems ridiculous.

However, a close examination of the text's supernatural elements suggests a more coherent worldview than critics have given Evans credit for; the narrator's use of supernatural language throughout the novel is consistent with Edna's ultimate transformation from individualist to angel. Although the narrator displays throughout a clear tension between an individualistic perspective, in which she promotes a classical education for women and defends bluestockings and female authors from all-too-common attacks, and an angelic perspective, in which she adheres religiously to the dogma of domestic ideology, the use of supernatural language reflects the novel's overall promotion of angeldom.

Prior to her transformation, Edna resembles Cassandra and other heroines of the supernatural marriage plot in her idiosyncratic, individualistic nature and in her self-possession, which allows her to preserve this distinctive nature in the face of public criticism. In many respects, Edna is unconventionally feminine: she publicly rejects accepted social norms such as dueling; she chooses to earn her own living rather than be dependent; she prefers studying to attending balls; she insists on learning classical languages, an area of scholarship traditionally denied women on the assumption that "the mental discipline classical languages required would

destroy their femininity" (Harris, *Interpretive Strategies* 67); and she becomes wildly successful as an author. The novel, however, does not depict Edna's individualistic traits as universally positive, nor does it assemble them all under the mantle of supernaturalism. Rather, the text makes implicit distinctions between traits which it considers consistent with True Womanhood and those which it considers antithetical to True Womanhood; only the latter are associated with supernaturalism.

Certain behaviors—such as her rejection of dueling or her refusal to marry purely for financial security—are, according to the logic of the text, signs of the True Woman's superior moral code and her refusal to betray her values under any circumstances. These signs of strength are not connected with the supernatural in any way because they are seen through the lens of angeldom rather than individualism; the angel must exhibit such moral strength if she is to be granted the power of "influence." In addition, Edna's adoption of a public stance on dueling is consistent with "woman's traditional sphere of home and benevolence" (Hoffert 11); so long as a woman's indignation stems from a selfless concern for others rather than from self-interest, such behavior is considered admirable. Evans associates supernaturalism with specific individualistic or "unfeminine" traits—traits which Evans views as antithetical to True Womanhood—and she depicts these traits in decidedly negative terms. This deployment of supernatural language reflects the philosophy of True Womanhood being promoted throughout the novel and foreshadows the ultimate triumph of domestic ideology at the novel's conclusion.

It is significant that Edna's supernaturalism does not pervade her entire being as it does in the other female supernatural figures we have explored; rather, her supernaturalism is restricted to her intellectualism, her ambition, and the suppression of her emotional, "feminine" side. This differentiation of her supernatural qualities prepares us for the ending, in which—as one would expect of conventional domestic fiction—these traditionally masculine qualities are purged from her; as Harris notes in her discussion of *The Morgesons,*

> [t]he important difference between . . . conventional [domestic] novels and *The Morgesons* . . . is that the conventional closures of the former—endings in which the heroines submit to husbands, God, and social pressures—suggest that their protagonists' early unruliness is an evil to be rooted out. ("Stoddard's *The Morgesons*" 12)

By blending the supernatural marriage plot with the domestic novel, Evans underscores the intimate connection between the supernaturalism of the female individualist and the supernaturalism of the angel. Further, by using supernatural language to contain characteristics that she wishes to depict as undesirable and which must be "rooted out" in order for an angel to emerge, Evans demonstrates the degree to which the two types of supernaturalism are in fact diametrically opposed and in a state of perpetual conflict.

Based on the supernatural language associated with it, intellectualism apparently represents one of the evils to be rooted out. The text links study with disturbing supernatural images, and often depicts education as a wicked temptation. Edna's desire for knowledge begins in childhood, and through her reading,

> the vast domain of learning . . . stretched alluringly before her; and as often as she climbed this height, and viewed the wondrous scene beyond, it seemed, indeed,

> . . . . . "an arch where through
> Gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades
> Forever and forever when we move."
> In after years she sometimes questioned if this mount of observation was also that of temptation, to which ambition had led her spirit, and there bargained for and bought her future. (22)

This passage suggests an association between knowledge and supernatural access to other worlds; this supernatural access, though, is a problematic temptation to which she has been led by her "unfeminine" ambition and which, we are forewarned, will create trouble down the road. The linkage between intellectualism and supernaturalism becomes even more pronounced when a harsh, mysterious man—St. Elmo, as Edna discovers years later—appears during Edna's childhood and hires her grandfather to shoe his unruly horse. St. Elmo lays "his hand heavily on the horse's mane, said sternly a few words, which were utterly unintelligible to his human listeners, though they certainly exerted a magical influence over the fiery creature, who . . . soon stood tranquil and contented" (26). When St. Elmo departs, he leaves behind a book which becomes influential in Edna's education. When she inquires what language is inscribed in the book, her grandfather tells her that "'It is Greek, or Latin, or Dutch, like the other outlandish gibberish he talked to that devilish horse'" (27), creating an association between foreign languages—in particular the classical languages which Edna later insists on learning—and a disturbing, seemingly evil type of supernatural power. The text thus suggests that education for women becomes problematic when linked with "unfeminine" desires such as ambition or the desire for power. Given the novel's obvious desire to broaden the boundaries of feminine education, the text's position seems to be that

education for women is permissible only if her motives are pure and selfless, and if she ultimately uses this education for proper, True Womanly ends. Later in the novel, in response to an Englishman's belief that her "'countrywomen are growing dangerously learned,'" Edna herself insists that

> "it is rather the quality than the quantity of their learning that makes them troublesome. One of your own noble seers 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.'" (395)

Women should be permitted as much education as they choose, but only if they employ it within the proper bounds. The novel's perspective toward education for women, then, is anti-individualistic—it may be used to help one's race, it may be used to help one's husband, but it should not be used for one's own gratification or self-development. As Nina Baym argues, "[t]he idea that woman must also be personally gratified by the work she is doing is, in Evans' view (for she identifies herself with Edna's position), weakness"; rather, woman must "sta[y] where she does the world's work best" and "learn to like what [she] must do" (*Woman's Fiction* 293).

The first direct reference to Edna herself as supernatural occurs later, in her young adulthood, and is associated with the beginnings of her literary career. Late one night in St. Elmo's study, she becomes unsettled when she senses a presence in the room; she calls out, and "the echo of her own voice seemed sepulchral" (131). Moments later, her "large eyes look elfish under their heavy jet lashes" (133), and this elfishness is directly linked with a new future dominated by study and ambition. This night in St. Elmo's library, which is filled with ancient relics, plants

the seed for Edna's first book, a study of world mythologies; a few nights later, "her eyes kindled, her cheeks burned, as ambition pointed to a possible future, of which, till this hour, she had not dared to dream; and hope, o'erleaping all barriers, grasped a victory that would make her name imperishable" (135). This shift from depicting ambition in the abstract as supernatural to depicting Edna herself as supernatural reflects the fact that her ambition has now become a guiding, dominant force in her life. This consuming ambition, by triggering her illness, ultimately leads to a transformation from elf to ghost. As she works on her project, St. Elmo asks her, "'How long do you suppose your constitution will endure the tax you impose upon it? Midnight toil has already robbed you of your color, and converted a rosy, robust child into a pale, weary, hollow-eyed woman'" (229); growing into a woman represents, for Edna, a deathlike state because her activities are thwarting the development of femininity. Her condition worsens—and becomes more supernatural—as her work progresses. Her employer tells her that she looks "'too pale, too pale! If you don't contrive to get up some color, people will swear that [one of Edna's suitors is] airing the ghost of a pretty girl'" (417). Immediately after completing this first book, "this Gobelin of her brain" (432), Edna suffers a spell which marks the diagnosis of her illness: "[Her] heart beat faintly, and seemed to stop now and then, and the white, rigid face was as ghastly as if the dread kiss of Samaël had indeed been pressed upon her still lips" (234). She, however, refuses to quit working as her doctor advises, and continues to deteriorate, to Gertrude's shock: "'you pale darling! What a starved ghost you are! Not half as substantial as my shadow'" (496).

One motivation for this obsessive labor is her desire to forget the pain caused by having to renounce the wicked St. Elmo:

> she felt that her sole hope of peace of mind, her only rest, was in earnest and unceasing labor. . . . She worked late at night until her body was exhausted, because she dreaded to lie awake, . . . haunted by precious recollections of days gone by forever. (439)

This desire to suppress her emotions through intellectual activity represents another aspect of her illness and another source of ghostliness; although domestic fiction centers on the heroine's "learning to conquer her own passions" (*Sensational Designs* 172), the utter rejection of emotion exhibited by Edna—like the ambition and intellect she embraces—is incompatible with the domestic vocation prescribed by True Womanhood and is thus linked with the "illness" of supernaturalism. Edna has, beginning with the death of her grandfather, always suppressed her emotional side, a difficult feat given the unusually warm heart that Mr. Hammond attributes to her. Her refusal to confront her emotions repeatedly triggers the deathlike spells that characterize her illness. For instance, after hearing news that St. Elmo is to marry another woman, the view from her window seems "ghostly and weird," and she becomes unconscious. When her pupil enters, he cries, "'Oh! I thought you were dead! You looked so white and felt so cold'" (391). Early in the novel, Mr. Hammond makes it clear that this bifurcation between head and heart cannot last; he wonders

> "how long her pure heart will reject the vanities and baubles that engross most women; how long mere abstract study will continue to charm her; and I tremble when I think of the future, to which I know she is looking so eagerly. Now, her emotional nature sleeps, her heart is at rest—slumbering also; she is all intellect at present—giving her brain no relaxation. Ah! if it could always be so. But it will not! There will come a time, I fear, when her fine mind and

> pure, warm heart will be arrayed against each other, will battle desperately, and one or the other must be subordinated." (118)

The cure, then, is for Edna to subordinate her intellect and allow emotion to dominate; Mr. Hammond makes clear that Edna will be forced to choose between two integral parts of her nature, that she must sacrifice aspects of her temperament as she passes into womanhood.

Her illness paves the way for the subordination of her intellect and her will, but the ghostly status induced by this illness could have led in one of two directions: if she had continued to suppress her emotions, her death would have rendered her a literal spirit; by subordinating her intellect and ambition instead, she loses a significant part of her individuality, but gains access to the figurative spirituality of the angel. And while Edna is, throughout the novel, depicted as embodying many of the virtues of True Womanhood, she clearly does not become angelic until late in the text. It is only near the end of the novel—after her ghostliness has set in—that the text refers to her as angelic. Upon learning that St. Elmo is in love with Edna, Mrs. Murray realizes that Edna is the source of his transformation, and marvels that she was "'sheltering unawares the angel who was to bring back happiness to my son's heart'" (473). And in his final confrontation with Agnes, his former fiancée, St. Elmo asserts that Edna is "'the only queen my heart has acknowledged since then, . . . one who, in her purity soars like an angel above you and me'" (535). The novel thus makes it clear that her ghostliness serves as a precursor to her angeldom, and that angeldom can be achieved only through the elimination of certain conventionally masculine traits.

Ghostliness in fact forms an integral part of Edna's education into femininity, since this education occurs as a direct result of her debilitating illness. In part, her ghostly status symbolizes the spiritualizing process attendant on the wasting of her body and necessary to the creation of an angelic being. In addition, her ghostliness represents not only the supernatural character flaws that induce her illness—her "unfeminine" ambition, willfulness, and intellectualism—but also the physical and emotional debilitation caused by the illness itself and integral to her transformation. Her purported flaws are not rectified through training in femininity, through the kind of role-modeling and chastisement we saw in *The Morgesons*. Rather, Edna receives an education through illness; her transformation at the novel's conclusion comes, not through an active realization of her faults, but through the weakening influence of disease. She "learns" dependency through debilitation, through a wearing away of her strength and her will. Illness also teaches her, implicitly, that she was wrong to reject her feminine birthright of domestic peace and protection, since claiming that birthright would have sheltered her from physical and psychological decline. And the weakness induced by illness lowers her psychological barriers, allowing her long-suppressed emotions to finally emerge and become dominant. Although the novel insists on the importance of role models such as Edna, on the need to actively teach girls the tenets of True Womanhood, the depiction of Edna's transformation ultimately suggests that conventional femininity will manifest itself on its own. If a girl is headed down the wrong path, nature will send her down the right one because one cannot contradict one's makeup without dire consequences. Rather than depicting a molding of her character through the

influence and example of others, the text depicts the emergence of True Womanhood as a natural and inevitable process. Where *The Morgesons* depicted education into femininity as an artificial process of acculturation, *St. Elmo* depicts education into femininity as innate—in the end, girls become True Women through the assertion of their feminine natures—and therefore unavoidable.

In the context of the supernatural marriage plot, Edna's transformation also becomes unavoidable the moment she agrees to marry St. Elmo, because she has chosen a husband who conceives of women as icons rather than individuals. The three periods of his life—youthful innocence, Byronic cynicism, and Christian reform—are all marked by sweeping generalizations about women. As a young man, he engaged in the sort of idealistic angel-worship exhibited by *The Morgesons'* Ben Somers; believing his fiancée Agnes to be an "'angel'" (313), he is so disillusioned by her betrayal that he brands all women as base, selfish and immoral. Edna's great influence over him stems from the fact that she challenges his assumptions; because she is honest, noble, and capable of great moral strength, she counters his view of women as universally demonic. But rather than learning to see women as complex individuals, St. Elmo in the end simply combines his youthful, idealistic view of women with his subsequent, jaded view of women: some women are angels (like Edna), some women are demons (like Agnes), and the demons should be subject to Christian forgiveness.

The supernatural language assigned to St. Elmo reflects the nature of his transformation. The text has two primary modes of describing him, demonic and corpselike, and both descriptions suggest that his old self will be revived rather than

replaced by a new and improved version. He makes frequent references to his "'dead self,'" and "'the Lazarus of [his] buried youth'" (311), and when Edna's noble behavior strikes the first, temporary blow to St. Elmo's Byronism, he tells her that she has "'galvanized the corpse'" (147); St. Elmo's youthful self, long-buried, is clearly capable of resurrection. He is also depicted throughout the text in demonic terms, and when describing his discovery of Agnes' and Murray's betrayal, he says that "'he was transformed; the soul of St. Elmo seemed to pass away—a fiend took possession of me; love died, hope with it'" (314). The image of demonic possession likewise suggests that his old self can be restored once the devil is exorcised. Further, unlike the other transformed heroes we have seen, St. Elmo's transformation does not involve the adoption or enhancement of a supernatural aura; in fact, it is depicted as a rejection of supernaturalism—and of the corpselike images with which he has been described throughout—and an implicit return to humanity:

> His almost Satanic pride was laid low as the dead in their mouldering shrouds, and all the giant strength of his perverted nature was gathered up and hurled in a new direction. The Dead Sea Past moaned and swelled, and the bitter waves surged and broke over his heart, but he silently buffeted them. (410)

He "kills" the problematic demonic qualities that have overwhelmed his youthful self, and overcomes the memories that have rendered him a walking corpse. Thus, rather than changing into something genuinely new, he merely resurrects his old self, with a slightly modified—but still schematic—conception of women.

He reveals this slightly modified philosophy in an encounter with Agnes after his reform; although he claims he has, through great struggle, managed to

forgive her for her crime against him, his cold, angry behavior toward her suggests otherwise. Murray, on the other hand, has been forgiven so completely that St. Elmo even begins to miss his late friend (whom St. Elmo killed in a duel after discovering his and Agnes' betrayal) (406). St. Elmo acknowledges the reason for his lingering anger:

> "Mark you, it was my injuries that I pardoned, your treachery that I forgave. But recollect there is a mournful truth in those words—*There is no pardon for desecrated ideals!* Once, in the flush of my youth, I selected you as the *beau ideal* of beautiful perfect womanhood; but you fell from that lofty pedestal where my ardent, boyish love set you for worship, and you dragged me down, down, almost beyond the pale of God's mercy!" (536)

Agnes' real crime, according to the text, was betraying the ideals of True Womanhood, ideals which Edna now embodies for him; he has enthroned Edna as his new angelic queen, and replaced the "'broken idol'" with a new one (534-35). And Agnes's crime is one which (unlike murdering one's best friend, apparently) can never completely be forgiven; since the angel is held responsible for safeguarding the morality of those around her, she bears the ultimate blame for any immoral acts committed by those in her charge. St. Elmo even goes so far as to refer to Murray—whom he murdered—and Murray's sister Annie—who succumbed to consumption after St. Elmo wooed her and then vengefully left her at the altar—as *Agnes'* victims as well as his (537). And the text endorses St. Elmo's views; at the novel's conclusion, the narrator contrasts Edna, whose "pure lips" are kissed by her new husband, with Agnes, who crouches in the graveyard like a "serpent" (564).

St. Elmo, then, lacks the capacity to view Edna as anything other than a rarefied angel; as a result, Edna's unique individuality must be jettisoned in favor of

generic angeldom. But while *St. Elmo* demands that women choose between intellect and emotion, self-possession and the comforts of marriage, humanity and angeldom, it permits men the full range of human qualities. The innocent, youthful self that St. Elmo left behind was "'as tender in his sympathies as a woman'" (104), and this partially-feminine self is restored at the novel's conclusion. St. Elmo is permitted to blend the conventionally masculine traits of intellectualism, strength of will, and activity in the public sphere with the feminine traits of sympathy, emotionalism, spirituality, and charity, and it is this return to partial femininity that allows Edna finally to accept his proposal; her refusal throughout the text stems largely from her knowledge that "St. Elmo's loss of the feminine part of his nature makes him the worst kind of patriarch" (Johnson 22). But St. Elmo's return to humanity from the demonic realm of unrestrained patriarchy also follows from the generic conventions of this hybrid text. Where Edna translates one form of supernaturalism into another, St. Elmo rids himself entirely of supernaturalism and regains human status. And in fact, the couple's divergent paths are implicitly required by domestic ideology: in order to be worshipped, angels must interact with subordinate beings; thus, the angel-worshipping husband must be fully human rather than supernatural in order for the domestic equation to work. Meanwhile, the angel must sacrifice her humanity in exchange for the power that attaches to her iconic status. By injecting supernaturalism into domestic fiction, Evans' text thus reveals the unspoken dynamics at work in the latter genre.

The elimination of St. Elmo's supernaturalism derives from the conventions of supernatural marriage fiction in another respect as well: it reflects the

introduction of gendered opposition and incompatibility into their relationship. As I noted in my discussion of *The Morgesons,* supernaturalism serves in part as a reflection of compatibility and similarity in a romantic couple; the supernatural hero is operating on the same level and defining himself in the same terms as the supernatural woman he loves. As we have seen with Ben and Veronica, the marriage between a supernatural woman and a non-supernatural, angel-worshipping man is a marriage of opposites, marked by incompatibility and a problematic lack of connection; further, the supernatural woman is forced into angeldom by such a match, because her husband does not acknowledge her individuality. That model is borne out in *St. Elmo*, in that St. Elmo in fact seemed more compatible with Edna during his Byronic, supernatural phase than he does at the novel's conclusion. The Byronic version of St. Elmo, unmarriageable because of his cruelty and misogyny, is nonetheless capable of engaging with the autonomous, intellectual Edna, and even as he derides female intellectualism, he engages in vigorous intellectual debates with Edna and other women.[3] The saintly minister that he becomes, however, is incapable of such interaction: he preaches to Agnes rather than engaging with her (532-37), and at the novel's conclusion, speaks for his new wife, getting the last word in a novel that had, up till that point, focused almost exclusively on the inner life and strong opinions of Edna Earl. In a way, it is as though Desmond Somers has changed into his brother Ben, with the expected results for Edna.

Ultimately, Edna's transformation occurs because she has been denied the protection typically offered in these texts by supernatural language, which is here

depicted, not as a source of strength and a talisman against angeldom, but rather as a source of pain, as a diseased part of her which must be transformed in order to ensure her survival. The talismanic power accorded Cass' "supernatural" self-possession is here transformed into a weakening influence; Edna's supernaturalism causes her almost literally to dematerialize. These opposing depictions of supernaturalism reflect the divergent goals of the two novels; where Stoddard wishes to protect Cass' individualism, Evans wishes to protect Edna's "femininity," and depicts Edna's supernatural individualism as antithetical to this goal. And this depiction of individualism as a weakening influence on the True Woman corresponds neatly with the conventional antifeminist argument against the expansion of woman's sphere: if woman "sought other rooms than those of her home, she lost both her happiness and her power" (Welter 211). Like Cassandra's mother, Evans refuses to explain Edna naturally, and in so doing, she transforms her novel into an embodiment of the pervasive cultural pressures that Cass works so insistently to evade.

At the same time, Evans' text in fact reinforces the sense of an ongoing dialogue between two established genres rather than a one-sided response to domestic fiction and ideology. Evans' modifications of supernatural language correspond with what one would expect from a text which transforms a supernatural individualist into an angel and which promotes domestic ideology: supernatural individualism is depicted as an unsettling version of supernaturalism rather than a positive force; this form of supernaturalism weakens the protagonist rather than strengthens her; her problematized supernaturalism is transmuted into

supernatural angeldom through her relinquishment of individualistic, conventionally masculine traits; and her angel-worshipping husband must leave behind all remnants of supernaturalism by the time of their marriage. The fact that these modifications are consistent with the patterns to be found in other supernatural marriage plots suggests that Evans was in fact engaging with an established—but heretofore unrecognized—genre, one with a predictable set of expectations and conventions which her readers would have recognized.

The presence of similar elements in Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* further supports the supernatural marriage plot's status as a recognizable genre whose conventions could be deployed as a convenient shorthand to convey certain ideas to its Victorian audience. As I mentioned earlier, Warner's novel—true to its genre—contains only a smattering of supernatural language. Yet the few, rare appearances of supernatural language coalesce into the same basic pattern apparent in Evans: such language is linked with Ellen Montgomery's "unfeminine" traits (in this case, rebelliousness and willfulness), which must be subdued through submission to the will of earthly and divine authority in order for her to find contentment and rise to angelic status. Early in the text, a friend comments on Ellen's distress and frustration at being forced to live with the harsh Miss Fortune and to endure her unfair treatment: "that poor little thing was going wandering about like a ghost, and growing thinner and paler every day, and he didn't know what she would come to if she went on so" (134). The other reference to supernaturalism also comes early in the text. Ellen's "strong passion [and] strong pride"—the qualities which must be overcome in order for her to become an angel—are overtly linked with the

supernatural: "Ellen had yet to learn that many a prayer and many a tear, much watchfulness, much help from on high, must be hers before she could be thoroughly dispossessed of these evil spirits" (181). Apart from these two, isolated examples of supernatural language, paleness throughout the text is often associated with episodes of passion and rebellion. Thus there are subtle, lingering hints that Ellen's willfulness is connected with supernatural ghostliness, but it never becomes overt again. This tiny incursion of supernatural language into a decidedly "realistic" piece of domestic fiction represents a chink in the armor of realism and normativity erected by the text; it undermines the illusion that angeldom is a natural womanly trait grounded solidly in the real world. Further, this slippage reveals the degree to which the conventions of supernatural marriage fiction had infiltrated the imaginations of nineteenth-century readers.

CHAPTER III

"I COULD NOT TELL DISTINCTLY WHETHER IT WERE GHOST OR WOMAN": GHOSTLINESS AND THE TERRORS OF FEMININITY

As the case of Edna Earl demonstrates, ghostliness can represent the intermediate phase in domestic fiction's standard trajectory, the transformation of a rebellious girl from supernatural individualist into selfless angel. And although *St. Elmo* heartily endorses this transformation, it nonetheless depicts both the process and the end result as a living death, suggesting at least some degree of understandable internal conflict in the intellectual but socially conservative Evans. This association between ghostliness and living death in fact pervades the supernatural marriage plot: the abjection and submersion of self caused by Victorian culture's rejection of individualistic women and endured by both Mary Conant and Hester Prynne are, as discussed in Chapter I, also linked to a ghostly state. And as the female-authored ghost stories we will explore in this chapter reveal, spectral disembodiment serves an even broader function; ghostliness is, in general, associated with problematic aspects of femininity. Examining the supernatural marriage plot's vexed depiction of ghostliness will allow us to consider why the genre excludes the apparition from its generally liberatory depiction of supernaturalism, which will in turn illuminate the genre's perspective on embodiment.

Because the short stories examined in this chapter focus their attention on the various ways in which Victorian America renders women metaphorically invisible, they center exclusively on ghostliness. Their focus on the ghostly woman makes these tales a perfect venue for exploring the specific functions of ghostly supernaturalism. This examination of ghostliness will, in turn, further illuminate the other forms of supernaturalism by highlighting the implicit dichotomy between embodiment and disembodiment in supernatural marriage fiction, a subject I will explore in Chapter IV.

In her discussion of the mid-century mesmerism and mediumship crazes, Teresa Goddu argues that

> the medium acted out women's private position in antebellum America: covered in white from head to toe, a disembodied spirit imprisoned in her own impenetrable sphere, the veiled lady acted the role of the angel in the house. (98)

This description of the medium in Victorian culture also aptly describes a central function of the ghost in literature of the period. As Vanessa Dickerson argues in her study of the British ghost story, ghostliness in women's supernatural fiction reflected the liminal status of the Victorian woman in the real world:

> Destined to be seen but unseen, required to shine forth in the broad daylight as an ethereal being, but thought to be too fleshly, too corrupt and corruptible, she lived during an era of the highest material, social, and political achievement, yet found herself all too often unable fully, if at all, to participate. (11)

The ghostliness experienced by female characters in these stories, then, typically symbolizes some anxiety about the female condition. In some cases, a female character—often in a partially spectral state herself—encounters a ghostly woman

who "warn[s] of the dangers of domesticity, frequently through connections between the ghost's history and the living woman's" (Carpenter and Kolmar 14). In others, the powerlessness, invisibility, and silencing associated with women's legal and social status—their expected obedience to husbands and fathers, their dependence on men for financial support, their inability to own property after marriage—are transmuted into the living death of ghostliness.

The depiction of women as ghosts, then, represents in part a reflection of women's "legal invisibility," the fact that they "'died' a civil death upon marriage with their independent civil identities tossed aside" (Rowland 17). Early feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, who helped plan the landmark Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention in 1848, "blamed men for denying women such things as the vote, the right to control their own property, guardianship of their children, and equal opportunities in education and employment" (Hoffert 3). These issues stemmed from the Republic's inception: because the Constitution was silent on the issue of women's legal status, this question was left up to the individual states. Despite the potential for inconsistency, most states based their statutes on English common law and its concept of *coverture*, in which the identity of the married woman—classified as a *feme covert*—was absorbed into that of her husband. Having no civil identity apart from that of their husbands, women could not enter into contracts or file lawsuits without their mate's permission, nor could they own property. Upon marriage, a woman's property flowed to her husband; in many states, even the "moveable property" she owned before marriage became her husband's to "'sell, keep, or bequeath if he dies'" (Rowland 17). And although some

Married Women's Property Acts were passed as early as 1839, they were designed primarily to protect male interests; not until the 1860s and 1870s did significant legal changes begin to occur.

Simultaneously, domestic ideology and the flood of prescriptive literature which it spawned supported woman's subordinate position, depicting submission as "perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women" (Welter 199). While literary critics condemned fictional female characters who did not conform to the Cult of True Womanhood (Coultrap-McQuin 11-12), the writers of conduct literature insistently extolled the virtues of conventional femininity. Caroline Gilman reveals the extent to which ideology expected women to suppress their desires, advising young brides to "'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*'" (1834; Quoted in Welter 201). And a morality tale published in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1842 exemplifies a conventional literary warning against filial disobedience: a young woman who chooses to marry a man against her parents' wishes finds him to be her "only comforter when all others have forsaken" her and as she dies her melodramatic death the narrator chides, "thou art reaping the reward of thy disobedience."[1]

Domestic fiction and ideology insist on the power that comes with the invisibility of self-abnegation, claiming that "doing the will of one's husband and father brings an access of divine power" ("The Other American Renaissance" 43) and that because of her submission, the wife "'bears rule over [her husband's] inclinations: he governs by law; she by persuasion'" (1839; Quoted in Welter 209).

The supernatural marriage fictions in this chapter, however, insist that the only true power lies in individualistic self-sovereignty. As Lynette Carpenter argues of Louisa May Alcott in her discussion of "A Whisper in the Dark," Alcott rejects domestic fiction's ethic of power through submission: "Alcott has no illusions about the potential for women's power in the face of male temporal authority. If [the heroine] gains any spiritual stature through her submission, she pays for it dearly" (*Legacy* 40). These tales imply what Margaret Fuller states overtly in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1848) in a fictional debate with a male interlocutor who espouses the common notion that "'I am the head [of the family] and [my wife] the heart'":

> God grant you play true to one another then. . . . If the head represses no natural pulse of the heart, there can be no question as to your giving your consent. Both will be of one accord, and there needs but to present any question to get a full and true answer. There is no need of precaution, of indulgence, or consent. But our doubt is whether the heart does consent with the head, or only obeys its decrees with a passiveness that precludes the exercise of its natural powers, or a repugnance that turns sweet qualities to bitter, or a doubt that lays waste the fair occasions of life. (16)

Given women's legal powerlessness and the presumption that man's word carries the weight of law, these texts argue, woman's fate depends on the goodwill and virtuous behavior of the men around her.

In addition to serving as a critique of woman's legal and social invisibility, ghostliness often represents a critique of angeldom since it literalizes the qualities demanded of this mythical creature: the Angel in the House is envisioned as a disembodied spirit, divorced from her physical body and its urges and rendered invisible by her self-abnegation and rejection of individualistic desire, and achieving power only indirectly, through her influence on those who have the power to act in

the "real" world. In the supernatural marriage plot's critique of the various forms of female invisibility, ghostliness represents the limbo in which those who resist domestic fiction's angelic transformation—but who are unable to escape it, typically because of social pressures and the power of male authority figures—become trapped. Further, women often become ghostly by rebelling against the legal and social injustices which angeldom, by promoting female submission, trains women to overlook.

As my discussions of *St. Elmo* and *The Wide, Wide World* in the previous chapter would suggest, though, ghostliness can represent either a critique of angeldom or a critique of rebellion, depending on who is deploying it. For the author of domestic fiction, the ghostly girl's unreasonable pride and sense of injustice prevent her from accessing the purported contentment that comes with angeldom, the peace that derives from accepting as just the power others wield over her. For the author of supernatural marriage fiction, on the other hand, the ghostliness of the rebellious female individualist stems from her justifiable sense of the unfairness of her position and from her self-protective unwillingness to cross over into the realm of angeldom. As we saw in *St. Elmo,* a supernatural marriage plot which morphs into domestic fiction, Edna Earl's innate True Womanhood forces her to overcome her resistance and embrace angeldom, enabling her to escape the liminal phantom zone in which she had been trapped for the last half of the novel. Conversely, the supernatural marriage plot's ghostly critique of angeldom typically focuses its attention on rebellious women who, unlike the denizens of domestic fiction, sustain their resistance to angeldom.

In some cases, spectral resisters can remain in limbo; in others, they can substitute death for angeldom; in still others, they can revert back to their individualistic selves. In any case, the ghostly women of supernatural marriage fiction, like "real" ghosts, become trapped in the netherworld because their unhappiness and sense of injustice prevent them from crossing to the other side. Their hauntings represent a refusal to let their sufferings be suppressed, a desire to reiterate their stories to prevent other women from enduring the same fate; as Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues, the ghost

> interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events. (5)

Like apparitions who cannot rest and walk the earth to address unfinished business, these spectral women serve as reminders of their discontents, discontents which cannot be remedied without the advent of Hester Prynne's "coming revelation." And as the texts in this chapter will reveal, the ghost story version of supernatural marriage fiction places particular emphasis on the necessity of reform, not only because of its focus on male abuses, but also because of its concern with power dynamics between the sexes. These ghost stories interrogate male power over women, and insist that true individualism depends on self-sovereignty.

"A Whisper in the Dark"

The ghosts in Louisa May Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" (1863) are a mother and daughter who are victimized by male guardians and rendered spectral

when they resist being transformed into angelic sleepwalkers like Edna Earl. The tale centers on Sybil, a rebellious, willful orphan with a coquettish streak who, soon before coming into her vast inheritance, is transferred to her uncle's guardianship so that she can fulfill the compact that he and her father had made years earlier. In order to allow his foster brother to share in his fortune, Sybil's father agreed that his daughter should, at the age of eighteen, marry her uncle's son Guy. Her uncle—who has gambled away his inheritance and desperately needs the marriage to take place—takes her to the family estate which she will soon inherit, and introduces her to his son. Sybil and Guy have much in common and fall in love, but when Sybil overhears her uncle admit to Guy that she could break the contract if she chooses, she realizes the information makes her "'mistress of them both'" and decides to toy with them. She feigns interest in her uncle in order to make Guy jealous and ensure that he falls in love with her, as she has with him. Her coquettish games lead her uncle to believe that she favors him, not Guy, and he decides to propose marriage himself. When she angrily rejects him, the vehemence of her resistance inspires him to concoct an alternate plan: he has Sybil declared mad and drugs her with wine so he can transport her to his own private asylum. During her imprisonment, she becomes fascinated by the seemingly ghostly inmate of the room above her, who repeatedly warns Sybil and finally urges her to flee. After the woman dies, Sybil finds an opportunity to escape and encounters Guy. Guy informs her that her uncle is dead and that her fellow inmate was in fact her mother, who had been imprisoned for years after supposedly going mad during Sybil's childhood. Guy and Sybil enjoy

a happy marriage, but Sybil nonetheless remains haunted years later by her mother's "spectral whisper in the dark."

Like the rebellious girl of domestic fiction, Sybil's trials stem from her inability to reconcile herself to the injustice of being controlled by others and to the idea that they have the right to expect her obedience. But unlike domestic heroines, Sybil rejects the requisite angelic transformation and as a result, enters the ghostly limbo reserved for such women, the region her similarly rebellious mother has inhabited since Sybil was a child.

The rebelliousness that protects Sybil from angeldom is evident from the story's opening scene, in which she describes herself as a "frank, fearless creature, quick to feel, speak and act"; she possesses a "willful curiosity" and feels indignation at being expected to "remain ignorant of so important an affair" as her arranged marriage (33, 32). She also exhibits a love of authority, manifested in part through imperious commands and in part through her coquettish maneuverings; she flirts with her uncle because she is aware of "her charms and longed to try their power" (33).

But the text repeatedly reveals that her belief in the power of coquetry is sadly misplaced. Her gamesmanship with her uncle in the opening scene, in which she attempts to gain the upper hand over him by perching on his lap and kissing him daintily, backfires when he physically restrains her, impertinently kisses her in return, and declares he shall "'tame'" her (33).[2] She, in turn, "felt perfectly powerless. All my little arts had failed, and for the first time I was mastered." And later, during the period of coquettish toying with father and son, she repeatedly

describes the "wanton pleasure" she takes in the idea of making her uncle "yiel[d] to [her] dominion" and bringing her cousin "to subjection" (42). But this sense of empowerment transforms into "a sudden bewilderment and sense of helplessness" when her uncle asks her to read his covertly altered copy of her father's will. Her recognition of the true power wielded over her both by her father and by male-authored laws deflates her sense of control: "the strange law terms seemed to make inexorable the paternal decree" (43). And shortly thereafter, her uncle renders her utterly helpless when he responds to her refusal of his marriage proposal by incarcerating her.

With coquetry proven to be a false form of power in the first half of the story, another of Sybil's options—angeldom—is raised in the second half, which focuses on her imprisonment. According to Nina Baym, the coquette was a primary target of critique in domestic fiction because she "lived for excitement and the admiration of the ballroom in the mistaken belief that such self-gratification was equivalent to power and influence" (*Woman's Fiction* 28). But rather than critiquing the coquette's false power in order to valorize the angel's "true" power, Alcott likewise interrogates the validity of angelic power.

The text in fact rewrites domestic fiction's typical angelic transformation in which the heroine learns, through an education in the value of Christian duty and humility, that her rebellion against the injustices associated with her powerless position stems from her own inordinate pride, immaturity, and lack of self-command, traits which she must learn to exorcise. She is taught that it is her perspective, not that of her guardians, that is misguided, because those against

whom she rebels have every right to expect her obedience. Alcott's ghost story depicts the heroine's path not as a process of Christian enlightenment, but as a brutal degradation of her spirit. The process begins soon after Sybil awakens to find herself imprisoned in the asylum, a discovery to which she responds with a daring escape attempt. Darting past one of her attendants and exiting the house, she finds the grounds surrounded by a high wall; she then swings herself into a tree and continues climbing even though "the branches snapped under [her and] the slender tree swayed perilously." Reaching the top of the wall, she discovers a stony ditch below her, but she decides she would "rather risk [her] life than tamely lose [her] liberty," and leaps in hopes of reaching the bank on the other side (50-1). She crashes into the stones below, triggering a lengthy illness. The boldness required to execute such an attempt contrasts sharply with Sybil's defeated state when she rises from her sickbed. Sybil has passed into ghostliness, "[rising] at last a shadow of my former self, feeling pitifully broken, both mentally and physically" (51), and she soon begins sleepwalking. Her transformation into ghostly somnambulist suggests that the transition to angeldom involves the sedation—and ultimately the death—of the self.

As Elizabeth Lennox Keyser persuasively argues, this lulling of the self occurs through the mechanism of forgetfulness, through a form of culturally-induced "amnesia" that allows women conveniently to disregard male injustices against them (Keyser 10). In her attempt to warn Sybil of the dangers facing her if she remains imprisoned, her ghostly mother loses her train of thought when she begins missing her husband, but she catches herself: "stop! I must not think of

those things or I shall forget" (55). And Sybil's uncle persuades her, despite her distrust of him, to drink the wine he had secretly drugged: "'Forgive, forget . . . and drink with me, "Oblivion to the past"'" (48).

This ability to overlook injustice—which, I contend, is crucial to a domestic heroine's transition from rebellious girl to obedient angel and which develops as the heroine learns to view others' infuriating behavior in a "spirit of charity" that rationalizes away "excited and angry feelings" (*Lamplighter* 143)—is depicted here not as a beneficial recognition of her guardians' right to claim obedience, but as a dangerous denial of facts which undermines women's ability to defend themselves. Alcott's text insists that women must remain haunted by their sense of ill-treatment in order to avoid being pacified into neglecting their own interests. And they must also develop the means of "communication across generations," the ability to perpetuate knowledge of the dangers of male authority despite cultural attempts to thwart this process, represented by Alcott as the pathologizing and imprisonment of the rebellious mother (Keyser 4). As Weinstock and Keyser both argue, this "contestation" of "the privileged narratives of history" is one key function served by ghostliness (Weinstock 6).

Thus, Sybil is wakened from her sleepwalking and prevented from lapsing into angeldom by ghostly contact from her mother, who has remained in her own spectral state because she refuses to forget. After this ghostly tenant of the upstairs room makes her first attempt to contact Sybil, the girl becomes obsessed with questioning her condition rather than passively accepting it:

> Why was I here? What motive induced my uncle to commit such an act? And when should I be liberated: were equally unanswerable, equally tormenting, and they haunted me like ghosts I had no power to exorcise or forget. After that I walked no more, because I slept no more; sleep seemed scared away. (52)

Ghostly reminders of the terrors associated with female powerlessness counteract the compulsion to lapse into angelic slumber, and the mother's ability to pass these questions—learned through hard experience—to her daughter possesses the potential to save the girl from suffering the same fate.

Despite her awakening, however, Sybil continues to deteriorate, and this deterioration implicitly critiques the limitations of domesticity. Shut away from the world and denied control over her own fate, she has been driven to despair by this "unnatural life" (52). Sybil also realizes she has been completely cut off from "the outer world" (51), reflecting her initiation into the sharply circumscribed sphere that angels are expected to inhabit. The outspoken girl who attempted a bold physical escape from her prison and who once declared, "'I fear no one,'" finally becomes "mute, motionless, and scared" (38; 53).

Once she is broken, she attempts to secure her freedom through angelic means. She tells her uncle she will give him all her property, "'will never ask for Guy, will be obedient and meek'" if he will only release her (53). This passage represents a distillation of the angelic compact, in which a woman relinquishes ownership of her property and herself in exchange for the power of influence. And notably, Sybil's attempt to access this power fails; her plea falls on deaf ears and her uncle continues with his plan to gain "full control of [her] fortune and [her] fate" through her imprisonment. This failure of angelic influence indicates that the

angel's so-called power, like the coquette's, is reliant on swaying those who possess the real power and as such, can hardly be considered power at all. The text suggests that power derived through others is ephemeral and uncertain, and represents a poor substitute for genuine self-sovereignty.

Alcott thus reveals both coquetry and angeldom to be inadequate sources of power and suggests that the third option, individualistic self-determination and directness of speech and action, is the only form of power that promises any real-world efficacy. Sybil's initial, bold escape attempt almost succeeds, and her ultimate liberation occurs because her wakefulness is stimulated into activity and rebellion by her mother's overt warnings. By reminding Sybil that her guardian, rather than looking out for her best interests, has in fact abused his power and is deliberately attempting to drive her mad, her mother imparts knowledge which reassures Sybil that her rebellion is justified. This knowledge renews Sybil's self-interest and bolsters her courage, and convinces her to attempt another physical escape rather than continuing to rely on the goodwill of men for her deliverance.

However, although the tale reveals direct forms of power to be the most effective since they allow Sybil's escape, her ordeal also teaches her that women are denied the efficacy of direct power because they remain subject to guardianship their entire lives, a reality for which domestic fiction tries to prepare its heroines by quashing rebellious tendencies. Part of Sybil's trajectory in the tale involves recognizing that, as a woman, she will be granted neither adulthood nor self-sovereignty, a difficult realization for a woman who clearly desires and expects autonomy. Early in the story, as she begins learning more about her inheritance, she

recognizes that "'I am as ignorant as a baby about my own affairs; for, as long as every whim was gratified and my purse full, I left the rest to [my guardians]'" (38).[3] This statement reveals her awakening to the responsibilities and knowledge that should accompany adulthood but which have thus far been denied her because of domestic ideology's belief that "'[t]rue feminine genius . . . is ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent: a perpetual childhood'" (Quoted in Welter 200). Further, Sybil repeatedly responds with indignation to others' attempts to control her behavior. When her uncle asks whether she intends to fulfill her father's wish and marry Guy even though his will does not compel her to do so, she makes this "declaration of independence":

> "Why should I? It is not binding, you know, and I'm too young to lose my liberty just yet; besides, such compacts are unjust, unwise. What right had my father to mate me in my cradle? How did he know what I should become, or Guy? . . . No! I'll not be bargained away like a piece of merchandise, but love and marry when I please!" (43)

And when her uncle's doctor, assuming her mad, declares she should obey him and her uncle and insists she drink the sleeping draft he has prepared, "[her] patience [gives] out at this assumption of authority" and she replies,

> "my uncle . . . deserves neither respect nor obedience from me! I am the best judge of my own health, and you are not bettering it by contradiction and unnecessary fuss. This is my house, and you will oblige me by leaving it . . . this is my room, and I insist on being left in peace immediately." (47)

But her uncle's reference to a potential husband for Sybil as "'a younger guardian'" emphasizes one of the text's central themes: women are merely transferred in marriage from one authority figure and caretaker to another, and Sybil's expectation of autonomy is at odds with the reality of women's lives (40).

Reactions to her declarations of independence prove even more disturbing; Sybil learns firsthand the consequences for women who presume to exercise autonomy and who display anger on their own behalf. Her rebellious outspokenness and furious responses to unjust treatment lead her uncle to exercise control in more extreme ways since conventional means failed him. Perhaps even more impactful and distressing in its pervasiveness and insidiousness is the evident cultural equation between female insubordination and insanity. When Sybil rejects her uncle's proposal—"'I will accept neither yourself nor your gifts, for now I despise both you and your commands'"—she flings the offered betrothal ring across the room to give "the most energetic emphasis I could . . . to my defiance" (45-6). At this moment, her uncle's doctor enters the room, exclaiming, "'Great heavens! Is the young lady mad?'"; not only does his reaction provide her uncle with a convenient way to dispose of her, but it also reflects what Alcott suggests is a typical response to female defiance. The housekeeper and female servants also treat her as though she is insane, speaking in whispers and gawking; Sybil, meanwhile, reacts with incredulity, revealing the disconnect between the justifiable indignation she is experiencing and others' expectations of female behavior: "'What do they mean? Did they never see anyone angry before? . . . I'm tired of so much stir about such foolish things as . . . a girl in a pet'" (47). When Sybil finally declares that she is "'no child to be confined in a fit of anger'" and that she intends to "'be mistress in my own house,'" the doctor and her uncle again respond by acting as if she is insane: "'yes, yes, don't excite her again.'" That night, she is drugged and taken to the asylum (48).

As a result, Sybil does not completely revert to her old self at the end of the tale; she emerges from her imprisonment chastened and subdued. As Keyser argues, Sybil's reunion with Guy—in which she, "too weak for words, cl[ings] to him in an agony of happiness"—"implies a mute and passive dependency" (10). And after relaying to him her story of captivity, she ends "with a passionate entreaty not to be returned to [her] uncle's keeping"—a far cry from the old Sybil, who would have proudly demanded that she exercise her right to determine her own fate (57).[4] Nonetheless, Sybil's marriage to Guy is happy and he has been depicted throughout as possessing the traits that typically allow a woman to retain her individualism in marriage: he and Sybil are quite similar in their outspokenness and love of freedom, he possesses a "warm heart" and a feminine capacity for emotion, indicating that he would be a sympathetic husband, and he demonstrates a desire for equality in their relationship when he tells his father that he hates the arranged marriage because "'my poor little cousin is kept in the dark. I'll tell her all, before I marry her'" (42). However, the tale suggests that even he poses a potential threat. Although there is, at the end of the story, the suggestion of mutuality as opposed to one-sided submission in their relationship—"it was easy to see *our* way, easy to submit, to forgive, forget, and begin anew the life these clouds had darkened for a time" (58, emphasis mine)—Guy has also exhibited problematic tendencies which could endanger Sybil's autonomy. Before meeting her, he tells his uncle he wants to "'inspect our new ornament'" (36), and although he grows genuinely to love Sybil, the language he uses in discussing the arrangement with his father suggests his complicity in viewing her in mercenary terms: "'You know I never liked the

bargain, for it's nothing else'" (41). Sybil, the text implies, can never let her guard down completely.

Sybil's return to individualism, then, is tempered by what her trials have taught her: that individualistic directness is, for women, as dangerous as it is protective. Given the perils to which Sybil's autonomous and imperious nature have subjected her, she must adopt the more subdued, submissive temperament—the invisibility associated with angeldom—that will allow her to survive. Thus, she can return to the land of the living—the conventional world which punishes female rebelliousness—only by acquiescing to the submission and forgetfulness of angeldom. But although she has to some degree learned the self-abnegating lesson of domestic fiction, she also rejects it—and preserves her link to rebellious ghostliness—by retaining her mother's spectral lesson of perpetual wakefulness. She is saved both from the nightmarish limbo of ghostliness and the living death of angeldom by her sustained connection with her mother's history; she is able to incorporate her mother's ghostliness into her psyche rather than enduring her own perpetual limbo, as her mother did for so many years. Her mother's spectral lesson thus allows her to protect herself from complete submersion into either angeldom or ghostliness and to recognize when guardians are abusing their power. The capacity to recognize injustice must remain covert but ever-wakeful, and the lingering influence of ghostliness—the "shadow of the past," the "spectral whisper in the dark" that hangs over her "over all these years"—enables her to stand guard over herself rather than placing too much faith in the benevolence of guardians (58). In a relationship in which one party possesses all of the real power, the tale suggests,

such watchfulness represents the only means of self-preservation. And barring the kind of reform which would grant women genuine self-sovereignty, this problematic ghostly limbo at least permits a woman like Sybil to straddle the fence, to maximize her ability to protect herself given her enforced angeldom.

"The Country Cousin"

Catharine Maria Sedgwick's "The Country Cousin" (1830) centers on the transformation of various characters into "true" American citizens, citizens who reject artificial aristocracies in favor of "nature's aristocracy" (72). Isabel, a young American woman who identifies strongly with the British aristocracy and who feels perpetual embarrassment over the less refined manners of her country cousin, Lucy, is the protagonist of the frame narrative and the target of her grandmother's edifying ghost story. In the ghost story, M'Arthur, a British soldier in the Revolutionary War, is brought to the home of Emma and Anna Blunt (the mothers—and doubles—of Lucy and Isabel) to recover from his wounds. During his recuperation, M'Arthur falls in love with the angelic Emma, but after his recovery, he realizes that the rebellious Anna's temperament is more in line with his own and transfers his feelings—and his proposal of marriage—to the other girl. Anna, forbidden to marry M'Arthur by her patriotic American father, rejects filial obedience and selects her own husband. The spoiled, impetuous M'Arthur, however, abandons her soon after the marriage in part because of his impulsive inability to commit to a single course for long and in part because he feels mortified at having married beneath his station.

Anna, abandoned by her husband and cast out by her father for her disobedient marriage, gives birth to a blind son, grows progressively more melancholic and corpselike, and must be supported financially and emotionally by her angelic sister. However, the disobedient woman does not die, as the conventions of such tales—set forth for us by Isabel—would lead us to expect; rather, her ghostliness triggers M'Arthur's transformation, through which he becomes "'always afterwards faithful and kind'" (94). Although the legal marriage occurs about halfway through the story, the *true* marriage—in which M'Arthur makes a genuine commitment to her and develops the maturity and sympathy that will allow him to be a good husband, occurs only at the end of the tale, after M'Arthur's "supernatural" encounter with what appears to be Anna's ghost (she is in fact alive, but appears undead because she has wrapped herself in her dead son's winding sheet). Thus, Anna's individualistic insistence on choosing her mate ends in a happy marriage which is rooted in Anna's and M'Arthur's similar, rather than opposite, temperaments. Further, her husband's supernatural transformation allows this rebellious woman not only to retain her individualism but also to pass it on to her daughter.

Although the narrative depicts both Emma and Anna as attractive and appealing, on the surface it seems to cast the angelic Emma as the heroine of the piece: obedient to her father, loyal to her sister despite M'Arthur's shifting affections, and possessed of a disposition that is no less than "'saintly'" (89), Emma's hard work and self-sacrifice save Anna's life and reunite her with her father and her inheritance. But in fact, the tale undercuts Emma—and the tenets of angeldom—

through a variety of tactics, and hints at the illusory nature of the power associated with angeldom by revealing that it is entirely dependent on the goodwill of men. Though it is Anna who temporarily disappears into ghostliness, Emma's complete lack of self-interest and mortal terror of filial disobedience—she would rather die than disobey—suggest the degree to which she too has been rendered invisible. Sedgwick's tale implies that the angel's obedience to men and abject self-sacrifice represent their own form of living death.

Comparing the descriptions of Emma/Lucy with those of Anna/Isabel suggests where the narrative's affinities truly lie. The first description of the sisters is clearly skewed—in terms of length and complexity—in the individualists' favor. Where Emma/Lucy can be boiled down to a comparison with "'that meek representative of all spiritual purity and womanly tenderness, the Madonna" (75), Anna/Isabel receives this extensive and lovingly detailed rendering:

> "Anna had a brow of lofty daring, a quick, glancing, laughter-loving eye, a rich damask on her cheek that expressed the kindling and burning of her feelings; lips that a Grecian artist would have chiselled to utter the laws of love, rather than its prayers; in short, a face and shape that a painter would have chosen for a Semiramis, or Zenobia, or Clotilda." (76)

And later, in describing why M'Arthur chooses Anna over Emma, we discover that "'Anna's beauty was more brilliant, her conversation more lively and taking'" than that of her "'meek'" and "'timid'" sister (78). Further, the context of this description—the male love interest's rejection of the angel in favor of the individualist—does not speak well for the attractions of angeldom.

This subtle undermining of angeldom is echoed in the tale's introduction, in which the narrator romanticizes the supernaturalism of fairies, ghosts, and witches.

On the surface, this prologue represents the narrator's attempt to gain credibility by acknowledging that ghost stories represent a throwback to an unenlightened age of superstition—an opening move typical of the ghost story, which often begins with narrators' "claim to rationality, their attempts to establish their credentials as credible observers" (Carpenter and Kolmar 13). However, the section nonetheless demonstrates a striking affinity for the world of fairies and ghosts—and by extension, for Anna, the individualistic character affiliated with this supernatural world—by depicting a world without such creatures as bland indeed. In particular, Sedgwick makes explicit the role of supernaturalism for which I have been arguing throughout my project:

> Though in the full meridian of our "enlightened day," we look back with something like regret to the imaginative era of darkness, when spirits, embodied in every form that fear or fancy could invent, thronged the paths of human life, broke its monotony, and coloured its dull surface with the bright hues and deep shadows of magic light. (67-8)

By linking the supernatural to depth, complexity, and vibrancy, and its absence to colorless "monotony," she suggests that it—as I have argued previously—provides access to a variety of possible identities, as opposed to the monochromatic, universalized identity prescribed for all women by angel ideology. Further, it allows for the imperfections that would imbue a character with shadow as well as light, rather than embracing the angel's idealized vision of perfection.

The structure of the story likewise suggests the location of the narrator's affinities. The narrative prepares the reader to expect that the angel be rewarded for her endless self-sacrifice, a convention made explicit in the penultimate chapter of Maria S. Cummins' popular domestic novel *The Lamplighter* (1854). After much

suffering and selflessness on the part of Gerty (including her willingness to sacrifice her own life to save the belle who has, she mistakenly believes, stolen the heart of the man she loves), this "'saintly'" young woman is finally reunited with her beloved; Gerty, in keeping with the conventions of such novels, has "by long and patient continuance in well-doing, . . . earned so full a recompense, so all-sufficient a reward" (410-11). Such a direct linkage between angelic self-sacrifice and the just desserts expected for such goodness is echoed in Isabel's mid-story prediction of how the tale will end, an interjection designed to foreground the conventions of domestic fiction—to spell out what Sedgwick knew her readers would be expecting—so that she could then neatly overturn these expectations. Isabel predicts that

> "Anna must die, that I see—poor, poor girl! I am sure she suffered more than she sinned—and I foresee how it will end, M'Arthur will return, find his wife dead, and marry Emma." (89)

But this triumph of the angel, in which the errant hero realizes her true value after all, does not in fact occur. M'Arthur chooses the woman whose "'gay and reckless spirit harmonized far better with his natural temper, than the timid disposition of her sister'" (78), reflecting the tale's rejection of the conventional marriage of opposites which, according to Joseph Allen Boone, reinforces notions of diametric opposition between the sexes (11-12). And Emma, who agreed to marry a man of her father's choosing in exchange for his relenting toward Anna, is rewarded for her many sacrifices, including this "'sacrifice of her feelings,'" with a pleasant but passionless marriage and a later reversal of fortune which leaves her orphaned daughter Lucy in poverty after Emma's early death.

While the narrative clearly finds Emma's self-sacrificing nature extremely admirable, then, it also suggests that such utter, unadulterated self-sacrifice results in a life that one would not have chosen for oneself. Emma's sacrifices confer a reward not upon herself, but on the sister for whom she made many of these sacrifices—she repairs Anna's life, but pays no heed to her own, and her lack of self-interest shows. Sedgwick thus suggests that the excessively meek inherit nothing but "'an accumulation of misfortunes'" and potentially a less satisfying life than those for whom they endlessly sacrifice (70).

By so pointedly undermining the expectations set up by domestic fiction, the tale questions the legitimacy of these conventions, and by so doing, interrogates the legitimacy of angeldom as the ideal female identity. The respective fates of Emma and Anna suggest the benefits of a woman's pursuing her own interests: the obedient, dutiful daughter endures "'the hardest sacrifice a woman could make'" (87), while her defiant sister's "rebellious tendencies are not brought under control but rewarded" with a happy marriage to the man she opposed her father to marry (Fick 87). The text thus counters domestic fiction's insistence that relinquishing self-interest and handing oneself over to the care of powerful men are in a woman's best interests. In fact, Emma's filial obedience is depicted as extreme and thoroughly self-effacing: this utterly obedient woman is described as a "'martyr'" who, when confronted with her father's refusal to allow her own marriage to M'Arthur, decides that "'She must suffer, might die, but would submit'" (78). Her only choice, in her own mind, is utter submission, even to the point of death, and although Emma cannot—according to the logic of supernatural marriage fiction—be depicted as a

ghost herself because she has willingly and irrevocably passed into the angelic realm, her stance clearly indicates that the angel, like the ghost, endures her own form of living death. The tale also reveals that influence—the feminine power which it is the angel's exclusive right to wield and which depends on her obedience and self-sacrifice—is in fact an illusory form of power, entirely dependent on her deference to men and largely ineffectual. Emma's repeated attempts to influence her father's opinion fail miserably—he refuses to allow either her marriage or Anna's, and he rejects her multiple pleas for leniency toward her sister—and she succeeds only when she agrees to sacrifice the rest of her life in an undesirable marriage simply in order to please him. Emma's case indicates—as did Sybil's—that influence rarely achieves the desired result, and that the price for the modicum of power granted the angel is the disappearance of the self, the relinquishment of agency.

Meanwhile, the ghostly Anna, as we have seen before, represents the rebellious individualist, trapped in the living death of ghostliness because of her resistance to the filial obedience of angeldom. But she also literalizes the tale's critique of men's inordinate power over the fates of women. Abandoned by both husband and father, Anna has no status in the real world and thus descends into the spectral netherworld: "'Pale, emaciated, her form attenuated, her eye sunken—was this the bright, blooming, gay Anna?'" (88). She also reflects a problem which many single women realized for themselves, that "all women hovered on the brink of poverty in a society that expected women to depend on the support of husbands" (Braude 125). She remains in this no-man's-land until she, draped in white and mistaken for an "'apparition'" by M'Arthur, is once again claimed by a man;

reunited with her husband, her "'figure became instinct with life, the blood mounted to her lips and cheeks, and Anna, his living Anna, stood before him'" (94). As Anna's case reveals through spectral metaphor, an unaffiliated woman is legally and socially nonexistent, so much so that literary convention demands her literal death. And her ghostly figure haunts the landscape as a perpetual reminder of the crimes committed against her.

But Anna's return to life does not occur solely through her rise from the netherworld of being neither wife nor daughter; rather—as is usual in supernatural marriage fiction—the transformation of the husband is necessary as well. M'Arthur's two-stage transformation not only takes the usual tack of rendering him sympathetic, but also corrects the self-indulgent tendencies that allowed him to shirk his familial responsibilities. In other words, because this ghost story centers on male abuses, the man's transformation must address these abuses as well as his capacity to accommodate an individualistic wife.

The first stage of M'Arthur's transformation occurs through the medium of illness, while "'wasting away'" for months in the sick-room (90). Not only does this illness exhume his feelings of guilt over abandoning his wife, but it also implicitly exorcises his angel-worshipping tendencies. At the beginning of the story, when M'Arthur is stricken with his first illness, he falls for the angelic Emma despite their incompatibility because Emma's temperament is "'so suited to the nurse and leech, so adapted to the abated spirit of the invalid, that his susceptible heart was touched'" (76). M'Arthur's subsequent reversal reflects not only his general impetuousness, but also an internal conflict between an attraction to individualistic

women and a tendency toward angel worship. His reaction during his subsequent illness is quite different, and reveals that he has been stripped of the latter. Rather than finding himself again attracted to the angelic Emma because of his weakened condition or waffling between the two women he has loved, he instead forms a "'resolution'" to seek out his abandoned wife, indicating a stable and focused interest in her. This rejection of angelic fantasy represents the first step toward becoming a suitable husband for an individualist.

Then, his encounter with his ghostly wife in the graveyard triggers his acquisition of sympathy, without which he could return to his former ways. After repeated attempts to convince himself that the "'spectral apparition'" he sees in the graveyard can be explained rationally, "'his reason assented to the convictions of his senses, and yielding himself to the power of this awful visitation from the dead, he prostrated himself on the earth'" (94). The "supernatural" thus serves to coax emotion from reason; its goal is to stimulate "the act of submission to proper feeling" (Fick 86). It is only at this point—after "'the awe and shrinking from a preternatural appearance gave place to a gush of tenderness and bitter grief . . . to the spirit of his wife'"—that she regains her life and color (94). The spectral individualist's return to life, then, stems not from the mere reunion of husband and wife, from the status that only affiliation with a male can confer. Rather, her resuscitation can occur only after he achieves the capacity to surrender wholly to emotion, to exhibit the sympathy which will keep his newly-awakened conscience fully active and which, as we have seen throughout the supernatural marriage plot,

will allow the heroine to remain possessed of her individualism in the context of marriage.

Ultimately, the story insists on the necessity of reform: many supernatural marriage plots, including this one, allow for a happy ending by linking the perpetuation of a woman's individualism with her marriage to a sympathetic man who will not gradually maneuver her into fulfilling angelic fantasies. This tale, however—like "A Whisper in the Dark"—reveals why dependence on men for the preservation of self is so problematic: if such a man fails to materialize, the woman disappears. Before arriving at its happy ending, "The Country Cousin" explores the degree to which women's reliance on men jeopardizes their very identities.

The linkage between ghostliness and vexed femininity at play in these texts raises the question: why does the supernatural marriage plot specifically single out ghostliness as an almost-universally negative form of supernatural manifestation? Why, in a genre teeming with appealing supernatural figures, is this particular form of supernaturalism imbued with such dread? I contend that the supernatural marriage plot's problematic depiction of ghostliness stems specifically from a rejection of metaphorical disembodiment. As the short stories in this chapter have demonstrated, the genre literalizes the troubling state of Victorian women by translating their powerlessness into pallor and disembodiment. The genre also—by making the intuitive connection between the disembodied angel and the disembodied ghost—implicitly interrogates angeldom by linking the True Woman to the living dead, thus not only illuminating the death of self associated with a relinquishment of individualism, but also implying that angels are bland, colorless

creatures when compared with the liveliness and variety of fairies, witches, and elves. But apart from the metaphoric evils associated with disembodiment, there exists also a political and ideological basis for the genre's rejection of disembodiment. It is this mid-nineteenth-century rhetorical shift that I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

"'I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE THEM MAKE ME BLENCH'": EMBODIMENT AND METAMORPHOSIS IN *THE HIDDEN HAND*

The hauntings of spectral women, then, emphasize the need for reform by serving as perpetual reminders of the problematic aspects of femininity. Domestic ideology defined women as "less physical, more spiritual, and morally superior," making them "indeed closer to 'angels'" (Woloch 122), and supernatural marriage fiction translates this metaphoric dematerialization into the colorless features and somnolent demeanor of an apparition. The ghostly version of the supernatural marriage plot also focuses on the powerlessness women experience in their relationships with male authority figures, manifested as the disembodied ghost's inability to exercise any direct control over the world around her. The denial of individualistic self-governance, mandated by ideology and law, is revealed by these texts to be a living death.

Supernatural marriage fiction's rejection of ghostly disembodiment thus represents in part a desire metaphorically to reclaim the female body—along with the agency and activity it symbolizes—from its dematerialization at the hands of angelic rhetoric. But it also reflects a temporary rhetorical movement toward an awareness of bodily specificity, a shift which began in the first third of the century and receded with the postwar suffrage movements. Several notable studies—by critics such as Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Bruce Burgett, and Carolyn Sorisio—document

this shift away from the "disembodied 'person' of Revolutionary rhetoric" (Sorisio 2) and toward "a political discourse and a concept of personhood that attests to the centrality of the body" (Sanchez-Eppler 1).

Prior to this transition, the right to freedom and equality was based in an abstracted notion of personhood—a "universal and hence bodiless subject"—which purportedly provided access to a fundamental, inherent equality by "locating personhood in the soul" (Sanchez-Eppler 3, 46). But with the rise of the feminist and abolitionist movements came a belief that women and blacks needed to address the specifics of their bodily experiences—to "claim knowledge through the body" by reinterpreting the body as "a symbol of [their] oppression" (Sorisio 7; Sanchez-Eppler 18)—in order truly to claim personhood. The problem with the constitutional notion of political disembodiment, "as feminists and abolitionists surely suspected, was that women and blacks could never shed their bodies to become incorporeal 'men'" (Sanchez-Eppler 3).

Nineteenth-century culture was simultaneously engaged in a widespread program of scientific categorization. For women, this meant a focus on the reproductive organs as the ultimate regulators of the female body; many physicians contended that the womb governed women's lives, not only as a source of perpetual illness, but also as the organ that defined (and restricted) their innate characteristics and abilities. Physicians of the period thus defined biology as destiny, deploying physiology to delimit women's roles and arguing that the tenets of domesticity derive from woman's inherent nature. Reformers instead attempted "the inscription of . . . female bodies into the discourse of personhood" by transforming these

conservative readings of the body and constructing their own bodily rhetoric (Sanchez-Eppler 15). In order to illuminate the injustices of woman's legal and social position, feminists metaphorically linked woman's plight with that of slaves, noting such conventions as the assumption of a husband's name and laws which treated women as property (Sanchez-Eppler 19). Meanwhile, spiritualist/feminist reformers believed that the spirit world is "'but a finer material world, as real, as substantial; and as directly within the province of universal law as that which we now inhabit'" and attempted to discover the universal spiritual/physical laws governing marriage in order to find a rational basis for marriage reform (Bednarowski 181). However, as Carolyn Sorisio notes, "a woman in the nineteenth century has cause to fear an association with the natural sphere (including her body), which too often justifies her oppression" (10). Ultimately, the awareness of the dangers posed by embodiment overshadowed any advantages deployed by the mid-century abolitionists and feminists, and "the right to vote replaced the status of the human body as a sign of membership in the body politic"; as a result suffrage movements after the Civil War reverted to "the rhetoric of abstract personhood" that they had previously rejected (Sanchez-Eppler 5).

Sentimental fiction participated in the antebellum rhetorical shift toward embodiment, which is why it served the abolitionist movement so well; its physicality facilitated emotional identification between readers and characters. As Bruce Burgett notes, "the sentimental literary culture of the period relied on readers' affective, passionate, and embodied responses to fictive characters and situations in order to produce political effects" (3). Emotional states in these texts exhibit

themselves physically through blanching, fainting, weeping, and a character's physiological reactions often serve to impart the text's ideological positions. In Maria S. Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), for instance, a character's intractable weeping over the loss of her beloved leads directly to her blindness, viscerally driving home domestic fiction's prescription of emotional self-control and submission (321). At the same time, however, the genre also—in keeping with its ideology of angelic spirituality—deployed a rhetoric of disembodiment; as Nina Baym argues, even the heroine's "appearance testifies to a spiritual body, a non-body" and as a result, "[p]rotagonists are both embodied and not embodied" (*Woman's Fiction* xxxvii). Exemplified by the contrast between the embodied Emma and the disembodied Anna in Sedgwick's "The Country Cousin," the angelic woman's appearance is described only briefly, as a "'representative of all spiritual purity and womanly tenderness'" (75) because the domestic woman was constructed "as something separate from or opposed to bodily life and force" (Brodhead 274). Like the description of Augustine St. Clare's mother in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "the ideal woman as the cult of domesticity dreams that ideal . . . is so fully identified with spirit that St. Clare can say of her: '*She* was *divine*! She was a direct embodiment and personification of the New Testament'" (Brodhead 275). And the description of Gerty in *The Lamplighter* – which will serve as a touchstone throughout this chapter—demonstrates both the angel's disembodiment and sentimental fiction's rejection of embodied supernatural figures. Gerty's appearance is described primarily through her capacity to register emotion, especially when her face is "sanctified by the divine presence, when the heart turns away from the world and

itself, and looks upward in the spirit of devotion" (129). Further, her form is "neither dignified, queenly, or fairy-like," but it possesses "a power of moving lightly and airily in [her] sphere, and never being in any one's way"; Gerty, in other words, remains firmly within her appointed sphere, is self-abnegating to the point of near invisibility, and is explicitly excluded from the fairydom associated with the supernatural individualist. Further, domestic fiction's "moral, emotional, and fundamentally spiritual code that devalues bodily constraints to focus on the soul" ultimately undermines arguments against women's and slaves' social powerlessness by insisting that, "whatever the condition of their bodies, their souls remain blessed and free" (Sanchez-Eppler 46). Given the supernatural marriage plot's rejection of angelic submission and its concern with alleviating women's social powerlessness, the genre would clearly find sentimental fiction's spiritualized body particularly problematic.

As a result, the supernatural marriage plot negotiates this hazardous rhetorical landscape by embracing embodiment but evading the human body. By enrobing themselves in a variety of supernatural bodies, the protagonists of the supernatural marriage plot reject the disembodiment associated with both angeldom and ghostliness and participate in the feminist deployment of embodiment as an avenue toward claiming the personhood granted to most men. At the same time, they reject the problematized embodiment associated with human femininity and sentimental fiction by replacing the much-contested and rigidly defined female body with nonhuman bodies, some of which are feminine without being human—the ethereal fairy and the alluring witch—while others are indeterminate—the more

androgynous imp and elf. And by continually shifting from one supernatural metaphor to the next—often in the course of a single sentence—rather than claiming the solitary metaphorical identity of the angel or ghost, these individualistic characters further protect themselves through a refusal to be pinned down to a single physical form.

Metaphorically laying claim to a body rather than simply evading femininity through disembodiment is a crucial rhetorical move for another reason as well. According to the concept of possessive individualism, which had become "an article of cultural faith" by the mid-eighteenth century, "every man has property in himself and thus the right to manage himself, his labor, and his property as he wishes" (Brown 2). Since individualism is based in the notion of self-ownership, "the recognition of ownership of one's own body [is] essential to claiming personhood" (Sanchez-Eppler 33); one cannot have property in the self, in other words, without asserting a physical form. As Lucy Stone wrote to Susan B. Anthony in 1856, the question, "'Has woman a right to herself?'" in fact "'underlies the whole movement'" (quoted in Sanchez-Eppler 23).

Domesticity represented a particular threat to the possibility of female individualism; as such, "[a]dvocates of individual sovereignty attacked the institution of marriage because it conflicted with women's self-ownership and put the weight of the state behind slavery to oppressive customs" (Braude 118). For one, the concept of possessive individualism was bolstered and transformed by the nineteenth century's ideological separation of spheres: "American individualism takes on its peculiarly 'individualistic' properties as domesticity inflects it with

values of interiority, privacy, and psychology" (Brown 1). But because the ideologically distinct—and specifically feminine—domestic sphere became the basis for individuality, women could not adopt an individualistic identity; as Gillian Brown and Joyce Warren argue in their studies of American individualism, women's role was to bolster male individuality through their domesticity. Marriage law also denied women access to possessive individualism. Women could not legally own property within marriage, and "one must claim ownership to property in order to be an individual, in order to have "'full proprietorship of his own person'" (Weinauer 14). Further, according to law books of the period, "the husband held property in the 'person of his wife' and all she acquired by 'labor, service or act'" (Stanley 194), clearly foreclosing the possibility of female self-ownership.

The Hidden Hand

Capitola Black, the shapeshifting supernatural individualist in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859), insists on her capacity for self-ownership by repeatedly fending off attempts to force her into domestic fiction's requisite angelic transformation and insistently clinging to embodiment. Through her adventurous physicality and her supernatural identities, she rejects the disembodiment of ghosts and angels in favor of the physical activity women were expected to relinquish in adulthood: "Girlhood, often seen as the golden age before long dresses and corsets, was the free time"; as one woman wrote,

> "This is my seventeenth birthday and the oath of my martyrdom. Mother insists that I shall have my hair done up woman fashion, and my dress made to trail like hers. She says she shall never forgive herself for letting me run

> wild so long. . . . I carry eighteen hairpins; my head aches; my feet are entangled in the skirt of my new gown. I can never jump over a fence again so long as I live." (quoted in Habegger 159)

This novel also renders transparent many of the conventions and concerns of the supernatural marriage plot, in part by pushing these conventions to unprecedented extremes, and in part by rewriting scenes from sentimental fiction—particularly 1854's *The Lamplighter*—and overtly mocking that genre's conventions. Southworth also proposes alternatives to the forms of feminine power advocated by sentimental fiction, alternatives which would allow women to wield the powers attributed to angels without relinquishing their physicality.

Capitola, heiress to the vast fortune associated with The Hidden House, is possessed of an "adventurous spirit" and an attraction to physical danger (241). She was spirited away in infancy by her midwife, who took Cap to New York. Cap's ghostly mother—who had been imprisoned in the upper floors of Hidden House by her evil brother-in-law, Colonel Gabriel Le Noir—masterminded Cap's disappearance in order to protect the girl from Le Noir's attempts to seize the family fortune for himself. Years later, when Cap reaches early adolescence, she is forced to fend for herself, and eventually adopts the dress of a boy so she can earn a living and protect her chastity while living on the streets. When a neighboring landowner, Old Hurricane, learns of Cap's whereabouts, he seeks her out and brings her to live with him as his ward. Despite Old Hurricane's attempts to domesticate her, Cap roams the neighborhood seeking adventure and hoping to capture the infamous robber, Black Donald. She also rescues the angelic Clara Day from Colonel Le Noir's plot to acquire Clara's fortune; Cap, a master of disguise, switches places with Clara,

allowing her to escape a forcible marriage to Le Noir's son Craven. Ultimately, Capitola is reunited with her long-imprisoned mother and marries her childhood beau Herbert Greyson.

The disembodiment of ghosts and angels is, in this novel—as in the ghost stories in Chapter III—associated with problematic femininity. Cap's mother, imprisoned for years by the Le Noirs so that they can claim Cap's fortune, becomes the neighborhood ghost, the "'spectral lady of the lighted window'" whose white face appears at the upper windows of Hidden House (247). Her ghostliness began years earlier, during Cap's birth, when the Le Noirs covered the imprisoned woman's face with black crape so that the midwife would not recognize her, mirroring the legal and social obliteration of female identity that lays a woman's possessions in the hands of male guardians and that provides the basis for the Le Noirs' evil plan (17). After recovering, she remains imprisoned in the upper floors of Hidden House, and the Le Noirs cover her absence from the neighborhood by claiming she has been taken to a madhouse in the north; as a result, the locals interpret their sightings of a woman at the window as a haunting. One of the text's primary concerns is its "attack on discriminatory laws" (Baym, Introduction xv), and it further underscores this fictional ghostly figure's linkage with real-world concerns when Cap, hearing the story of her mother's disappearance years earlier, exclaims, "'*Disappearance* did you say? Can a lady of condition *disappear* from a neighborhood and no inquiry be made for her?'" (170). By repeating the italicized word "disappearance" in the context of a conflict over female property, Southworth subtly drives home the point that women, in fact, disappear—metaphorically speaking—

every day with no inquiries being made because their invisibility is enshrined in law: laws of *coverture* which render husband and wife "'one person in law' upon marriage, with the man emerging as the dominant and singular identity" prevent women from controlling their own property and subject them to "legal invisibility" (Rowland 17,16).

Meanwhile, Marah Rocke—the wife abandoned by Old Hurricane years ago when Colonel Le Noir tricked him into believing that he and Marah were having an affair—is repeatedly referred to as an angel (76, 79), and exemplifies the problems of angelic disembodiment. She becomes "'as white as death'" in times of stress (199) and is gradually disappearing—"day by day her cheeks grew paler, her form thinner, her step fainter" (88)—and she is, not coincidentally, a model of self-abnegation. Well-trained in the sentimental heroine's tactic of rationalization—in which women talk themselves out of anger by assuming that a wrongdoer "may have his own reasons for what he has done" (*Wide, Wide World*, 553-4)—she fully adopts her husband's perspective in place of her own, making excuses for his abandonment and continuing to worship him despite his many years of neglecting her and their son, Traverse: "'consider the overwhelming evidence against me! I considered it even in the tempest and whirlwind of my anguish, and never once blamed and never once was angry with my husband'" (87). Although, as Joanne Dobson argues, Southworth "does not denigrate Marah" and in fact sees her as "admirable" (235), the narrator clearly admires Capitola more fervently, and depicts such angelic self-abnegation as problematic and dangerous to women—Marah's gradual disappearance will, her doctor insists, eventually kill her (94). Further, the

text contends that angelic selflessness is in fact unsatisfying to men; during her marriage to Old Hurricane, she "never prov[ed] the deep love [she] bore [her] husband except by the most perfect self-abandonment to his will," and he interpreted this "deep though quiet devotion" as "mere passive obedience void of love" (83-4). It is this misunderstanding that, by planting doubt in Old Hurricane's mind, allowed Le Noir's plan to succeed. And Old Hurricane's insecurity despite her utter devotion suggests that angelic selflessness and submission are in fact detrimental to marital bonds; as Nina Baym argues, one of Southworth's goals is to reveal "that attraction grounded in admiration and esteem is far more satisfying to both sexes than attraction based on pity" (xiv).

Such wan and powerless figures contrast wildly with the physicality of Cap, whose supernaturalism not only reflects the metaphoric embodiment we see throughout the supernatural marriage plot—she is associated with embodied beings such as witches, elves, imps, and vampires—but is also closely linked to her physical embodiment. Repeatedly, Cap's outlandish physical escapades—in which she takes on the decidedly masculine role of a "knight" (242)—are associated with supernatural epithets, making explicit the genre's metaphoric promotion of embodiment. When Cap physically attacks the villainous Black Donald by jumping on his back in an attempt to capture him, the narrator refers to her as "that brave, rash, resolute imp" (139). When Cap goes riding alone in a storm despite Old Hurricane's warnings that propriety demands ladies be accompanied, he calls her "'the little demon'" in his frustration (240). And when Black Donald describes Capitola's instrumental role in capturing the men he had sent to kidnap her—during

which she runs a quarter mile through the fields and is, during the showdown, "exposed as much as any other to the rattle of the bullets" (176)—he refers to her as "'that blamed witch, Capitola'" and later complains that "'the sorceress'" has given him no opportunity to complete his plan of carrying her off (188, 303).

Southworth further underscores the supernatural marriage plot's implicit promotion of embodiment through her decidedly physical depiction of the distinctions between angels and supernatural individualists. For instance, the domestic realm ideologically mandated as woman's sphere is, to Capitola, agonizingly dull; as such, she depicts angelic domesticity as a living death. Between each of her highly physical adventures, Cap complains of "the monotony of her life at Hurricane Hall" (190), and likens her new home to "'a quiet country graveyard,'" saying that she "'[does]n't want to return to dust before [her time]'" (133). Cap thus rejects the "comparatively limited space and mobility" for which domestic fiction prepares women through its indoctrination into angeldom (*Woman's Fiction* xxvi), lamenting that she is "'decomposing above ground for want of having [her] blood stirred'" (154). The narrator confirms the legitimacy of Cap's complaints, interjecting that she "had scarcely exaggerated her condition. The monotony of her life affected her spirits; the very absence of the necessity of thinking and caring for herself, left a dull void in her heart and brain" (154). The antidote to domestic entombment is physical adventure, and Cap's equation of this antidote with having her "'blood stirred'" is part of a larger pattern of physical symbols throughout the text.

Images of flowing blood—particularly flushing—are throughout the novel associated with a rejection of angelic pallor, and the contrast between flushing and blanching parallels the distinction between supernatural individualist and angel. In particular, flushing and blanching represent physical manifestations of two distinct ways of dealing with danger; where the angel blanches, freezes, and faints, the supernatural individualist flushes, which stimulates her to activity. In particular, this dichotomy seems to be a direct response to images in *The Lamplighter*, in which the angelic heroine, Gerty, responds to stress with a statue-like stillness: "The strange, fixed, unnatural expression which took possession of Gertrude's countenance . . . was fearful to witness. . . . she did not move her eyes, did not move a feature of that stony face," and her hand becomes "cold as marble" (311). The sentimental heroines in Southworth's text respond in precisely the same way, and the distinctions between their responses and Cap's represent Southworth's critique of one of sentimental fiction's primary goals, the heroine's acquisition of self-control. This "self-willed act of conquest of one's own passions" (*Sensational Designs* 162) involves the suppression of indignant responses to injustices committed against oneself, and allows the heroine to submit dutifully to the authority of her guardians without questioning the justness of their commands. As Maria Cummins puts it in *The Lamplighter*, one must "learn to bear even injustice, without losing [one's] self-control" (99).

Whereas domestic fiction depicts its version of self-control as a means of reigning in "the passionate tempers and individualistic impulses that endanger [heroines'] security and salvation" (Kreger 328), Southworth contends that this

version of self-control in fact undermines women's ability to protect themselves. Not only do they lose the capacity to recognize abuses of power, as I discussed in Chapter III, but they are also, the novel suggests, being taught the wrong kind of self-control; rather than suppressing the protective emotion of indignation, women should learn to suppress the paralyzing emotion of fear, which renders them vulnerable in a crisis. Cap's mother, in a state of perpetual danger because of her imprisonment, has a "marble form" and "large, motionless black eyes, deeply set in her death-like face" (255), and later, after being conveyed to the incurables ward of the asylum to which she had been transferred two years earlier, "might have been a statue or a picture, so motionless she sat" (396). Similarly, upon discovering that Colonel Le Noir is to be Clara's guardian after her father's death, Marah returns to her chamber with "blanched face and staring eyes, like a marble statue of despair" (211). Marah responds to Clara's jeopardy with paralysis, as does Clara herself when Colonel Le Noir threatens her with sexual assault to coerce her into marrying his son: "All this time Clara had neither moved, nor spoken, nor breathed. She had stood cold, white, and still, as if turned to stone"; his departure from the room "took off the dreadful spell that had paralyzed Clara's life; her blood began to circulate again; breath came to her lungs and speech to her lips" (271). Pallor and motionlessness—especially of the eyes—signify inaction in the face of fear, and as we shall see shortly, contrast sharply with Capitola's red-blooded activity.

Fainting represents another form of this statue-like immobilization. Angelic Marah, confronted with Le Noir's invasion of her bedroom—the event which triggers Old Hurricane's abandonment of her—loses consciousness, and awakens

"'alone, deserted, cast away!'" (86). Notably, Marah refers to her fainting as "'that deadly swoon,'" underscoring the dangers the novel is associating with women's inability to control their fear. Clara faints at particularly inopportune moments as well, passing out just before her dastardly new guardian arrives to claim her (207). Thus, at moments of the greatest danger, when they need all their wits about them, these sentimental heroines—trained to control their indignation, but not their fear—become passive and immobilized. Cap, on the other hand, repeatedly suppresses "the deadly inclination to swoon" when in mortal danger (170); instead, "all her faculties instantly collec[t] and concentrat[e] themselves upon the emergency" because she, "with a heroic effort," "control[s] her fears" (100, 170). Although "her first impulse" may be to scream or panic, she is always able to "contro[l] herself" (344). She thus deploys the sentimental heroine's self-control in the service of individualistic self-interest, underscoring the text's thoroughgoing interrogation and reconfiguration of sentimental conventions.

The novel further emphasizes its rejection of sentimental fiction's trajectory for women through its depiction of indignation. When Clara learns that Colonel Le Noir, her new guardian, intends to ignore her father's wishes and force her to live with him, she becomes "flushed with indignation" (218). But this self-protective reaction is stripped away from her by her father's best friend, Doctor Williams, a man who claims to be looking out for Clara's best interests:

> "this impatience and rebellion is so unlike your gentle nature, that I can scarcely recognize you for the mild and dignified daughter of my old friend!" . . . said the old man in gentle rebuke, that immediately took effect upon the meek and conscientious maiden.

> "Oh! I feel—I feel that I am doing very wrong, but I cannot help it. I scarcely know *myself* in this agony of mingled grief, indignation and terror, yes, *terror,* for every instinct of my nature teaches me to distrust and fear that man." (222)

Doctor Williams continues, telling her that, regardless, she must "'try to bear this trial patiently'" and "'*obey* [Le Noir]—go with him without making any objection'"; finally, Clara resolves "'to act with becoming docility'" and that night, "by prayer and endeavor she . . . brought her mind into a patient and submissive mood" (222-24). This sequence represents a condensed version of the sentimental heroine's typical transformation, in which her mentors emphasize the importance of patience and forbearance and she gradually strengthens her resolve to submit through prayer and self-command. And Southworth's critique is clear: Clara's training in angelic submission teaches her to disregard her "'every instinct,'" to silence the voice of "'nature'" and, rather than distrusting malevolent guardians, to distrust herself. This critique also surfaces during a conversation in which Marah relates to Cap's beau Herbert the story of her marriage and abandonment. Throughout Marah's tale of forbearance and undying devotion, the young man repeatedly interrupts with indignant rejoinders, saying that Old Hurricane provided Marah the sort of "'protection as vultures give to doves—covering and devouring them'"[1] and insisting that "'it was monstrous to have abandoned you so!'"; it "enrage[s] his honest but inexperienced boyish heart to hear this wronged woman speak so enthusiastically" (83, 87, 82). And significantly, Herbert depicts the proper response as "'natural indignation,'" suggesting again that sentimental fiction undermines an

innate and legitimate response by stripping heroines of their capacity to become indignant on their own behalf.

The brief association between flushing and indignation that we have seen in Clara's case becomes even more pronounced in Capitola's. "'I should like to see them make me blench,'" says Capitola of the Le Noirs, and her refusal to succumb to the living death of angelic self-abnegation and forbearance places her in stark contrast to the novel's other female characters (275). When Craven Le Noir spreads malicious gossip questioning her chastity, Cap's "face, neck and bosom were flushed with the crimson tide of indignation"; "her eyes glittering" and "'blazing,'" she asks two male relatives to defend her honor (326, 327). Her reaction after being refused by both men suggests that, from the novel's perspective, the angelic suppression of indignation represents a suppression of the basis for life itself: "'had you been *dead* and in your *grave*, the words that I spoke should have roused you like the trump of the archangel!' exclaimed Capitola, with the blood rushing back to her cheeks" (326). If the indignation which should rouse even the dead cannot rouse the typical fictional angel, then the angel's situation is quite grave indeed. Similarly, Clara, imprisoned by the Le Noirs and soon to be forcibly married, tells Cap that she would "'give me life by teaching me how to escape!'" (273).

Further, the text links the embodied liveliness of flushed skin and flashing eyes with a physical ability to protect oneself. All of Cap's flushing and glittering finally lead her to take matters into her own hands; unable to find a male defender, Cap, in her mounting exasperation, challenges him to a duel herself. And during another encounter with Craven, her ability to escape is implicitly linked to the

physical signs of rebellious individualism: "her lip curled, her eyes flashing and her cheeks burning, [she] put whip to her pony and galloped away" (321). The text's depiction of flushing contrasts with that of *The Lamplighter*, in which reddening is associated with a distrust of physicality. The text's physical description of Gerty as a young woman notes "the rosy hue that flushes her cheeks," then quickly adds, "but that may be the effect of her rapid walk from the railroad station," suggesting a discomfort with the idea of a naturally rosy complexion (128-29). Gerty also becomes flushed during stress and overwork, and in this case flushing is specifically associated with illness, suggesting an anxiety surrounding excessive physicality; for instance, after engaging in taxing housework, Gerty's "face was flushed and heated; she looked tired" (244), and later, an anxious, flushed Gerty experiences "what was very unusual, symptoms of a severe headache" (302). Blushing is also associated with embarrassment, often at being physically observed; Gerty blushes "as she saw the doctor's keen black eyes scrutinizing her face" (122-23), and again later, when a friend recalls a "'gray-headed gentleman's staring at [Gerty] all dinner-time'" (287). The physicality of flushing, in other words, is associated with the desire to disappear. Overall, then, Cummins uses flushing to problematize embodiment and suggests that physicality is something to be avoided. And unlike Capitola, Gerty's blushing is associated with an inability to act: Gerty, caught off guard by a question, is "unprepared for a reply, blushe[s], and bec[omes] very much confused" (300). And she is later silenced by the bewilderment associated with flushing: "The color rushed into Gertrude's face. She attempted to speak, but failed" (365). Embodiment, it would seem, undermines the angel's power.

At times, Capitola does in fact blanch, but this blanching is offset by the activity of her flashing eyes, which sets her apart from the statue-like sentimental heroines who become thoroughly immobilized. These episodes of blanching occur when Cap is confronted with a powerful male's attempt to domesticate her, and her flashing, glittering eyes represent her ghostly resistance to angelic transformation. But although she becomes ghostly during these sequences because she is, in each case, teetering on the brink of enforced angeldom, she retains the core of embodiment—the activity of her flashing eyes—that allows her to translate ghostliness into self-protective power. Rather than remaining in a state of perpetual limbo like her ghostly mother, who remains trapped and powerless despite her acts of rebellion,[2] Cap takes on a seemingly supernatural power in her semi-ghostly state which allows her to avoid both angeldom and ghostliness. As we have seen in "A Whisper in the Dark," in which Sybil rescues herself from a spectral limbo by effecting a physical escape, the disembodiment associated with angels and ghosts can be avoided only through the assertion of individualistic corporeality.

One of Capitola's blanching episodes involves a potential kidnapping and forcible marriage to Black Donald. Like her mother, who was imprisoned by unscrupulous men, and Clara, who was almost forcibly married to Craven, Capitola is in danger of being compelled into angelic submission. During this scene, Donald sneaks into her bedchamber, triggering a battle of wits in which Capitola's pallor tricks Donald into lowering his guard. Capitola turns "ashen pale," but her self-control prevents her "blood" from "turn[ing] to ice" and her form from turning to "stone" (350, 344). She plans to lure Donald to the trap-door in her room and trip

the spring; her assumption that she will kill him in the process is one source of her paleness, not fear of Donald: "Capitola turned very pale, but not with fear, though Black Donald thought she did, and roared with laughter" (348). Donald's assumption, and the laughter which follows, suggests another reason for Cap's pallor—by making herself seem vulnerable like other women, she puts him at ease, making it easier for her to lure him into her trap.[3] And the text emphasizes that Cap retains her embodiment—that she has not, like the angels around her, entered the grave before her time—by noting that Cap becomes "paler than a corpse, for hers was the pallor of a *living* horror!"; Cap may be temporarily corpselike, but even in this condition, she is decidedly full of life (133, 352). Just before she springs the trap, she stands over him "paler than marble! sterner than fate! with no look of human feeling about her but the gleaming light of her terrible eyes, and the beading sweat upon her death-like brow" (352). When everything else has become statue-like, her eyes remain active, and it is this remnant of movement and embodiment that allows her to preserve her individualism and her life.

Thomas H. Fick argues that what he refers to as the "authentic ghost story"—in which ghosts turn out to be real women in disguise—allowed female characters to assert "a physical presence that still accommodates Victorian assumptions about women's higher (that is spiritual) nature" by providing them a means of "playing bodily force as if it were disembodied" (90, 84). But Capitola's case suggests that there must be more to the story, since Cap asserts her embodiment openly and directly throughout the novel. Not only does her temporary spectral state—as with other ghostly women—represent the perils of disembodied angeldom from which

Cap is struggling to free herself, but its cloaking of her active physicality also serves as a protective disguise; Cap's seeming disembodiment allows her to conceal from her prey the decidedly physical action she is about to take. Like the disguise of angelic femininity which caught Craven unawares, ghostliness can serve as a means of throwing her enemies off their guard and preventing them from recognizing her concealed power.

Cap's other significant ghostly episode occurs when Old Hurricane becomes exasperated because she "'won't obey [him], except when she likes! she has never been taught obedience or been accustomed to subordination, and don't understand either!'" (155). As a result, Old Hurricane seeks out a religious mentor for Cap in an attempt to set in motion domestic fiction's angelic transformation. When Reverend Goodwin's suggestions and intervention fail to achieve the desired result, Old Hurricane finally decides to make the "'witch'" obey him "'*[w]ith the rod!*'" (166-7). This physical threat places Cap in real jeopardy of being coerced into angeldom; her first reaction is the flushing of indignation—"wave after wave of blood tiding up in burning blushes over neck, face, and forehead"—and then the assumption of an almost literal spectral state:

> She turned around; her face was as white and still as marble, except her glittering eyes, that, half sheathed under their long lashes, flashed like stilettos; raising her head and keeping her eyes fixed upon him, with the slow and gliding motion, and the deep and measured voice that scarcely seemed to belong to a denizen of earth, she approached and stood before him.

She then threatens that, if he ever strikes her, "'the—first—time—I–should—find—you—asleep—I—would—take—a—razor—and—'" (167). Old Hurricane completes her sentence with a shudder, saying she would slit his throat; at this, she snaps out

of her supernatural spell and jokes that she would shave his beard off. But Cap's transformation has had the desired effect; Old Hurricane departs this confrontation with the firm belief that "'She'll kill me! I know she will! If she don't in one way she will in another!'" (167).

Thus, ghostliness can also allow women to become fearsome, to frighten and intimidate men in a way that their weaker physical bodies—which, according to Baym, is the only gender difference which Southworth's text acknowledges (Introduction xiv)–will not allow. And as we see when Craven besmirches Cap's honor, men do not take women's threats seriously: when Cap vows that she will not associate with her cousin until her wrongs are avenged by a duel, he replies, "'don't swear, Cap; it's profane and unwomanly; and nothing on earth but broken oaths would be the result!'" (327), and Craven responds to her challenge with insults and ridicule; he does not take her seriously until the moment she actually shoots him in the forehead (with dried peas) (332). In Old Hurricane's case, ghostliness permits Cap to threaten physical action—and make her threat thoroughly plausible—without actually needing to act on it. And fearsomeness, notably, is a form of power antithetical to angeldom. *The Lamplighter's* Gerty—who, like Cap, grew up on the streets—wields this power, which protects her from the other children, who do not "venture to abuse her": "spirited, sudden and violent, she had made herself feared, as well as disliked" (5). But this fearsomeness, which Cummins depicts as an offshoot of Gerty's "dark infirmity," a repulsive product of her "untamed" nature (63, 7), cannot stand. The angel must relinquish this physical and distasteful form of power—epitomized by an episode in which Gerty, enraged by mean schoolgirls,

"doubled her little fist, and, without hesitation, came down in battle upon the crowd" (60)—in order to "'become good and be forgiven'" (62).

The sequence preceding Cap's spectral confrontation with Old Hurricane represents a prime example of the text's overt participation in the supernatural marriage plot's implicit dismissal of sentimental conventions. Reverend Goodwin counsels Old Hurricane to use "'moral suasion'" to render Cap tractable—the typical approach deployed in domestic fiction—but Old Hurricane replies that she would not respond to that tactic because "'Cap isn't *sentimental!*'" (155). Goodwin finally agrees to visit Cap so the he can advise Old Hurricane "how to manage the capricious little witch," but Cap instantly intuits the purpose of his visit, "which immediately provoked all the mischievous propensities of her elfish spirit" (161, 162); she then plays a trick on him—and makes a mockery of his tactics and his purpose—by staging a cliché-ridden sentimental conversation. The link between her elfishness and her conscious rebellion against sentimental fiction's mission of inducing submission highlights the supernatural marriage plot's oppositional relationship to domestic fiction. Through the little witch's open mockery of sentimental conventions, Southworth makes explicit the agenda of the supernatural marriage plot: the rejection, through supernatural rebellion, of domestic fiction's attempt to transform the individualist into a submissive angel.

Further, by translating domestic fiction's spiritual process of angel formation into physical terms, Southworth insists on its underlying brutality. Reverend Goodwin's first suggestion is to "'lock her up in her chamber until she is brought to reason'"; Southworth thus equates the clearly evil imprisonments perpetrated by

villainous men like the Le Noirs with the supposedly benevolent and beneficial process of training a young woman in her angelic duty to submit. When Old Hurricane threatens to enforce submission with the rod, Southworth literalizes Cummins' famous metaphor from *The Lamplighter*, in which Gerty's mentor tells her that the only individuals who can achieve happiness in life are those "'who have learned submission; those who, in the severest afflictions, see the hand of a loving Father, and, obedient to his will, kiss the chastening rod'" (104). Like Old Hurricane's description of his purpose prior to the ghostly confrontation—"'I have broken haughtier spirits than yours in my life'" (167)—the image of the rod and the Reverend's suggestion of imprisonment imply that the process in fact involves psychic degradation, that its true goal is the demeaning of the spirit rather than its elevation.

Capitola's ghostliness also reflects her skill at transformation, a skill which the text uses to further the supernatural marriage plot's undermining of rigid gender roles. Southworth translates into physical terms the genre's assignment of multiple metaphoric identities to a single woman by making Cap a master of disguise. Because of the effectiveness of her disguises, her shapeshifting takes on an almost supernatural air. Her metamorphosis into a boy is so convincing that, even after being unmasked, those around her—especially Old Hurricane—remain confused; he repeatedly alternates between calling her "sir" and "miss," "little man" and "little woman," and finally gives up: "'I don't know what I mean! nor I shan't, neither, until I see the creature in its proper dress'" (43). And Cap's language depicts it as a genuine metamorphosis, one that transcends the superficiality of a change of clothes;

in describing the first time she donned boy's clothing, Cap says that "'I went into that little back parlor *a girl*, and I came out *a boy*,'" adding that "'the only thing that made me feel sorry, was to see what a fool I had been, not to turn to a boy before, when it was so easy!'" (41). Because of the ease with which Capitola adopts different roles, here and throughout the text, "[b]y the end of the novel, all supposedly innate gender differences have been thoroughly dismantled as false ideology (Baym, Introduction xiv).

The text's depiction of Cap's multifaceted nature also expands on a tactic used by the genre at large to undermine rigid notions of gender. Throughout the novel, Old Hurricane repeatedly addresses Cap with a litany of ever-changing epithets:

> "you New York hurrah boy! you foundling! you vagabond! you vagrant! you brat! you beggar! will you never be a lady!" (419)
>
> "Demmy, you New York newsboy, will you never be a woman? Why the demon didn't you tell *me*, sirrah?" (338)
>
> "What now, you imp of Satan? What mischief have you been at now? Opening the trap-door, you mischievous monkey!" (354)
>
> "you perilous witch . . . you terrible termagant!" (167)

Since his habit stems from exasperation, from his blustering inability to define her adequately, it underscores the hidden function of the supernatural marriage plot's deployment of a multitude of epithets: not only do its heroines' varied supernatural identities reflect their complexity of character, but this variety also enables them to avoid being pinned down to a single identity. Just as Old Hurricane is unable to settle on a single word that adequately sums up Capitola, the supernatural marriage plot suggests that individualistic women cannot be summed up so easily; Cap cannot be readily defined as a "'lady'" or a "'woman,'" and she mischievously

sidesteps such tidy definitions through her complex and ever-shifting identity. Like the witch who tells Cap's fortune-"Was it man, woman, beast or demon? She could not tell" (243)—Cap blurs the lines between identities, and thus remains indefinable.

Cap also dismantles the ethos of the sentimental heroine, since "the soul of Capitola naturally abhorred sentiment! If ever she gave way to serious emotion, she was sure to avenge herself by being more capricious than before" (108). Unlike Cassandra Morgeson's mother, who "refused to explain [her] naturally" (*The Morgesons* 64), the narrator asserts the naturalness of Capitola's rebellious individualism, thus rejecting notions that angeldom represents woman's true and innate identity. In fact, Cap insists on the artificiality of domestic fiction's model of femininity, referring to it repeatedly as "'doing the sentimental'" (276, 279) and, after imitating Clara for a while, complaining that she is "'immensely tired of doing the sentimental, making speeches, and piling up the agonies'" (284).

In addition, Southworth challenges sentimental fiction's project of undermining female pride, in which the heroine's training in submission aims "to quell and subdue earthly pride and passion" (*Lamplighter* 73) and to ensure that "the spirit of pride [is] entirely broken" (*Wide, Wide World* 554). When Cap discovers that Black Donald's ruffians are hiding under her bed, she must conceive a plan to deliver herself and her maid from harm without the invaders realizing she is aware of their presence. Despite her fear, "Happily, Capitola's pride in her own courage came to her aid" (172). And when Clara, imprisoned by the Le Noirs, fears that a person has been killed at Hidden House, the chapter ends with Clara relying on the tactics prescribed for angels: "She could only shudder, pray, and trust in God"

(264). Cap, in contrast, opens the following chapter "trusting in her own powers" and intending to help Clara out of her difficulties (265). Southworth thus suggests that pride is integral to a woman's capacity to defend herself in the face of danger, that it is an asset rather than a liability.

The text furthers this interrogation of sentimental fiction with its depiction of Herbert's and Traverse's stint in the military. When his mortal enemy Colonel Le Noir becomes their commanding officer, Traverse must learn how to contend with Le Noir's abuse of power, and this process parallels precisely the trajectory of a domestic heroine. Traverse is "a high-spirited young man" whose superior takes "every opportunity afforded him by his position to wound and humiliate the young lieutenant" (360, 306). Herbert takes the role of angelic mentor, counseling the young man to "'practice every sort of self-control, patience and forbearance under the provocations you may receive'" (310). Like the domestic heroine, "'a soldier's whole duty is comprised in one word—obedience'" (363), and Southworth's gender reversal makes the point that soldiers, the manliest of men, in fact occupy the same powerless position as women and must undergo a transformation similar to the angel's. By translating domestic fictional conventions into masculine terms, she reveals not only that the sexes are much less different than they seem, but also that the standards of obedience and duty applied to True Women are in fact neither gender-specific nor innate.

More strikingly, she disrupts the process of angelic transformation, thereby further interrogating its validity for women. When Le Noir systematically railroads Traverse into falling asleep at his post—a crime which will lead to the young man's

execution—Herbert at first continues to counsel him in submission and patience. When Traverse says he has borne Le Noir's cruelty "'with the servility of a slave,'" Herbert corrects him in the manner of a true sentimental mentor: "'With the submission of a saint, dear Traverse, and in doing so you followed the divine precept and example of Our Saviour . . . Great respect is as often manifested in forbearance as in resentment'" (367). But as Traverse begins recounting his story in full detail—Le Noir deprived him of sleep and gave him exhausting assignments in preparation for nightly guard duty—Herbert becomes enraged by Le Noir's "'infamous abuse of military authority,'" stops doing the sentimental, and reacts with mounting "indignation" (368). The angelic mentor reverses course, encouraging Traverse to recognize and fight back against an abuse of power, thus rejecting the absolute submission to authority he had been espousing. This repudiation of domestic fiction's ethos reveals the injustices that follow from absolute deference to authority.

In addition to dismantling the conventions of domestic fiction, Southworth subtly counters the typical arguments of those opposing woman's rights by presenting embodied, individualistic alternatives to the powers supposedly achieved through angelic selflessness and disembodiment. Those who wished to preserve the ideology of True Womanhood maintained that the trend toward "equality" and dismantling "the social and political distinction of the sexes" was "undermining the golden thrones shining in the blessed and hallowed light of the hearth, whence every true woman ruled the realm of her own family" and that "the borders of the feminine realm could not be enlarged, without rendering the throne

unsteady, and subverting God's law of order" (*St. Elmo* 522); Southworth undermines such arguments by recasting the powers ideologically associated with woman's throne such that they can be wielded by individualists.

The assumption that an individualistic stance would negate a woman's feminine appeal represented a prominent antebellum fear: woman's rights reformers were depicted as "haranguing audiences that secretly laughed at and despised them" (*St. Elmo* 523) and feminists such as Lucretia Mott and Jane Hunt concerned themselves with the impressions made by apparel, recommending that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in future speeches,

> use her appearance to confirm her femininity, respectability, modesty, and ingenuousness. Her clothes, their suggestion implied, could serve as a kind of masquerade that might temper and render more palatable the effect of her unconventional demand for gender equality. (Hoffert 22)

Southworth uses Cap's example to counter the popular opinion that femininity and individualism are mutually exclusive; Cap retains the power of feminine attractiveness, dazzling nearly every man she encounters. Craven Le Noir refers to her as "'bewitching Capitola'" (321), and the attraction represents

> the very first passion that he had ever known. Her image, as she stood there at the altar with flashing eyes, and flaming cheeks, and scathing tongue, defying him, was ever before his mind's eye. There was something about that girl so spirited, so piquant and original, that she impressed even his apathetic nature as no other woman had ever been able to do. (313)

Black Donald is likewise attracted to her boldness and her "'face full of fun, frolic, mischief and spirit'" (143), and he assumes that most men would be subject to "'the fascination of such a witch'" (145); his men are taken in as well, referring to her as "'the pretty witch of Hurricane Hall'" (143). Southworth thus emphasizes that Cap

is alluring not in spite of, but precisely because of her individualism and physicality. She makes "Capitola attractive to readers and to all the other characters in the book," and thus encourages men "to appreciate Capitola-like women" (Baym, Introduction xiv).

Proponents of domestic ideology also contended that the "equality of the sexes" is "subversive of all chivalric respect for woman" (*St. Elmo* 464). But Southworth implies that "the spiritual, disembodied status of the mid-century white woman" which supposedly "operates to constrain masculine aggression" (Fick 83) in fact confers no power at all. While all of the angels in the text are sexually endangered at one point or another, the only one who escapes such peril without outside intervention is Capitola. Marah's angelic status does not protect her from Colonel Le Noir's invasion of her bedroom, and he and Craven have no qualms about threatening angelic Clara with assault as a means of blackmailing her into marriage. And when Craven runs into an unattended Capitola he twice refers to her as "'my angel,'" but never wavers in his evil intentions (102, 104). While arguing that angelic reliance on such power is misplaced, the text simultaneously confers upon Cap the seemingly magical power usually attributed to angels. Black Donald's men promise him that Cap "'shall be as sacred from insult as though she were an angel and we saints'" (144), and the text notes that "the girl seemed to bear a charmed safety" (339). When perceived as angelic, Cap is endangered; when individualistic—and the fact that she will be treated *as if* she were an angel underscores the fact that she is most assuredly not one—she is charmed and

protected. Southworth thus not only allays fears about an individualistic identity for women, but also undercuts the perceived power of angeldom.

The text also challenges domestic ideology's belief in the power of influence, a woman's "right to modify and direct her husband's opinions, if he considered her worthy and competent to guide him," which was purportedly accessed by occupying the angel's "divinely limited sphere" (*St. Elmo* 465). But in the end, Marah's reliance on her domestic status as the sole legitimate means through which she could influence her husband to support his family leaves her impoverished and alone. When Herbert hears the tale of her abandonment, he laments that the girl had no father, brother, or friend "'to take [her] part'" and no "'means to employ an advocate'"; she replies, "'Nor would I have used any of these agencies, had I possessed them! If my wifehood and motherhood, my affection and my helplessness, were not advocates strong enough to win my cause, I could not have borne to employ others'" (86-7). She relies solely on the tools of angeldom, which fail miserably.

Capitola, on the other hand, influences men by earning their respect. Early in the novel, as part of Old Hurricane's attempts to instill obedience in the little rebel, he forbids her to go to the fair and then sabotages her horse so she cannot go by herself. During his absence, she captures the ruffians Black Donald had sent to kidnap her, and when Old Hurricane returns, he exclaims, "'my heroine! my queen! and it was you against whom I was plotting treason! ninny that I was!'" (177); by winning his esteem, she puts an end to his severe attempts to control her. And at the end of the novel, she plays an instrumental role in the reform of Black Donald, but

unlike angels, who transform men through "'secret, silent influence'" (Woloch 103), Cap saves him through a combination of intellect and physicality, first by capturing him, and then by freeing him from prison. She wins him over by matching wits with him; as Donald acknowledges, "'It was a fair contest, child, and you conquered!'" (431). And she completes the transformation by providing him the physical means to escape from prison and the execution awaiting him, circumstances which, Donald argues, would prevent any man from experiencing "'*sincere* repentance'" (421). As Donald tells his men, "'No one on earth could have helped me except the one who really freed me—Capitola!'" (434). The text thus "rejects the myth that self-sacrificing women exert moral influence over men, a myth often invoked by adherents of 'True Womanhood' to justify women's self-sacrifice and counter all attempts to improve their status under law" (Baym, Introduction xv).

The text's overarching concern with woman's legal status—particularly the issue of female property ownership—combines with its critique of domestic fiction's angelic transformation and Cap's insistent physicality to formulate an argument for female possessive individualism. Sentimental fiction's goal of training female characters in their duty to submit to the will of others and to align themselves with the tenets of True Womanhood by "subordinat[ing] themselves and their personal interests to the authority and interests of their husbands" (Hoffert 33) inherently forecloses the possibility of possessive individualism for women. And domestic novels often indicate as much; a particularly extreme example arises in *The Wide, Wide World*, in which Ellen's uncle, after becoming her guardian, declares:

> "Forget that you were American, Ellen—you belong to me; your name is not Montgomery any more,—it is Lindsay;—and I will not have you call me 'uncle'—I am your father;—you are my own little daughter, and must do precisely what I tell you. Do you understand me?" (510)

A woman's guardian thus has utter possession of her person—with a word, he can radically alter her identity and strip her of any ability to govern herself; as Colonel Le Noir tells Clara, "'the law very properly invests the guardian with great latitude of discretionary power over the person and property of his ward'" (270). Nina Baym contends that Ellen's inward response—"'I shall do precisely what he tells me of course . . . but there are some things he cannot command, nor I neither;—I am glad of that! Forget indeed!'"—reflects domestic fiction's problematizing of submission, since even "the genre's most submissive heroine . . . stands up to her Scottish uncle in defense of her country" (*Woman's Fiction* xxxix). But her seeming resistance to authority in fact reaffirms her selflessness, since she is defending her country rather than herself. And more importantly, the passage emphasizes her utter relinquishment of self-possession; the only aspect of her identity which she can maintain is that over which she herself has no control.

Capitola, on the other hand, insists on complete self-sovereignty, and her freedom of action is bound up in questions of property ownership and financial support. Cap tells Old Hurricane that

> "if you really were my uncle, or my father, or my legal guardian, I should have no choice but to obey you; but the same fate that made me desolate made me *free!* a freedom that I would not exchange for any gilded slavery!" (166)

Cap's lack of family, despite her early impoverishment on the streets, is the source of her self-possession; although she owned nothing, no one owned her, and as the text

insists, guardians equate financial support with ownership. The novel repeatedly emphasizes the degree to which male control over female property translates into behavioral control, specifically men's ability to enforce angelic submission. After Clara refuses Craven's proposal of marriage (leading to the attempt to force her into wedlock), Craven says to himself,

> "whatever power the law gives the husband over his wife and her property, shall be mine over you and your possessions! Then we shall see who shall be insolent! Then we shall see whose proud blue eye shall day after day dare to look up and rebuke me! Oh! to get you into my power, my girl!" (268)

Craven assumes that, once Clara's possessions fall legally under his control, she will have no choice but to submit and obey; all rebellion will be forced out of her.

And even in more benevolent male-female relationships, financial inequality undermines women's potential for individualistic self-definition. The text reveals the degree to which expectations of obedience are based in the financial support provided by guardians and husbands; as Capitola always tells Old Hurricane whenever he tries to "'check her in her wild and dangerous freedom of action,'" "'liberty is too precious a thing to be exchanged for food and clothing . . . rather than live in bondage, she would throw herself upon the protection of the court!'" (161). As Capitola's protest reveals, feminine submission is the price women pay for material comfort, an exchange which, according to Amy Schrager Lang, is central to domestic fiction in general and to *The Lamplighter* in particular. Lang argues that domestic fiction elides class divisions in its depiction of female street urchins on the rise from poverty to middle-class status; Cummins' text depicts Gerty's ascent as a movement not from poverty to comfort but from poverty to femininity—in other

words, it shifts from a focus on meeting Gerty's material needs to a focus on "the reform of individual character" and the resultant creation of the domestic woman (20). Gerty's capacity for maternal love and selflessness—exemplified by her affection for a kitten given her by True—"both establishes her right to a proper home and provides her with a means to get one" (20). Lang's reading of *The Lamplighter* thus suggests that, for the female individualist who comes from poverty, supernatural embodiment takes on particular importance. For one, a corollary of Lang's argument is that domestic fiction implicitly denies middle-class status to women who reject domestic angeldom; the acquisition of material comfort, then, hinges on metaphoric dematerialization. Gerty's education is designed not only "to move Gerty out of the slums but to get the slums out of Gerty" (21), and without this transformation to angelic womanhood, Gerty can never create her own middle-class home. Further, domestic fiction equates the street urchin with boyishness "insofar as the bad behavior of the poor is almost invariably represented as masculine behavior" (Lang 22), and this equation reinforces the assumption that attaining a home hinges on achieving femininity.

As a result, the lower-class female individualist's challenge broadens beyond merely clinging to individualism; the challenge for a character like Capitola is to negotiate a middle-class, female identity that does not require angelic disembodiment, given the fact that domestic ideology equates middle-classness with ideal womanhood. *The Hidden Hand* does in fact conform to the model of domestic fiction in that, by translating Capitola's lower-class status into a metaphor for her boyish physicality and freedom of action, the text subordinates class to gender; as

Cap herself notes, living on the street, despite its hardships, at least permitted her to govern herself and engage in the physical adventures which prevent stagnation. But despite this conventional elision of class, Southworth nonetheless exposes the ideological strategies of domestic fiction: Capitola literally transforms into a boy during her time in the slums, thus illuminating the gendered nature of the transformation expected of her as she ascends in class, and revealing the ways in which the pursuit of middle-class status is, for the individualist, frought with the perils of angeldom.

Capitola evades these ideological perils through her supernatural embodiment, which, by allowing for a multifarious sense of self, permits her to maintain a metaphoric identification with the freedom and physicality symbolized by her former class status. This identification is crystallized in Old Hurricane's blustering attempts to describe her. Not only does he, in his litanies, perpetually conflate Cap's supernaturalism with his inability to determine her whether she is a "'sirrah'" or a "'miss,'" but he conflates both supernaturalism and gender confusion with a lingering insistence on her past as a "'vagabond'" and "'beggar,'" thus maintaining Cap's linkage with an identity which, in the logic of the text, represents freedom from the enslavement associated with material wealth. Further, because "the danger of the street urchin—overwhelmingly a male figure despite the ungendered term—lay in his propensity to violence" (Lang 22), maintaining this identity permits Cap to wield the lingering threat of boyish aggression. This threat, which convinces Old Hurricane that she might well be capable of slitting his throat—a capacity also directly linked to her supernaturalism—causes him to retreat

from his attempts to domesticate her, and thus plays a central role in Cap's ability to maintain her newfound physical comforts without relinquishing her physicality. Capitola, then, negotiates her embodied middle-class identity through a supernatural slipperiness which permits her to straddle not only gender identities, but also class identities, and thus to reconcile the material comforts of middle classness with the materiality and fearsomeness the text associates with the urchin's boyish embodiment.

Southworth also critiques the psychological maneuverings endorsed by domestic fiction in its project of converting impoverished orphan into middle-class woman. Whereas Gerty's gratitude toward the lamplighter True for taking her off the streets and providing her a comfortable home represents a central motivator for her angelic transformation, Cap openly rejects such notions as base manipulation. *The Lamplighter* depicts Gerty's affection toward her benefactors as a direct result of her gratitude toward them; when Gerty first meets her angelic mentor Emily Graham, she exclaims, "'You asked [True] to keep me; . . . and you gave me my clothes; and you're beautiful; and you're good; and I love you! O! I love you ever so much!'" (54). It is this "strong affection" which in turn makes her "so submissive and patient [during an illness,] so grateful for [True's] care and kindness, so anxious to do something in return," and which "prove[s], in after years, a noble motive for exertion, a worthy incentive to virtue" (34). And it is this affection which Emily and others actively deploy to orchestrate Gerty's angelic transformation, as the following example demonstrates:

> Emily understood the child's nature so much better than True did, and urged upon her so much more forcible motives than the old man had thought of employing, that *she* succeeded where *he* had failed. (65)

These "forcible motives" involve "convincing [Gerty] at last that, if she loved Uncle True, she would show it much better by obeying his wishes" (65).

Cap bristles at the manipulative nature of such tactics and, while demonstrating her "'gratitude'" for "'the benefits . . . conferred upon her'" and "'repaying [Old Hurricane] with a genuine affection,'" she insists that "'the restriction of her liberty is too heavy a price to pay for protection and support!'" (155). When Old Hurricane chastises her for "'disobey[ing her] benefactor'" (106), Cap argues that

> "there is a sin that is worse, or at least more *ungenerous*, than ingratitude! it is to put a helpless fellow creature under heavy obligations, and then treat that grateful creature with undeserved contempt and cruel unkindness!" (108)

And when Old Hurricane calls her "'[u]ngrateful'" for "'meditating disobedience *on the horse I gave her*,'" Cap replies, "'I did not sell my free will for Gyp! I wouldn't for a thousand Gyps! He was a free gift!'" (166). Free will, Cap insists, is not for sale; the financial benefits a dependent receives from her benefactor must be defined not as reimbursement for her freedom, but as gifts, freely given and thus owned by the recipient. By centering a debate over Cap's obligation to obey her guardian on Gyp, the symbol of Cap's autonomy and physicality, Southworth underscores the nexus of embodiment, property ownership, and liberty in which possessive individualism is based, and reveals the importance of metaphoric embodiment for supernatural individualists as a whole.

Gerty in fact deploys a rhetoric of freedom similar to Cap's when Mr. Graham, one of her guardians, expects her to break a promise to friends who need her help and instead accompany him and his daughter on a journey:

> "Does he consider that my freedom is to be the price of my education, and am I no longer to be able to say yes or no? . . . it would be tyranny in Mr. Graham to insist upon my remaining with them . . . It is cruel in Mr. Graham to try to deprive me of my free-will." (*Lamplighter* 143)

But these notions of freedom are rejected as manifestations of the "pride" which must be rooted out: "Gertrude's heart, naturally proud, and only kept in check by strict and conscientious self-control, listened a while to such suggestions. But not long" (143). She then reiterates the ethic of sentimental fiction, in which selfless duty to others, rather than concern for the self, represents the only proper justification for subverting authority: "'I always considered it my duty to submit to him, until, at last, a higher duty compelled me to do otherwise'" (157). *The Hidden Hand*, with its insistence on the legitimacy of individualistic free-will, thus counters domestic fiction's implicit argument that the duty of female submission stems from a justifiable obligation to one's providers and that this duty can be neglected only if a higher duty—to others or to God—manifests itself.

The chapter in which Cap comes into her inheritance is entitled "Capitola a Capitalist," further underscoring the text's connection between our heroine's access to capital and her ability to maintain her individualistic liberty: her very name implies property ownership, and her status as a capitalist reflects her participation in the individualism associated with the male world of the marketplace. And, as Black Donald implies, embodiment is key to property ownership. When Colonel Le Noir,

worried that Cap will thwart his plan to claim her fortune, regrets not having killed Cap in infancy, Black Donald replies, "'the dead never come back; or if they do, are not recognized as property-holders in this world!'" (130). Without a living body, in other words, one cannot own property, and since without property, one forfeits ownership of the self, embodiment is crucial to self-sovereignty. The text thus correlates Cap's overt physicality with the capacity to own property, and by extension, to own herself. And the linkage of her physicality with her supernaturalism—which I discussed earlier in the chapter—in turn illuminates the supernatural marriage plot's focus on embodied supernatural beings and its problematizing of disembodiment: the individualism connoted by female supernaturalism is implicitly grounded in the supernatural individualist's metaphoric physicality.

The physicality which undergirds individualism is even hinted at in the novel's title, which alludes to the red birthmark gracing the center of Cap's palm (25), and which neatly weaves the central issues of the text into a single symbol. In a key scene, a fortune-teller reads Cap's future, asserting that "'the curse of the crimson hand is upon you'" and forecasting that her hand will be "'*stained with blood*'" (245, 243); while the prediction literally refers to Black Donald's blood, which would have been on her hands had his execution been carried out, critics have interpreted this hidden hand as the "rule of law" which haunts women throughout the text (Baym, Introduction xvi) and the stain of slavery which contaminates Cap's inheritance (Jones 73). But I contend that Cap's response to the seer's prophesy reflects another—perhaps *the*—central function of the hidden hand. When the seer

prophesies that "'This little hand of yours—this dainty woman's hand—will be—red with blood,'" Cap jokingly replies, "'Now, do you know, I don't doubt *that* either? I believe it altogether probable that I shall have to cook my husband's dinner and kill the chickens for his soup'" (244). As in Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech (1851), in which she explodes notions of female delicacy by noting that she, as a former slave, had endured the grueling manual labor and harsh physical punishments supposedly the province of men, Southworth reveals the secret, physical side of womanhood which is belied by feminine daintiness and kept forcibly concealed by the expectations of True Womanhood. Contrary to the pallid disembodiment of angelic women, Southworth asserts, women's hands are in fact red with the flowing blood which the text associates with liveliness, activity, and the capacity for self-defense. The red birthmark, like the indignant flushing which appears throughout the novel, represents an undeniable physical sign of the individualistic self-interest which angel ideology and domestic fiction attempt to suppress. This text, like the other supernatural marriage plots I have explored, insists that woman's embodied individualism—whether metaphoric or literal—should be allowed to assert itself openly and that self-ownership based in physicality, as opposed to the spiritualized selflessness of the angel, represents the true key to woman's power.

CONCLUSION

NEUTRAL TERRITORY: THE ERASURE OF SPHERES

> the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. Ghosts might enter here, without affrighting us. It would be too much in keeping with the scene to excite surprise, were we to look about us and discover a form, beloved, but gone hence, now sitting quietly in a streak of this magic moonshine, with an aspect that would make us doubt whether it had returned from afar, or had never once stirred from our fireside.
> —Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (35-6)

Hawthorne's evocative description of the imaginary process through which Romancers reimagine the world around them also encapsulates the functions of supernaturalism in supernatural marriage fiction. The genre's ideological debate with domestic fiction mirrored the larger cultural debate over the Woman Question, and its depiction of female individualists as creatures "somewhere between" woman and fairy, occupying a liminal realm between the real and the unreal, communicated the difficulties facing them given their culture's insistence that angeldom represented the proper mode of self-definition for women. Viewed as unnatural in a world ideologically dominated by angels, the individualist had to find some means of preserving her individualism despite pressure to undertake the angelic transformation mandated by domestic fiction. Occupying the neutral territory between the real world and fairy-land enabled the supernatural individualist to

evade the female body while still remaining feminine and simultaneously to reject the metaphoric disembodiment through which the angel defined herself.

The supernatural marriage plot, in its concern with dismantling boundaries, performed a function similar to that of the spiritualist movement which erupted in 1848 with the Fox sisters' reports of spirit rappings in their home. The flood of mediums who emerged in response to the Fox sisters' claims–along with consolation literature such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Gates Ajar* (1868), which offered readers a vision of the afterlife that permitted contact between living and dead—reassured those in a scientific age that their loved ones were not lost to them, even in death. Spiritualists' purported communications with the other side comforted the living by demonstrating that the seemingly impermeable boundary which separated them from those who had passed was in fact fluid. During a period dominated by the ideology of separate spheres, an era in which women's "everyday patterns of life and work were becoming increasingly different from those of men" and in which the "degree to which boys and girls were socialized to occupy separate spheres" led to "intangible but strongly felt barriers between the sexes," the liminal figures of supernatural marriage fiction bridged this gap (Woloch 115, Hoffert 6, Habegger 21). These figures who spanned the natural and supernatural, who combined alluring femininity with the supposed masculinity of individualistic self-determination, insisted that the boundaries between the genders are fluid and permeable and that the roles prescribed by domestic ideology are not as immutable and inflexible as they seem. Further, just as spiritualism reassured believers that the living and dead have access to one another across the divide of death, supernatural marriage fiction's

blurring of the ideologically impenetrable boundaries between genders and its depiction of marriages based in similarity rather than opposition provided the comforting sense that relations between the sexes are not a lost cause, that men and women could find common ground despite the disconnect induced by separate spheres ideology. Like Hawthorne's meeting of the "Actual" and the "Imaginary," male and female can, in these texts, "each imbue itself with the nature of the other" rather than being kept irrevocably apart.

As the century passed and the ideological battle over woman's self-definition shifted to favor an individualistic model, the two genres which carried out this contest in fiction receded along with the debate which spawned them. But supernaturalism did not disappear—the ghost story, for instance, "has thrived on both sides of the Atlantic for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Carpenter and Kolmar 6)—rather, its functions were transformed to reflect cultural shifts. The nature of this transformation emerges clearly in three late-century tales, Edward Bellamy's *Miss Ludington's Sister* (1884), Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1886), and Harriet Prescott Spofford's "A Composite Wife" (1894).

Bellamy's tale centers on Ida Ludington, a beautiful young woman who loses her looks due to illness; because of her disfigurement, she perpetually mourns her lost youth and dwells on memories of the past as her only source of happiness. Her ward Paul falls in love with the youthful portrait of Miss Ludington that forms the centerpiece of her household, and as he grows to manhood, the fantasy "blind[s] him to the charms of living women" because he views his love for "the spirit of a girl" as loftier and more refined than any earthly passion (161, 40). His obsession

with the spirit girl leads him formulate a comforting theory—that each individual is comprised of a string of past selves, which "have a spiritual existence, like that ascribed to the souls of those other dead whose bodies are laid in the grave" (23); he then employs a medium in an attempt to prove his theory and contact his beloved. The medium dies during contact, causing the spirit of Ida's past self to come to life.

This materialized spirit is revealed in the end to be a real woman who is perpetrating a hoax at the behest of her impoverished family, a plot twist which underscores the foolishness of the worshipful man who idealizes the image of woman above the "living woman" herself (107). And the text depicts Paul's worship of a disembodied, idealized woman as antithetical to real love. After discovering that Ida is not a materialized spirit, but an ordinary woman, he still wishes to marry her despite her fraud, and realizes that

> his devotion, while impassioned enough, had been too distant and wholly reverential to be called a wooing. But the night of their betrothal his love had caught from her lips a fire that was of earth, and it was no longer as a semi-spiritual being that he worshipped her, but as a woman whom it was no sacrilege to kiss a thousand times a day, not upon her hand, her sleeve, or the hem of her dress, but full upon the soft warm mouth. (204)

Paul's realization impacts Ida as well:

> A model relieved from a strained pose could not show more evident relief than [Ida] did in stepping down from the pedestal of a tutelary saint, where he had placed her, to be loved and caressed like an ordinary woman. (204-5)

The text thus asserts the primacy of embodied love, and contends that angel-worship represents for men a "dim and nebulous emotion" (244), and for women a restrictive prison.

Although we have seen these themes before, in supernatural marriage fiction, the key difference lies in the depiction of temporality. Ghostly Miss Ludington and spirit-worshipping Paul live in the past, almost literally: Miss Ludington, after coming into an inheritance, builds an exact replica of the town in which her prized youth was spent, and raises Paul in this "ghostly village" (18). Paul, like Miss Ludington, is stunted in a temporal limbo in which the phantoms of the past have more significance and reality than life in the present, and his view of love is depicted as a benighted folly of youth which must be outgrown. Angel-worship is thus depicted as a relic of the past, which evaporates in concert with the destruction of Miss Ludington's fantasy village at the end of the text.

James' *The Bostonians* exhibits a similar pattern: angel-worshipping Basil Ransom, engaged in battle with New Woman Olive Chancellor for possession of medium Verena Tarrant, is a resolute male chauvinist whose "doctrines were about three hundred years behind the age; doubtless some magazine of the sixteenth century would have been very happy to print [his articles]" (148). Verena is angelic, not only in her tendency to do "everything that people asked" (251), but also in that her mediumship represents an older model of female performance which reconciles public speaking with angelic womanhood by casting mediums as passive vessels directed by the spirits that possess them: "[her father] and Mrs. Tarrant and the girl herself were all equally aware it was not she. It was some power outside—it seemed to flow through her" (44). Verena's air of ghostliness—as with the ghostly women who populate supernatural marriage fiction—thus signifies, throughout most of the novel, her suspension between angeldom and individualism, between private

woman and public woman: she has "the sweetest, most unworldly face, and yet, with it, an air of being on exhibition, . . . of living in the gaslight" (46).

Although her angelic nature renders her susceptible to the manipulations of the controlling Olive and Basil, she evolves over the course of the novel until she teeters on the brink of an individualistic breakthrough: she prepares to break free of the angelic mode of mediumship and attempt public speaking without the "aid" of the spirits, and at the same time develops "a force she had never felt before [that] was pushing her to please herself" (300). But this new sense of identity never has the chance to take root; Basil intercepts her before she can deliver her first public speech and convinces her to marry him, thereby ensuring her assumption of an angelic identity and her descent into absolute ghostliness. At the novel's conclusion, Verena is "dressed in white, and her face [is] whiter than her garment," and Basil seals her fate when he "thrust[s] the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head, to conceal her face and her identity" (341, 349). Verena's ghostliness differs from ghostliness in the supernatural marriage plot in that female individualism does not, in this text, require concealment; in fact, the majority of women who surround Verena are New Women, while the man who wishes to suppress female individualism and the angel herself are the oddities. Basil's possession of Verena thus represents the triumph of the past over the future, and her ghostliness the haunting of a nearly-dead mode of female identity. Further, James reflects just how much times had changed by depicting ghostliness not as a state of angeldom into which a rebellious woman has been forcibly trapped, but as a prison of, to a large degree, her own making. Despite experiencing the first stirrings of independence

and recognizing that Basil's power over her is something to be feared, Verena nonetheless acquiesces to angeldom. The sources of female entrapment, James suggests, now lie within the individual psyche, because the external pressures experienced by earlier generations have been largely alleviated. James' novel thus reveals that, unlike supernatural marriage fictions, late-century texts deploy ghostliness to reflect the outmoded nature not only of male angel-worship, but also of female angeldom.

Spofford's "A Composite Wife" likewise depicts angel-worship as archaic, and further suggests that the angel, in her purest form, has become a thing of the past. Thrice-widowed Mr. Chipperley sets his sights on a lively, vibrant, and opinionated young woman who represents the polar opposite of his other three wives, a collection of "pallid women, dressing in pallid colors" because of Chipperley's discomfort with their wearing anything other than "fawns and drabs" (228). Honor, on the other hand, is a "brilliant creature in her burning reds and yellows," and bristles at the idea of "'going in tandem with three ghosts'" who "'must have lost all identity by this time'" (229, 220). Honor—who declares, "'I should like to have some identity of my own'" (243)—contrives a plan to free herself from his unwelcome attentions and from her parents' desire that she marry him for his money: she will pair him off with her friend Marian Marcy, who is

> "pale and drab, just like all the women he naturally prefers, wearing pale and drab gowns, doing pale and drab things . . . she would melt into that composite wife of his without a wrinkle." (235)

As in Bellamy and James, the worshipper of drab, ghostly women is depicted as a relic: Mr. Chipperley is viewed by individualistic Honor as "'an old man'" who

might as well be "one hundred and forty-five" (219). And he, in his own way, lives in the past, in that he repeatedly conflates his previous wives with his present one. Attempts at controlling female behavior are antiquated as well; when confronted with her mother's threats "that her supplies should be cut off" or that she should be "shut up in her room," Honor replies that "mediæval customs were impossible in this *fin de siècle* period" (234). And even the drab, seemingly angelic Marian exhibits the kind of moxie one would never have seen in an antebellum angel: on more than one occasion, this "timid and conventional person" does something "unusual and daring," and she participates fully in Honor's bold plan that will allow each of them to marry the man of her choosing (236). Disembodied, obedient women—and the angel-worshipping men who love them—are thus depicted, in late-century texts, as relics of the past who present no threat to fully-embodied, colorful individualists who display their individualism openly and unapologetically.

Thus, as supernatural individualists became accepted entities in the real world—in the form of the New Woman—they no longer needed to deploy supernaturalism as a means of preserving their chosen sense of identity. The supernatural marriage plot's project of engendering sympathy toward female individualists, a project which permitted these "supernatural" beings to enter "without affrighting us" and which led readers into a neutral territory which, though alien, ultimately rendered familiar the unfamiliar, had succeeded to the point that the genre itself was no longer necessary.

The supernatural marriage plot's significance thus stems in part from the ways in which it may have, like abolitionist fictions such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,

contributed to social change, a possibility which may represent one fruitful avenue for future study. My project's recognition of this previously undiscovered genre not only adds to the body of criticism exploring the hugely popular genre of domestic fiction, but also uncovers a set of rhetorical tactics that emerged to counter angeldom, to rebel against the path of female development prescribed by domestic fiction, and to negotiate an alternative female identity amidst problematic mid-century depictions of the body. Supernatural marriage fiction deserves finally to emerge from the netherworld in which it has been stranded and achieve recognition for the prominent role it played in the nineteenth-century ideological debate over gender.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1]Weinstock's introduction provides more depth, but focuses on the contemporary interest in ghostliness as a "privileged poststructuralist academic trope" (4) because of its undermining of binary oppositions such as life and death, past and present. Further, the essay collection casts its temporal net more broadly than other studies, examining literary supernaturalism from the Puritan era through the present day.

[2]In addition to Weinstock's and Carpenter's ghost-centric collections, the book-length study *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* by Dale Bailey—which contends that the haunted house tale "has developed a distinctly American resonance" in that the house, a powerful ideological symbol of American success, serves as a vehicle through which to critique the American Dream—rounds out the major scholarly explorations of nineteenth-century American supernatural literature.

[3]I will be using these two texts, generally considered to be prototypical examples of the genre, as touchstones throughout the project.

Chapter I

[1]The purported author of the text is a nineteenth-century man who has written a "'New England novel'" based on a historical manuscript penned by one of his Puritan ancestors (3). *Hobomok* was published anonymously, and Child's "series of male narrators," according to Carolyn Karcher, "allows her to evade the sanctions against female authorship" (Karcher xx). I would add that this formal device, by allowing her to depict a male narrator as sympathetic to the plight of women, would have given further credence, in the eyes of a resistant public, to her critiques of woman's place.

[2]As we shall see later, *The Scarlet Letter's* Pearl acquires sympathy through the same mechanism.

[3]The text's linkage between angelic spiritualization and a problematic spectral disembodiment is, as we shall see in Chapter III, another central feature of supernatural marriage fiction.

[4]Dimmesdale would, on the surface, seem to represent a blending of masculine and feminine spheres. However, as my later discussion of him will reveal, he is clearly a deeply flawed character, one who is not intended as a prototype for the "coming revelation." The problem with both Dimmesdale's masculine and feminine sides is the "sin" which the novel frowns upon more harshly than any other: the sin of self-absorption, of being a law unto oneself.

[5]For a more detailed discussion of Dimmesdale's selfishness, see Nina Baym's various readings of the novel, along with Kenneth Pimple's "'Subtle, but remorseful hypocrite': Dimmesdale's Moral Character" and Erika M. Kreger's "'Depravity Dressed up in a Fascinating Garb': Sentimental Motifs and the Seduced Hero(ine) in *The Scarlet Letter*." Pimple provides a fascinating and nuanced reading of Dimmesdale's perpetual "doubletalk," which manifests itself during the Forest Scene as "talk[ing] Hester into talking him into fleeing" (257). And Kreger argues that Hawthorne depicts Dimmesdale using motifs from the seduction novel which would have encouraged "readers to condemn Dimmesdale's hypocrisy rather than sympathize with his sufferings" (311).

[6]The novel's other references to Pearl as impish or demonic are a reflection and critique of the community's unsympathetic and hard-hearted perspective toward Pearl, a perspective from which the narrator distances himself; for instance: "Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants" (93).

[7]Again, this depiction of ghostliness—in which the rebellious woman's forcible acquiescence to the tenets of angeldom leads to a problematic disembodiment—reflects the depiction of ghostliness in the genre at large, and will be explored in Chapter III.

Chapter II

[1]In fact, the text suggests that Ver is a frustrated artist; she resides in her own imaginary world and has magnificent visionary power, but never shares her visions with others: "You were endowed with genius; but while its rays penetrated you, we did not see them. How could we profit by what you saw and heard, when we were blind and deaf?" (59)

[2]Scholars of domestic ideology such as Jane Tompkins and Nina Baym would certainly take issue with Stoddard's critique, arguing that domestic fiction did in fact prepare its heroines for the harshness of a life in which women must prepare to live "in a condition of servitude" (*Sensational Designs* 173).

[3]This is, interestingly, consistent with the nature of Byronism. Elaine Showalter notes that, while male critics viewed brutish Byronic heroes as "tyrants who took advantage of helpless heroines," their authors had entirely different intentions: "the brute flattered the heroine's spirit by treating her as an equal rather than as a sensitive, fragile fool who must be sheltered and protected" (*Literature of Their Own* 142-43). The linkage in these texts between Byronism and supernaturalism thus makes sense, since both serve the same function: the rejection of angelic delicacy and the establishment of compatibility and equality.

Chapter III

[1]This concern with filial obedience in mate selection was under debate during the first half of the nineteenth century, according to Karen Tracey: "the notion that romantic love should dictate who an individual chose to marry gained primacy gradually through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the turn into the nineteenth century, many Americans still distrusted romantic love" (31). By mid-century, the debate had been resolved in favor of romantic love and companionate marriage. Thus, texts written during the first half of the century, such as the short story "The Country Cousin," which I will discuss later in this chapter, exhibit a concern with women's ability to select husbands for themselves that disappears from later texts.

[2]Sybil's uncle is not in fact a blood relative; her childless grandfather adopted the son of a family friend after he was orphaned. Sybil's father was born two years later, and his guilt over having "'innocently robbed'" his adopted brother leads him to suggest the compact (44).

[3]The gratification of pecuniary needs is depicted throughout the tale as a central mechanism through which women are lulled into sleepwalking and forgetfulness. For instance, when trying to convince her to accept his proposal, her uncle "beckoned imperiously as if to awe me, and held up the glittering betrothal ring as if to tempt me. The tone, the act, the look put me quite beside myself" (45); the language suggests an act of mesmerism.

[4]As Elizabeth Lennox Keyser argues, the scene at the end of the story—in which Sybil finds herself in a carriage with Guy, soothed by the "cordial of his presence" (57)—parallels the opening scene in which Sybil, alone with her uncle in a carriage, is mastered by his "narcotic influence" (Keyser 10).

Chapter IV

[1]This is perhaps a subtle reference to and critique of the legal tradition of *coverture*.

[2]Despite learning to resign herself to her fate and God's will, like a good sentimental heroine, Cap's mother never becomes truly angelic because of her sustained ghostly resistance. She has made several escape attempts over the years, concocted a plan to rescue Cap from the Le Noirs' clutches, and to the last, stubbornly refuses to relinquish her identity (she responds to the asylum director's insistence on calling her "Mademoiselle" with indignation, since it is based in the Le Noirs' lie that she was ruined, not widowed, and the assumption that she is insane and not to be believed).

[3] Cap deploys the same tactic earlier in the text, during an encounter in which Craven Le Noir seems intent on a sexual assault. When Craven attempts to lure her off her horse, Cap answers "with deliberate hesitation." She keeps behaving with typical feminine delicacy, worrying about her riding-skirt and complaining that the

ground is damp; each of these acts of feigned femininity causes Craven to refer to her as "'my angel'" (102, 104), indicating that Cap is simulating angeldom in order to catch Craven off guard. Her tactic succeeds: she tricks him into removing his saddle, giving her the opportunity to dash away without being followed.

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