

Gothic Naturalism and American Women Writers

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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May 2016

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents who always thought I could be more. Grazie.

To my family for supporting me from many miles away and never saying I was crazy to go to graduate school and study literature.

To all of the brilliant teachers I have had throughout the years who taught me it was okay to love being a student.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks go to my dissertation committee, Dr. Mary Papke, Dr. Bill Hardwig, Dr. Amy Billone, and Dr. Carolyn Hodges, whose comments have made my work immeasurably stronger and who have taught me to think of myself as a writer. In particular, I am so grateful to Dr. Papke for her help in shaping the project at its outset and for the great care she took in reading and editing early drafts. Having her as a mentor throughout my graduate student career has been invaluable and has also made the process much more enjoyable.

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, naturalism and the Gothic have been seen as genres that have little to do with one another. However, Frank Norris, one of the practitioners and theoreticians of canonical naturalism, argued that the roots of naturalism lie not in realism (as is often argued) but in romanticism. This project seeks to explore Norris's claim by positing a new genre—Gothic naturalism. Gothic naturalism is a hybrid genre that combines the Gothic's haunting nature and representations of the abject, grotesque, and uncanny with canonical naturalism's interrogation of making choices and the forces of chance, determinism, and heredity. Although naturalism is traditionally seen as a male genre, I argue that women writers *have* made significant contributions to naturalism but that, because their work often draws heavily from the Gothic, thus far critics have largely omitted them from discussions of naturalism. In examining determinism, I explore female agency and the complexity with which it is portrayed in Gothic naturalist texts by writers such as Elizabeth Stoddard, Louisa May Alcott, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Edith Wharton, and Edith Summers Kelley. Gothic naturalism shows gender itself as something that both haunts and frequently overdetermines female characters. Agency also becomes illusory for female characters in Gothic naturalism as they frequently encounter situations with only negative outcomes or face situations where they must make a choice only to find there are no 'good' choices to be made. This project contributes to naturalist studies first by exploring how naturalism collaborates with other genres but also by examining women writers frequently left out of naturalist criticism. Indeed, several of the writers discussed have not been considered as naturalist authors until now. This project also contributes to American Gothic studies by exploring the psychological manifestations of the Gothic rather than its more superficial trappings and supernatural elements.

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INTRODUCTION

Richard Lehan asserts that “literary naturalism depicted what was at the end of the yellow brick road, what was going on behind the curtain, why an idealized nation had come to the end of its innocence” (50). Yet, in many ways American Gothic had already begun to strip away the veneer of the American Dream and reveal the frightening inequities of American life. Teresa Goddu, for example, argues that “American gothic literature criticizes America’s national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation’s claim to purity and equality” (10). The revelatory project of both American Gothic and American literary naturalism demonstrates the shared goals of these literary genres, yet there is very little work that brings these literary forms into conversation with one another. My project explores the intersection between the American Gothic and American literary naturalism in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century literature. Gothic naturalism¹ in my formulation combines the deep psychological interrogations and transgressions into the unsaid associated with the classic Gothic with the determinist trajectory of naturalism as well as the limiting categories of race, class, and gender against which characters struggle. Gothic naturalism also uses aesthetic effects from both modes, such as the grotesque, uncanny, abject, and sublime to defamiliarize everyday existence and to depict the animality of human nature. Although the Gothic and naturalism might be seen as

¹ Christophe Den Tandt discusses “naturalist gothic” in *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism* (42). However, this name seems to confuse the issue because it implies that naturalism is a subset of the Gothic. Interestingly, Den Tandt goes on to argue that the Gothic is also an important strain within realism, such that the sublime effects Den Tandt discusses may seem out of place within his taxonomy. By using the name Gothic naturalism for the hybrid genre I am discussing, I hope to place more of an equal emphasis on both genres and put them in the camp of romance, as Frank Norris defines it, rather than Howellsian realism.

antithetical to one another, I will argue that what other critics have characterized as the hardcore realist elements (and which I characterize as hyperrealist elements) that act as key components of naturalism do not necessarily preclude the inclusion of the supernatural or uncanny. Within naturalism's focus on depicting landscapes in ways different from those of realism, often with a particular focus on urban slums and harsh natural landscapes, humanity's experiences of those very real spaces often translate into the surreal and supernatural. In many ways, the inclusion of the supernatural within Gothic naturalism heightens the portrayal of the 'real' world because it captures the uncanny world depicted by naturalism, and *Gothic* naturalism intensifies the supernatural as an aesthetic effect utilized to capture the oftentimes strange nature of human experience. Frank Norris argued that fiction itself "is what seems real, not what is real," and this definition might apply to Gothic naturalism as well, which genre for all its capacity to depict human experience, does not adhere to a realist worldview ("Fiction Is Selection" 1115). However, the use of the supernatural within Gothic naturalism may appear quite different from the way authors deploy it in more traditional Gothic texts. In Gothic naturalism, readers will likely not find things going bump in the middle of the night. The use of the supernatural is often more subtle but remains nonetheless frightening precisely because of its subtlety. Haunting, for example, must be conceived of much more broadly within Gothic naturalism. It is not only spirits and ghosts that have the ability to haunt but the very factors of an individual's identity such as heredity, class, and gender. In that way, reality may be far more frightening than a lone malevolent spirit.

Many discussions of naturalism place the genre within the realm of realism. Indeed, Norris posits that “for most people Naturalism has a vague meaning. It is a sort of inner circle of realism—a kind of diametric opposite of romanticism, a theory of fiction wherein things are represented ‘as they really are,’ inexorably, with the truthfulness of a camera. This idea can be shown to be far from right, that Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of romanticism after all” (“Zola as a Romantic Writer” 1106). Donald Pizer interprets Norris’s critical writings on naturalism as “plac[ing] realism, romanticism, and naturalism in a dialectic, in which realism and romanticism were opposing forces, and naturalism was transcending synthesis” (107). However, I would argue that Norris places the greater emphasis on naturalism’s relationship to romanticism. Interestingly, Norris goes on to describe naturalism as a genre in which “everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout” (“Zola as Romantic Writer” 1107). Norris’s characterization not only clarifies the way in which naturalism participates in romance but could also easily describe the Gothic itself, and Norris’s account of naturalism allows readers and critics to place naturalism on the romance spectrum (although romance itself may be just as misunderstood as is naturalism). Norris vigorously defended romance, contesting

it is very easy to get the impression that Romance must be an affair of cloaks and daggers, or moonlight and golden hair. But this is not so at all. The true Romance is a more serious business than this. It is not merely a conjuror’s trick box, full of flimsy quackeries, tinsel and clap traps, meant only to amuse, and relying upon deception to do even that. Is it not

something better than this? Can we not see in it an instrument, keen,
finely tempered, flawless—an instrument with which we may go straight
through clothes and tissues and wrappings of flesh down deep into the red
living heart of things? (“A Plea for Romantic Fiction” 1165)

By Norris’s situating naturalism as a strain of romance, rather than realism, readers can appreciate a different set of qualities within naturalism, such as its heightened emotion and the occasional implausibility of the circumstances in which the characters find themselves. In addition, Keith Newlin argues that naturalism actually has a “melodramatic vision” that explains the aspects of the genre which do not cohere with realism (15). Newlin observes that critics judge the use of non-realistic techniques as “instances of flawed technique or defective artistry. But these ‘flaws’ . . . provided the naturalists with an effective means through which to articulate the impingement of Darwinian and Spencerian thought upon such social issues as land speculation and poverty, marital infidelity and the double standard, political corruption and labor agitation, and sexual deviance and crime” (5). However, seen through a Gothic lens and as part of a hybrid genre descended from romance, these aesthetic breaks with realism become a more cohesive part of the genre rather than stylistic aberrations.

Within discussions of naturalism’s literary genealogy, the contribution of women writers has been, until fairly recently, neglected. Indeed, Norris argues that “a very high and illustrious place will be claimed for romance, while sentiment will be handed down the scullery stairs” (“A Plea for Romantic Fiction” 1165). The association of sentimentalism with the scullery stairs relegates women writers to the lowest position

within literary hierarchies at the same time that Norris elevates male romanticists. Within this study, I wish to complicate the ingrained associations of naturalism with male writers and the Gothic with female writers. I am focusing on women writers because, although I would argue that Gothic naturalism is not unique to women writers, women writers *do* utilize the Gothic and naturalism in unique ways to speak frankly about female existence. Their use of Gothic naturalism allows them to engage with controversial subjects, such as sexuality and childbirth, while using complex, controversial literary forms in their narratives.

Undoubtedly, I will refer to male naturalists and male Gothic authors both to show instances in which women fit into these more recognized traditions as well as to demonstrate the ways in which women's writing of Gothic naturalist texts diverges from these traditions. One key difference between male and female naturalists is their subject matter. The depiction of childbirth, girlhood, caring for children, and female sexuality are among the topics which receive sparse attention in male authors' naturalist texts but *are* portrayed using naturalist aesthetics and philosophy by female naturalists. In addition, female Gothic naturalists emphasize the psychological experiences of characters to an even greater degree than do traditional male naturalists. The privileging of psychological states establishes the Gothic as a key aesthetic through which female naturalists can explore characters' adaptations to their deterministic naturalist environment as well as their own heredity. The Big Four male naturalists—Crane, Norris, Dreiser, and London—will be my main points of reference, but other male authors such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, whose *The Sport of the Gods* is a key example of

a male writer's making use of Gothic naturalism, will also be significant in positioning female Gothic naturalists. Other Gothic male writers such as Poe and Hawthorne will similarly serve as important points of reference for early female Gothic naturalists such as Elizabeth Stoddard and Louisa May Alcott.

My study concentrates largely on short novels as well as key short stories because those are central to the tradition of American Gothic and because they are often more experimental, allowing readers to experience different milieus and scenarios than those depicted in longer canonical naturalist novels such as Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) or Dreiser's *American Tragedy* (1925). However, two of my key texts, *The Morgesons* and *Weeds*, are long novels and chart the lives of their protagonists in many ways as would a bildungsroman. These texts queer themselves, though, much like my shorter texts, and place themselves in the realm of Gothic naturalism through their lack of normativity. Gothic naturalism lends itself to intense and, in many ways, liminal texts. These texts seem to rest on the point of a fulcrum: precariously balanced and able to move in multiple directions. Their moves are unpredictable because the action within these novels often results from chance or determinist impulses. I will start with Gothic protonaturalism in the 1860s, when Gothic women writers are beginning to introduce naturalist tendencies in their work. By beginning earlier in the literary timeline before the critically applauded heyday of naturalism, I will show different ways to examine how women writers rarely considered as naturalist authors create and contribute to this tradition. Beginning with these early texts more often classified as Gothic will then provide me with a different lens through which to consider texts written during the 1890s and around the turn of the

century, works more often claimed as naturalist. In the latter half of my project, I will examine later Gothic naturalist works in the early twentieth century to see where Gothic naturalism goes as it moves toward modernism. Finally, in my conclusion I will examine a more recent popular work to see how Gothic naturalism continues to play a role in the recent explosion of contemporary popular Gothic works by women.

My project emphasizes questions related to genre, gender, and female negotiation of agency, as both the Gothic and naturalism inherently question free will and the limitations placed on women who attempt to act on their own behalf. Gothic naturalism, then, is particularly well suited to investigations of female agency because it depicts a narrative world in which free will is severely limited, or even nonexistent. For my purposes, agency is the ability of a character to make her or his own choices, to retain decision-making power, and to take action without being undermined by others in equal or greater situations of power. Similarly, the Gothic's focus on supernatural events and the portrayal of past events' ability to harm characters in the narrative present also portray a narrative world where human characters' power is often curtailed. Coupled with these narrative outlooks, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century heroines operate in a world that rarely sees them as agents.

In addition to the thematic preoccupations of Gothic naturalism, there are also shared aesthetic techniques. As a hybrid genre, at its most basic level Gothic naturalism brings into contact subject matter as well as aesthetic techniques that might otherwise remain separate. Gothic naturalism privileges the uncanny, at times destabilizing the hard determinism of certain naturalist texts while asserting the eerie quality of many

Gothic works. The inclusion of the Gothic alongside naturalism also provides greater access to characters' interiority than in canonical naturalist texts. In Gothic naturalism, the Gothic often foregrounds itself in psychological explorations of the characters. My discussions of classic naturalist novels will show pre-existing connections to the Gothic, demonstrating its usefulness in portraying the range of psychological and emotional experiences contained within naturalism and brought even more to the forefront in Gothic naturalism. The introduction of naturalism can counteract the potentially hackneyed quality of some Gothic texts, particularly those utilizing Gothic terror to explain away supernatural elements. Due to the pessimism of so many naturalist novels, Gothic naturalism remains closer to Gothic horror than to Gothic terror. Horror is already present in canonical naturalism, particularly in scenes of extreme physical violence and gore. In Gothic naturalism, while there are examples of physical violence, more often psychological or emotional violence serves to evoke horror. Furthermore, within Gothic naturalism, forces of determinism cannot be easily dismissed in the way that ghosts can be rationalized away in Gothic terror texts. I will delineate carefully the differences between naturalism, the Gothic, and Gothic naturalism, focusing on what separates Gothic naturalism from the genres which form it.

In order to understand better the hybrid nature of Gothic naturalism, I want to first explain some of the ways I am conceptualizing genre. In "Migration Across Genres," Wai Chee Dimock discusses the relationship between different kinds of genres, and particularly international ones, using technological metaphors. In describing the way people open windows or tabs on their computers, Dimock uses the terms stackability,

switchability, and scalability to explain how computer windows resemble genre. Dimock notes that “we are the ones who open all those windows and switch back and forth among them. And, while switching, we are also at liberty to maximize some windows and minimize others, scaling up or down either to achieve a bird’s eye view or to zoom in for the close-up” (98). In other words, readers are actively participating in the delineation of genre, depending upon textual corroboration, of course. Dimock’s model begins to demonstrate the complicated relationships among genres as well as within hybrid genres such as Gothic naturalism. There is give and take between genres, and Dimock characterizes the exchange between genres as percolation, creating energy in the overlap (101). I hope to move in for the close-up, as Dimock defines it. The long shot view of naturalism is one that is largely white and male, and seen through a realist filter. I will examine Gothic naturalist texts more closely to demonstrate how these genres come together and how they reveal new and different conceptions of naturalism than what can be seen in a long shot.

When one examines Gothic naturalism more closely, it may not seem readily apparent as to why or how the Gothic, typically characterized as feminine, shares a relationship with naturalism, routinely gendered as a masculine genre. I hope to further complicate these gendered categorizations by arguing that the female authors I am discussing are able to mix these genres together successfully. By removing stereotypical gender biases about these various modes, the overlap in their philosophical outlooks as forms of storytelling becomes apparent. Donna Campbell points out that by setting aside the gendered stereotypes of local color writing and naturalism, the ideas that they share

become more apparent. She argues that both local color and naturalism share “a commitment to the accurate and detailed representation of ordinary human beings, a fascination with tracing the workings of heredity, and a belief in the shaping power of the environment” (*Resisting Regionalism* 9). For Campbell, overlap exists between local color and naturalism. I want to stretch this concept further, examining the Gothic and naturalism together so that they can be placed together and understood as interrelated. Think of a set of Russian nesting dolls, matryoshkas. When first looking at a matryoshka, one sees only one doll. However, upon further examination, one finds that one larger doll encases multiple smaller dolls within it. The structure of being nested inside other similar objects also applies to literary movements and modes of storytelling. Naturalism’s worldview draws from earlier genres, such as the Gothic, while differentiating itself from other genres, such as realism, through its thematic concerns and aesthetic techniques. If one removes all the top halves of the matryoshkas, though, and looks only at the bottom halves nested one inside the other, one can see the concentric circles of these objects. By using this metaphor of the matryoshkas to think about genre, critics can begin to see the relationships between these various categories, the overlap between some genres, as well as how certain genres engulf others. The women writers I will discuss manage to pull together particular veins of the Gothic and naturalism to write a hybrid genre which both foregrounds these modes and forges them together.

Not surprisingly, wedding the Gothic with the naturalistic draws attention to and raises crucial questions concerning gender within Gothic naturalism. In discussing female protagonists, I will be writing about gender determinism coupled with issues of

ethnicity and class which all make claims on the heroine's choices. Though it is naturalism's central tenet, determinism remains one of the critical quagmires of naturalism. That is, Ian F. Roberts argues that determinism "remains the most superficially understood [of naturalism's philosophies], despite having been so frequently discussed" (124). Critics often do not agree on the way determinism operates within naturalism, and, furthermore, there are many different forms of determinism depicted. There are notions of a hard determinism in which all the aspects of an individual's life are predetermined and in which an individual's actions have little to no impact. This hard determinist perspective could also be thought of as fatalism, which "implies that humans have effectively no control over their lives and suggests a defeatist submission to some divinely predestined outcome" (Roberts 127). There are also softer forms of determinism, in which factors of determinism such as heredity and the environment can exert pressures or establish boundaries which can still be tested, or possibly even transcended, by an individual's choices or actions. Roberts notes the varying philosophies engaged with determinism. Interestingly, some of these philosophies counter dominant critical notions of determinism. For example, Roberts notes that John Stuart Mill embraced "a compatibilist position, or the view that free will is compatible with determinism, because free will is most logically and meaningfully defined as the ability to act as one wishes, without denying the fact that one's wishes are themselves determined by one's upbringing, genetics, and circumstances" (125). In other words, the free will to make choices is already influenced by deterministic impulses of which individuals are not always conscious.

Given the confusion over determinism, I want to establish my definition of gender determinism within the new genre that I am positing in part to address its relationship with naturalism. I argue that both the Gothic and naturalism clearly display gender determinism in depicting female characters, and in subsequent chapters, I will inquire how Gothic naturalist determinism operates in the lives of female characters in particular. Gender determinism functions as a system of boundaries and restrictions relating to dress, behavior, what subjects an individual can speak about, sexual desires and expressions, and so on. I argue that gender determinism is not a hard determinism in all cases. Instead, gender determinism exerts pressures to act and behave in a certain way depending on one's gender. The Cult of True Womanhood and its touchstones of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity is one of the clearest distillations of female gender determinism in America in the nineteenth century (Welter 152). Gothic naturalism often displays the effects of women who are outside the Cult of True Womanhood and how their outsider status and rebellion against gender constraints impact narrative trajectories within Gothic naturalism. Of course, gender determinism extends to men as well. For example, the character of McTeague is very much determined by his own code, or cult, of masculinity as well as the comparison of his own masculinity with that of Marcus Schouler. McTeague's refrain of "'You can't make small of me'" betrays his fears of appearing less than virile in any physical or social situation (Norris, *McTeague* 75). His desire to not be bested or emasculated in many ways sets off his sadistic behavior in portions of the novel. Norris's portrayal of masculinity thus demonstrates that gender determinism impacts men and women,

although in different ways. Elisabeth Badinter argues that, in fact, masculinity may be even more difficult to construct than femininity. She notes “the crisis of masculinity” (13) in America at the turn of the twentieth century when “men’s vulnerability was exposed: with his masculine role uncertain, with his panicky fear of feminization, the average American man of the 1900s no longer knew how to be a man worthy of the name” (19). McTeague’s sensitivity regarding his masculinity betrays a very determined type of masculinity that is perhaps just as restrictive as female gender determinism.

Although I focus largely on the portrayal of women within naturalism, gender determinism affects men as well and impacts the relationships between men and women within Gothic naturalist works. Gender determinism is heightened in Gothic naturalist works but it certainly plays a significant role in canonical naturalism, as evidenced by the examples I will shortly present. What is unique to Gothic naturalism in relation to gender determinism is its more experimental approach to portraying gender roles and the attention it brings to situations in which characters attempt to override gender determinism.

Gothic naturalist authors’ use of gender determinism builds upon the work of canonical naturalism. The male authors traditionally associated with naturalism in many ways illuminate various cults of masculinity and femininity through their work. At times, the portrayal of gender is overdetermined in the naturalist canon. For example, Crane’s *George’s Mother* portrays a protagonist struggling with his masculinity in relation to his environment. Although the narrator describes George as a “young man,” his mother repeatedly talks to him as she might have when he was a boy (91). At one point George’s

mother even comments ““what an old bear th’ boy is!”” (133, my emphasis). More telling are his mother’s repeated reminders to not ““throw your coat down there. Hang it up behind th’ door”” in the same way a child has to be nagged to perform a mundane task (99). George’s chafing against this emasculation contrasts sharply with the “manly feeling” and the knowledge that he is “capable of sublime things” experienced when he begins drinking with a group of worldly men (106). While George retreats from the feminine environment of his mother’s home, he finds himself drastically out of his depth in the masculine world of the saloon.

Just as George struggles with his masculinity, *McTeague*’s Trina has a perplexing relationship to femininity. Curiously, Norris notes twice that Trina is “without sex” (*McTeague* 19, 70). Trina “was frank, straightforward, a healthy, natural human being . . . almost like a boy” (70). However, when McTeague holds Trina in his arms, “the Woman within her suddenly awoke” and “it frightened her now as she thought of it, this second self that had wakened within her and that shouted and clamored for recognition” (70). For Trina, femininity becomes a menacing prospect and a force over which she lacks control. Neither Trina nor George is equipped to deal with the performance of gender in responsible ways. In contrast, Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* creates quite a different trajectory for the female characters in his novel of returning to nature. Female dogs are viciously and violently killed in the text, so that readers may not be surprised when Mercedes, one of the few female human characters portrayed in the novel, betrays an inability to adapt to the Alaskan environment. In the Klondike, femininity is defined as a disadvantage, while in the urban environments of *George’s Mother* and *McTeague*,

both masculinity and femininity can be hazardous. While these examples of gender determinism from Norris's, Crane's and London's canonical works appear quite obvious and clear cut, the use of gender determinism within Gothic naturalism often presents itself in a more complicated manner. Within Gothic naturalism, women writers (and certain male writers as well) present gender determinism at times as very much in flux, and texts often depict characters actively testing the boundaries created by their gender. Readers experience not just the results of gender determinism but, rather, witness its construction and strictures actively playing out in the text, unlike the more straightforward trajectories of certain classic naturalist texts.

Female characters use a host of strategies to confront gender determinism in Gothic naturalist texts. Gender trouble, which I will discuss below, acts as one primary method used to evade determinism. At other times, female characters counter gender determinism by refusing to abide by its restrictions. Presented with a finite set of choices, Gothic naturalist heroines often circumvent these choices to find a different course of action (even though that action may contradict notions of femininity). Although in the traditional naturalist sense determinism often signals a downward trajectory, that is not always the case with gender determinism. Unlike the hard determinism of canonical naturalism, then, Gothic naturalism's gender determinism is much more fluid in its operation. While gender determinism is more flexible in Gothic naturalist texts, this elasticity does not mean gender determinism always impacts female characters positively. There is a wide range of effects created due to gender determinism. Some heroines find agency in hopeless situations, while other characters who *appear* to

have agency often end their narratives as powerless victims who have grimly resolved to accept their circumstances. Certain female characters seem fated to succumb to gender determinism no matter how they try to work within the system of guidelines created by this determinism; *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart comes to mind as a significant example. In contrast, other heroines, particularly those of Louisa May Alcott, transgress codes of femininity frequently but can still achieve economic security and even find positions of power as is the case in *Behind a Mask*. Interestingly, for some of these heroines, it will be crucial to question how they are determined by their gender and in some cases to ask whether the heroines themselves are complicit, to some extent, in the determinism that they experience.

Gothic naturalist heroines often make choices in their best interest only to discover that their choices are actually self-destructive. In many cases, they remain responsible for their choices and actions; however, at other times determinism places them within environments where there are no 'good' choices at all, leaving a 'bad' choice as the only available option. In fact, the word 'choice' used to describe the positions characters take up in Gothic naturalist texts may be misleading in cases where characters cannot exercise their agency freely. Critics have demonstrated the importance of chance to naturalism, but I would argue that it plays a central role in the Gothic as well. In some cases, the ability to act as an agent may depend largely on chance. Gothic naturalism, then, relies on coincidence, contingent circumstances, and the effects of chance in the construction of its plots.

Acting in opposition to chance, the interplay between determinism and free will is crucial not only for naturalism but also for the Gothic. As was discussed, gender determinism surfaces in many naturalist texts, particularly those by women writers, as it creates specific trajectories for men and women to follow. However, the Gothic often depicts gender as a deterministic factor as well, particularly in the portrayal of gender stereotypes such as the helpless heroine placed in peril. Another key Gothic gender stereotype is the male villain who threatens the heroine. The heroine's danger often contains the threat of rape, bodily harm, or even death. In conventional presentations of gender within Gothic texts, the heroine often becomes passive or is physically unable to defend herself. Female characters typically become one-dimensional victims, whereas male characters can be either villains or heroes. Many of Poe's short stories and poems portray this trope, including "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Black Cat," and even his detective stories such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," which oppose female victims to male heroes and villains.² Even in naturalist texts written at the turn of the twentieth century, gender stereotypes still remain quite stark, although villains become less identifiable, particularly within naturalism wherein the environment may be as much of a foe as is an actual person. Stephen Crane's *Maggie* represents a classic case of gender determinism. Although Crane critiques gender stereotypes, he also portrays Maggie's inability to combat the men who prey upon her. In contrast, the female authors I will discuss routinely portray heroines who have a much more complicated relationship to agency and gender determinism.

² Other Poe texts such as "Ligeia" complicate this gender dynamic as the story features both a passive and an active woman and Ligeia's supernatural nature makes her a puzzling character to decipher.

There is, in fact, often a tension in Gothic naturalist texts between stable and conservative portrayals of gender and depictions which incorporate gender trouble as part of their narratives. Gender trouble, for my purposes, constitutes a state wherein gender performance becomes more fluid and stereotypical traits of masculinity in men and femininity in women are often inverted or perhaps combined in the character of a single person in unpredictable ways. Judith Butler argues that

if gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (180)

In many ways, then, gender trouble acts as the opposite of gender determinism. In fact, gender trouble may be a way to evade determinism because it makes one's identity harder to pin down and constrain. Similarly, gender trouble may be a strategy used to override the negative options characters face. On the other hand, characters that live out gender trouble may be ostracized for their inability or unwillingness to conform to normative gender codes. In certain ways, gender trouble provides female characters with more agency because when they do break with the restrictions of the Cult of True Womanhood,

other characters simply do not know how to react to them. However, environment also plays a critical role in reactions to gender trouble as it often prescribes how reactions to gender identity and gender trouble will play out. *The Morgesons*' Cassandra Morgeson uses gender trouble to her advantage, for example, while *Weeds*' Judy Pippinger gains little advantage from the gender trouble her character experiences. Cassandra's upper-class status and New England town setting are slightly more receptive to her unconventional gender identity, whereas Judith's working-class status and rural environment are not receptive to the gender trouble she enacts. In Louisa May Alcott's stories, in turn, the location of the heroine necessitates very different kinds of behavior. Her heroines often enter potentially dangerous spaces such as insane asylums or houses in which they are held captive and imprisoned, such that behaving as a True Woman does little to aid the heroine in escaping these situations. Additionally, Alcott set some of her "blood and thunder" tales in English or European locales which often have different sets of gender codes for women than do American settings. In examining Gothic naturalist works, instances of gender trouble will be crucial, as they question deterministic gender trajectories, show the moments in which these trajectories collapse, as well as usher in the uncanny when once familiar markers and traits of gender become strange and even frightening.

By exploring the intersection of the Gothic with naturalism, I hope both to expand definitions of what naturalist works appear to be, as well as what aesthetic and political agenda they promote, and to demonstrate the ways in which the Gothic functions within this particular mode of writing and to what effect it is performed by women writers. I am

addressing Gothic naturalism in part as a way to examine more women authors who ought to be considered part of a larger naturalist canon and tradition. It is not controversial to claim a female author is writing in the Gothic tradition, but because there is such strong overlap between the Gothic and naturalism, some Gothic women writers also ought to be acknowledged as part of the naturalist tradition. Women writers *have* made significant contributions to naturalism but, because their work often draws heavily from the Gothic, these contributions have largely gone unrecognized.

Although critics have made the case for certain women writers' investment in naturalism, much of the criticism revolves not just around the same authors but often around singular texts from those authors. Donna Campbell has asked “‘Where are the ladies?’” in American literary naturalism and pointed to authors such as Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Edith Summers Kelley as practitioners of naturalism. Campbell contends that naturalism as practiced by women writers usually contains depictions of the female body, female sexuality, childbirth, and the labor of motherhood often not present in naturalist works by male writers. Campbell also notes the gendered distinctions among authors writing within naturalism. While male authors were categorized as “‘naturalists,’” female authors, whom she contends were also naturalists, were categorized only as “‘women writers’” (“Women Writers and Naturalism” 223). In many ways, the stereotype of naturalism being a male and masculinist genre still continues. While I will discuss women traditionally thought to be naturalists, such as Edith Wharton, I hope to demonstrate a wider matrix of women writers participating in naturalism through the

more stereotypically female genre of the Gothic. Much ink has been spilled by critics discussing the Gothic, particularly the role of female characters and female authors within it. However, by examining the Gothic through the lens of naturalist principles such as determinism, the loss or absence of free will, the focus on heredity and environment, and shared aesthetic effects such as the uncanny, grotesque, and abject, I believe there is still much more to be said about the American Gothic. At the same time, I am arguing that women writers have too often been left out of considerations of naturalism, and much remains to be said about that as well.

My methodology comes largely from materialist feminism. I am exploring questions of agency and a key component of an individual's agency comes through interpellation and the manner in which one's subject position is created within one's social milieu. The way in which all the different elements of one's identity become imbricated with one another is crucial to understanding the heroine's position within the novel's environment. The assemblage³ of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among other category memberships, is crucial to identity and something which must be attended to in literary analysis. Within Gothic naturalism, many different forms of hailing and coming to subjectivity converge in these hybrid texts, and these collisions create a complex subjectivity for heroines to negotiate. The women writers I am discussing often place

³ Jasbir K. Puar in "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" pits assemblage against intersectionality, arguing assemblage "is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative of identification" (128). However, at their core, both of these models for identity emphasize the complexity of identity and the precise scholarly language needed to unpack the collision of membership categories that coalesce in the identity of an individual. For the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts I am discussing, theory relating to identity construction remains crucial as the elements of characters' identities have to be understood as well as appropriately contextualized within their historical moment.

these complex indexes of identity at the heart of their texts in explaining the journeys undertaken by their characters. Understanding the contribution of material elements to one's existence is important for Gothic naturalism as discussions of the body, and particularly female bodily sensations and embodied female existence, are often at the forefront of these texts.

Understanding the construction of the protagonists' subjectivity remains significant for the questions related to determinism and agency which I am pursuing. Determinism is very much linked with identity and the construction of subjectivity. Once you answer the hailing, and respond to the "hey, you" of Althusser's classic example of interpellation, you become part of the process of placing yourself within various identity categories. Those very categories of one's identity then compose the boundaries and limits of determinism to which characters must respond. Agency also becomes linked with interpellation in an analogous manner. Because individuals are part of the process through which they come to subjectivity, they help to create, and therefore become complicit, in their own agency. In Gothic naturalist texts, the interpellation of characters in a range of familial and professional roles such as daughter, wife, mother, caretaker, and even actress, forge critical aspects of their identity that, once established, are nearly impossible to change. Through this chain of identity-forming actions and reactions, the relationship between determinism and the construction of agency can be traced.

Chapter One— "I have also clothed my skeletons with the robe of romance": *The Morgesons* and the Emergence of Gothic Naturalism

My first chapter will concentrate on Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) because she both looks back to the Gothic novels and stories of Hawthorne as well as forward to naturalist fiction. She deftly blends the Gothic with the protonaturalistic through the depiction of various characters. Charles Morgeson, a Byronic figure, is portrayed in many ways as would be a classic Gothic character, while Veronica Morgeson is portrayed as a more starkly naturalist character, and the characterization of the heroine, Cassandra Morgeson, presents the cross-pollination of Gothic naturalism.

The Morgesons resorts again and again both for its effect and its plot to the notion of blood, literal and metaphorical, in depicting the Morgesons' conflicted relationship with their Puritan ancestors and Cassandra's disastrous emotional affair with her cousin Charles, perceptively portraying the relationship between blood, familial inheritance, and its dramatic fallout. This negative familial heredity is crucial to the Gothic and to naturalism. The novel depicts both the uncanny nature of the family within the Gothic tradition as well as the way heredity is read as deterministic and forces characters into particular environments which may or may not allow them to thrive.

The novel is in conversation with Hawthorne's interrogation of Puritan ancestry and depicts the continued repercussions of this bloodline and the degenerative state of blue-blooded New England families. Befitting a Gothic naturalist text, there are moments when blood literally spurts forth, as Stoddard shows the fraught relationships between blood relatives. She depicts the determinism of familial inheritance in terms of physical traits, temperaments, and disease. *The Morgesons* demonstrates that even families who try to move beyond their ancestral roots cannot escape the past. The return

of the past is a key definition of the American Gothic, and I will argue that Charles Morgeson represents the patriarchal ancestor and the frightening power that accompanies such a position. Additionally, the struggle to override biological inheritance places *The Morgesons* within the naturalist camp, and, interestingly, the novel depicts some characters that are able to overcome genetics and others who are not able to do so. Discussing the different trajectories of the Morgeson sisters is significant for my argument as Veronica's story resembles a more starkly naturalist narrative, while Cassandra seems more able to gain agency even as her narrative intermingles the Gothic with the naturalist. Beginning my project with *The Morgesons* unseats many, if not all, canonical naturalist stereotypes and will provide a literary ancestor for the other female Gothic naturalists I will discuss.

The locations Stoddard uses to stage the conflicts over family, bloodlines, and Cassandra's travels through different parts of New England are crucial to the novel's presentation of environment, which becomes entwined with notions of heredity because the novel's families are rooted in their locations through both their homes and their familial connections to various New England towns. Stoddard incorporates occasional graveyards and old family homes, typical trappings of Gothic novels; however, she also includes homes that are completely uncanny, bearing no relationship to the comforting and domestic spaces readers might expect to see in the depiction of Cassandra's childhood. These uncanny sites are at once Gothic and also naturalistic in their critique of the American family. The sea also acts as a crucial location in *The Morgesons*, and Cassandra is often associated with it throughout the novel. The sea functions within the

Gothic sense of invoking sublime beauty and terror, yet it also connects the novel to deep time, and passages focusing on Cassandra's connection with the sea highlight her passion, and her descriptions of herself as a creature or animal, nurturing an appetite for food and for life in general, correspond with the evolutionary concerns within naturalism.

Chapter 2—The Temptation of Agency: Louisa May Alcott and the Staging of Gothic Naturalism

Examining Louisa May Alcott's "blood and thunder tales," as well as other significant scenes within her fiction, through a Gothic naturalist lens will similarly provide a different literary ancestry of women writers whose writings anticipate the heyday of naturalism. The thrillers Alcott published under other names are certainly Gothic, but they also focus on the impact of chance on the narrative and show the ways in which heroines manage to grasp at some kind of agency within their drastic situations. Alcott exposes as well the loss of free will in a world with tenuous agency for young, unmarried women (or women who think they are married but often find out they have been tricked by their "husbands"). One of Alcott's most interesting thrillers for my project is *Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's Power*. The protagonist, Jean Muir, is a sly actress and governess who navigates a world wherein she gains agency only through manipulating others. Alcott often deploys themes of masquerade and disguise in her Gothic tales, but her depiction of actresses shows a very different side of the profession portrayed through Carrie in *Sister Carrie* or Kitty in *The Sport of the Gods* (and, to be fair, in Alcott's feminist *Work* in which a girl gains an acting position by chance). In the

theatrical worlds written by male naturalists, theater is directed and controlled by men. Actresses are picked through good luck or because of their beauty rather than for any outstanding talent they possess. Alcott's actresses are quite different, however. Jean Muir becomes an actress who constantly performs for her employers to gain their sympathy in *Behind a Mask*. Yet, she also becomes a director who stages scenes for the observation of certain characters and also elicits emotional performances from other characters, particularly male members of the family for whom she works. Jean takes control of the theater she sets in motion within the story. She is far from the objectified actress who has little control over her role in the theatrical spectacle. Although as a governess she should have no agency, Jean retains agency within the theatrical situation (although much of her larger scheme also depends upon chance, reinforcing the text's naturalism).

In addition to Alcott's more sensational writings, there are also key Gothic naturalist moments in *Work*. Early in the text, Alcott's heroine, Christie, lays out the very limited options for women: to marry, to live with relatives and become a spinster, or to commit suicide. Yet, incredibly, for much of the novel Christie evades all three of these options, searching for meaning in work instead. She thus tests the overarching gender determinism of her society but quickly rejects it. At the same time, the difficulty of obtaining meaningful work reinscribes another type of gender determinism. There are a few other scenes from *Work* which are also significant for my project. Christie falls into poverty and tries to commit suicide at one point, and she also witnesses the inherited madness and then suicide of another young woman during one of the many professions

she undertakes. Similarly, she escapes the lascivious advances of her employer. The stories of the novel's female supporting characters are also important as we see former prostitutes as well as women struggling to support large families and women who have been slaves. There is, then, a curious blending of Gothicism and naturalism.

In a novel such as Crane's *Maggie*, the naturalist focus is in some ways very narrow. We see the struggles of one family and, in particular, one woman, herself an anomaly as she blossoms into beauty before being cast out by all. Although *Sister Carrie* depicts the poverty of homeless men in American cities, impoverished women are largely excluded. *Work* depicts a broad range of Gothic and naturalist struggles among women of different classes, professions, and to some extent different races and ethnicities. Darker moments in *Work* counter the utopic optimism portrayed at the end of the novel and demonstrate the Gothic and naturalist nature of Christie's life as a working woman as well as the common struggles of American women.

A Long Fatal Love Chase is another of Alcott's "blood and thunder tales" with implications for naturalism. In this *Faust*-like tale wherein the heroine, Rosamond, battles against a satanic romantic interest, the reader witnesses the impossible situation of living in a world framework wherein there are no positive choices. In a way, Rosamond is fighting against a devil or some kind of mythical embodiment of evil who is always one, if not two, steps ahead of her. Yet, she refuses to resign herself to her situation. Her will may not be free, but it is strong, maybe even stronger than that of her devilish pursuer. Naturalist issues arise relating to gender, such as the frank depiction of sexuality

and displays of gender trouble, particularly relating to cross-dressing as a form of masquerade.

V.V. furthers Alcott's interest in the body as spectacle as portrayed in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. The protagonist Virginie Varens, another actress, uses stagecraft as an extension of her agency. Gothic scenes are staged several times for the benefit of male viewers. These scenes display the female body or evidence of its presence, such as footprints, in ways that confound the male audience and raise questions about how identity markers such as gender and class are mapped onto the physical body. Demonstrating the fallibility of the male gaze, Alcott's attention to spectacle and visual perception anticipates canonical naturalism's touristic gaze. Similarly, Alcott's story "La Jeune" features another actress and another male viewer who continually misreads the actress as he stalks her offstage. Both V.V. and "La Jeune" portray skilled theatrical artists who use their art outside of the stage; however, both texts culminate with the death of the protagonist. In true Gothic naturalist fashion, even savvy characters who are extremely creative in their use of agency cannot escape the determinism that dominates their narratives.

Finally, "Thrice Tempted" features a plot that is reminiscent of Poe but which foregrounds female agency and expounds upon the complexity of how an individual grapples with her own agency and the choices she must make. The protagonist, Ruth, tries to deny her own agency by allowing chance to dictate the story's outcome. Rather than asserting her agency, she believes her interests will be best served by taking no action. However, "Thrice Tempted" shows that rejecting agency is not a viable way to

live and, in fact, can be more harmful than making choices and taking action. “Thrice Tempted” can be read in a number of different ways and by clarifying the differences between a Gothic, naturalist, and Gothic naturalist reading of this story, I can better demarcate Gothic naturalism as its own genre.

Chapter 3— Sour Apples: Lost Girls, Gothic Naturalism, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s work, though written around roughly the same time as the canonical naturalist works, is not often associated with that genre, being more typically categorized as regionalist or local color. However, her work has much in common with Gothic naturalism, while utilizing this literary hybrid in a very different way than do Stoddard or Alcott. While my other chapters focus largely on young heroines, Freeman’s work features more mature women often caught within deterministic environments. Even though they are often wiser than very young heroines, their wisdom often does not allow them to escape the consequences of being trapped in Gothic naturalist narratives. Many of the texts I examine concentrate on maternal relationships between older women and girls in their care. Freeman’s work also introduces grotesque and abject bodies at times, an important juncture for the Gothic and naturalism. In addition, she portrays the moral degeneracy not just of individuals but of entire towns and communities, paving the way for later naturalist examinations of the moral degeneracy of urban spaces such as the city. Analysis of texts such as “Old Woman Magoun” and a trio of ghost stories will demonstrate Freeman’s use of Gothic naturalism, while helpfully offering a contrast to the work of Stoddard and Alcott.

Discussions of regionalism and local color fiction often focus on storytelling as a way of reinforcing communal bonds and as a way of explaining the community to outsiders. I look at storytelling within Freeman's work but argue that it works quite differently in her Gothic naturalist stories. The Gothic naturalist stories I explore demonstrate the failure of regionalist storytelling to express certain concepts. To tell specific stories of lost girls who die as a result of abuse, Freeman must employ Gothic naturalist techniques to convey the horror appropriate to these stories. I examine three of Freeman's ghost stories: "The Gentle Ghost," "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," and "The Lost Ghost." While all three stories feature similar plots about abused girls, Freeman uses a different genre each time beginning with regionalism, then the Gothic, and, finally, Gothic naturalism. Freeman at times utilizes frame narratives and multiple narrators within these stories but what principally distinguishes her Gothic naturalist writing is the use of horror. While Freeman's ghost stories expose young girls' lack of agency, they also reveal the more disturbing example of adult women who fail to use what agency they possess to protect abused girls.

Freeman particularly investigates the issue of free will and the strength of an individual's will. Freeman's characters demonstrate that even though one's will might be free, clinging to one's own will can be self-destructive and can determine one just as strongly and as disastrously as outside deterministic forces. Adult women's strong will often leads to their downfall in Freeman's stories. Reading "Old Woman Magoun" as a Gothic naturalist text invites readers to be more suspicious about Magoun's agency as a character. Although it seems as though Mrs. Magoun orchestrates Lily's death (and she

certainly does in several key aspects), she also prevents herself from acting as she sits passively and watches Lily die. Magoun lays the trap but leaves the outcome up to an orchestrated act of chance in order to complete it. Does she prevent herself from taking action as a way to assuage her guilt, or does she simply lack agency? Barry, Lily's father, gives her an ultimatum which she cannot simply ignore. Additionally, the Masons extinguish her hope that they might adopt Lily and remove her from Barry's influence, further limiting Mrs. Magoun's options. Perhaps Mrs. Magoun has slightly more agency than Lily but certainly much less than Barry. Lily's death destabilizes the community's social order to some extent. Her death serves as a loophole through which to escape Barry's power, but the fact that she has to die calls into question how much the alternative social order Mrs. Magoun seeks can actually change things. While Mrs. Magoun's lack of agency does not excuse Lily's killing, the story asks the readers to carefully decipher the motivations and intentions which precipitate Lily's passing. Although Mrs. Magoun seems to make choices and take action, she, like Lily, finds herself with an illusory agency that becomes little more than a mirage.

Chapter 4— Unwilling Victims: The Living Dead in *Summer* and *Weeds*

Placing Edith Wharton's *Summer* and Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* in conversation with each other, I examine agency through victimhood and characters' relationship to being victims. Both novels focus on a single female protagonist but also surround her with many different kinds of secondary female characters who react to victimhood in a multitude of ways. While victims are typically thought to lack agency, these Gothic naturalist texts' sustained exploration of victimhood demonstrates a strange

form of agency for victims in their response to victimhood. *Summer* and *Weeds* portray women who vigorously resist victimhood, others who welcome victimhood, and others who become abject through a prolonged victimization. *Summer*, in particular, acts as an interesting example of Gothic naturalism because of Charity's awareness of certain aspects of her setting's determinism and her surprising lack of awareness of the Gothic nature of her life. In terms of naturalism, Charity recognizes the decay of the town's environment, as well as the poverty and hardship on the mountain and the effect of both—heredity and environment—on herself. However, despite working in a library, Charity does not read much and remains unable to recognize the Gothic narratives playing out in her relationships with Royall and Harney. This misreading of her situation allows Charity to feel she knows how to manage Royall and Harney, but she learns that in the end she has no control over either. Unlike the shrewd manipulations of Stoddard's and Alcott's heroines, Charity's attempts to extricate herself from her problems continually fail. Charity's agency changes several times throughout the text so that she exemplifies the complex nature of female agency in Gothic naturalism. Furthermore, Charity frequently misreads her own agency, often misunderstands the limits of her power, and fails to make choices that would increase her agency. *Summer* also displays naturalistic tendencies in its portrayal of Charity's sexuality, but its use of the Gothic demonstrates the disastrous consequences of her attempts to enjoy her sexuality outside of societal structures such as marriage.

In *Summer*, the setting is once again crucial as with many of the other Gothic naturalist texts. The mountains of Charity's birth embody both the Gothic and naturalist,

while the town acts as another kind of naturalistic environment. The mountain is a site of ruins and a dead end as Charity encounters her deceased mother. She sees her mother's corpse and encounters the abject in both the dead body and the undignified way in which her mother is buried. In both *Summer* and *Weeds*, familial histories play a crucial role for the heroines. Unlike the storytelling I explore in Freeman's work, which speaks to communal relations, the stories in *Summer* and *Weeds* are personal histories that ought to be passed from mother to daughter but are unsuccessfully transmitted or even lost altogether. Unable to find an alternative ending to her own story, Charity succumbs to the overdetermined conclusion of having to marry Royall. The reader cannot blame Charity for returning to her naturalistically determined fate in the town, but there, too, she is left with only unsatisfactory options. Royall remains the triumphant patriarch as Charity resigns her agency to him after a series of pathetic marriage proposals. Strangely, and befitting a Gothic naturalist plot, in becoming pregnant and being poised to enter motherhood at the end of the text, Charity herself is becoming abject.

Weeds, in turn, presents a more sustained narrative of motherhood. Like Charity, Judith Pippinger presents as a sexually aware woman whose sexuality often brings painful consequences. Judy's mother dies early on in the text, and, at the time of her death, her parenting style is severely critiqued. Judy does not specifically reflect on her mother's story and, like Charity, that lack of reflection does not serve her well when she later marries and has her own children. If *Summer* leaves Charity with a bleak future stretching out in front of her, *Weeds* plays out for the reader what that future might look like and the mental and emotional toll it takes on the heroine. Charity begins to confront

abjection in *Summer*, but *Weeds* demonstrates in great detail the abjection Judith experiences through motherhood. At one point, Judith even describes her children as vampires, linking her experience to the Gothic world of terror and horror (also linking *Weeds* to the vampire novel *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* discussed in my conclusion). *Weeds*' rural setting also links it to the depiction of the Mountain in *Summer* since these rural settings permit both these novels to display the naturalistic forces of their environments and, in *Weeds*, the particular kind of devastation these forces can cause in a farming community. Finally, like Charity Royall, Judith's agency becomes destructive within the novel, and her strength of will is often detrimental rather than beneficial. Judy and Charity both play out the negative consequences of trying to exercise agency for women in the face of heredity, social structures, and physical trauma.

Conclusion— "I'm not going to be a vampire": *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* and the Pleasure of Bad Choices

Given the recent resurgence of popular Gothic texts, I will conclude my project with Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, a young-adult vampire novel which manages to thoughtfully investigate both the Gothic figure of the vampire and the pathologies of American society which connect it to the naturalist tradition. Despite the ninety-year separation between the last of my twentieth-century works and this twenty-first-century text, there is a great deal of philosophical and thematic congruence between Black's work and that of earlier American women writers. *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, along with moments of Gothic naturalism in certain of Black's other novels,

demonstrates not only that naturalism continues to be a part of contemporary American literature but that women writers are still deploying Gothic naturalist techniques and themes in texts designed for popular audiences. Of course, this text will also bring the concept of blood full circle to my initial discussion of *The Morgesons*. Black invests blood with multiple meanings as it is both a life force for humans and the primary sustenance of the vampires but also serves as evidence of violent encounters within the text. The bite of the vampire is erotic, but Black is careful to also highlight the grotesque violence of the novel's supernatural landscape. Coldtown is not merely a site of decay but a metropolis permeated with death as well as the undead. The entire city is a site of necrosis. Blood often stains the clothing of Tana, Black's protagonist, as a reminder of the violent impact of the vampires' attacks and their feeding on humans. Black's vampires are utterly seductive but devoid of all romanticism. Vampirism unleashes not monstrosity but the underlying predatory nature of humanity within the novel.

Chance and determinism are also constantly at play in this novel. Getting infected with the disease which causes vampirism is often just chance. However, once the body is tainted with this infection, it triggers a deterministic biomedical trajectory, making it nearly impossible for anyone to fend off the disease and avoid turning into a vampire. Like so many naturalist heroines, Tana finds herself in a world where all options are bad options, and yet she cannot admit defeat. Her free will is no longer free and her agency is severely limited, yet she continues to make the least negative choice and fight for survival. I argue that *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* establishes three different frameworks for making choices: making the best choice among only bad options, making

a purely bad choice, and creating options where there seem to be none. The emphasis on different kinds of choices throughout Black's novel hearkens back to the various depictions of female agency seen throughout Gothic naturalist texts. Although Black's heroine Tana is a contemporary teenager, the similarity between her struggles to maintain her agency is similar, perhaps frighteningly so, to those of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Gothic naturalist heroines.

Heroines throughout these Gothic naturalist texts are almost playing a perverted kind of game theory, whereby they are trying to anticipate their opponents and outwit them. However, their opponents are not people so much as social forces: gender, race, class, determinism, pregnancy, insane romantic partners, etc. Life is their opponent. In these texts, we witness their attempts to play the game, sometimes successfully, but more often not.

CHAPTER ONE

“I HAVE ALSO CLOTHED MY SKELETONS WITH THE ROBE OF ROMANCE”: *THE MORGESONS* AND THE EMERGENCE OF GOTHIC NATURALISM

Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) remains notoriously difficult to categorize. Michelle Ann Abate notes that critical conversations about *The Morgesons* describe it “as straddling the modes of realism, regionalism, romanticism, early modernism, sentimental fiction, and even the female gothic” (56). Jessica R. Feldman concurs, bluntly stating that Stoddard's first novel “has always given readers the jitters. Presented with its jagged patterns of juxtaposition and dislocation in everything from punctuation, imagery, and tone to plot and characterization, we make our way through it haltingly” (202). These comments reveal that critics have not agreed upon how to read this text, and Stoddard herself commented on the way she conceptualized her writing within *The Morgesons*, asserting “if with these characters I have deserved the name of ‘realist,’ I have also clothed my skeletons with the robe of romance” (*The Morgesons* iv). Given the novel's obscuring of generic boundaries, I propose to read the text as a product of hybrid literary influences rather than limiting it to a single category. I argue that Stoddard's novel should be considered a work of Gothic naturalism. While I agree with some of the generic categories Abate lists, I contend that viewing the text as naturalistic can uniquely resolve the novel's blurring of genres. In addition, reading *The Morgesons* as a Gothic naturalist text contributes to the critical understanding of naturalism.

The Morgesons was published the year after Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861). In Stoddard's first novel, readers witness the attempts of another

woman writer who, although working in a different manner from that of Davis, nonetheless manages to incorporate the Gothic and naturalistic into her writing well prior to the arrival of the Big Four (Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Jack London) on the literary scene in the 1890s. Critics such as Sara Britton Goodling and William Dow have made the case that Davis's work ought to be included in the naturalist canon. Goodling, in particular, aptly notes how and why naturalism and sentimentalism share various political and aesthetic concerns in Davis's application of them. In addressing critics' possible surprise at her joint discussion of sentimentalism and naturalism in the work of Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Goodling imagines her reader questioning "How can this be? Naturalism this early in the century? Naturalism in texts written by women? Naturalism alongside sentimentalism?" (2). I can equally imagine readers wondering how Elizabeth Stoddard's work, specifically *The Morgesons*, makes a claim on a position in the naturalist canon.

The Morgesons tells the story of Cassandra Morgeson, beginning with her childhood and concluding with her marriage. Throughout her youth, she lives for extended periods with relatives, staying in the homes of her maternal grandfather, Grandfather Warren, and visiting the family of her cousin Charles and his wife, Alice. After participating in an unconsummated affair with her cousin Charles, who subsequently dies in a carriage accident, Cassandra also stays with her friend Ben Somers and his family. At the Somers's house, she meets Desmond Somers, Ben's brother and the man she will eventually marry. Cassy's adulthood features a number of turbulent and life-changing events. For example, Mrs. Morgeson passes away suddenly. Following his

wife's death, Mr. Morgeson remarries Alice, Charles's widow, and moves away with Arthur, his youngest child and Cassandra's brother. Veronica, Cassandra's sister, weds Ben Somers, while, in the novel's final chapters, Cassandra marries Desmond Somers. Furthermore, Veronica gives birth to a disabled child before Ben succumbs to alcoholism. Despite the inclusion of the marriage plot and conventional elements of the *bildungsroman*, *The Morgesons*' portrayal of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood contradicts assumptions about young American women. Significantly, Cassandra remains at odds with the social fabric of her community, just as the novel itself transgresses generic boundaries.

Given all the generic categories which critics have used to define Stoddard's work, it remains difficult to pinpoint her position within the literary canon. Is she a regionalist/ local color writer, an author of sentimental fiction, or a writer whose work presciently anticipates modernism and possibly even postmodernism? Stoddard's awkward position as an American woman writer began with the release of her first novel and continued with a small revival of her work around the turn of the century, coinciding with the republication of her three novels in 1901, a year after Dreiser publishes *Sister Carrie* and a mere two years after the publication of *The Awakening* and *McTeague*. Yet, both times *The Morgesons* was published, it remained out of step with literary trends; the first time it was too far ahead of standard realist and sentimental works, and the second time it had appeared a few years too late to be recognized as a naturalist work because of its dissimilarities from the naturalist classics emerging at the turn of the century.

Stoddard also had the ill fortune to publish *The Morgesons* initially under the pall cast by

the Civil War. The *American Annual Cyclopedia and Register of the Important Events of the Year* for 1862 notes “the continuance of the war materially checked the enterprise of publishers” (“L.”). Of 138 novels published in 1862, only 34 were written by American authors (“L.”). *The Morgesons* is recorded in the *American Annual Cyclopedia and Register*, and, although the novel received some positive reviews, it failed to gain popularity with the reading public. In 1901, Edmund Clarence Stedman, a friend of Stoddard’s, wrote a reappraisal of her novels to coincide with the publication of their revised editions. Stedman argues that Stoddard’s novels are “essentially modern, and in keeping with the choicest types of recent fiction” (vii). Contending that “if ‘The Morgesons,’ ‘Two Men,’ and ‘Temple House,’ had not been written until the tempest of the Civil War was more fully assuaged,—if in other respects the season had been ripe,—they would have been received by the many, as they were by the critical few, for what they verily were—the pioneers of something new and real in the novelist’s art,” Stedman concedes that Stoddard’s work was too far ahead of its time to be properly appreciated (vii). However, he maintains his assertion that her work is aesthetically valuable.

Indeed, Stoddard’s work received more notice around the turn of the century when her novels were republished, perhaps because she had published more short fiction in literary magazines by that time, and because she and her husband, Richard Henry Stoddard (a poet in his own right), had become a part of New York literary circles. For example, *The Comet* wrote glowingly of Stoddard, claiming “it is more than an open question if America has not her greatest genius, in the line of creative fiction, in Elizabeth Stoddard . . . [;] the Charlotte Bronte [sic] of our time, in her high lonely, isolated genius.

To read her novels is to come into the direct atmosphere of an almost unrivaled power of creative art” (“Elizabeth Stoddard’s Fiction”). Similarly, The Rambler column in *The Book Buyer* lamented that “Mrs. Stoddard’s novels deserve the wide popularity that was denied them in the dark days of ’63 to ’67. They are part of American literature, and will probably be read long after much that is zealously devoured to-day has suffered several reincarnations in the paper mills” (Rambler). Perhaps most significant in terms of contemporaneous literary criticism, William Dean Howells wrote of Stoddard that

it seems to me that she has failed of the recognition which her work merits. Her tales and novels have in them a foretaste of realism, which was too strange for the palate of their day, and is now too familiar, perhaps. It is a peculiar fate, and would form the scheme of a pretty study in the history of literature. But in whatever she did she left the stamp of a talent like no other In a time when most of us had to write like Tennyson, or Longfellow, or Browning, she never would write like any one but herself. (77)

Even Howells struggles to characterize Stoddard’s writing, noting her mode was too realistic for her own time and too unlike what would come after her. Howells’s characterization of Stoddard’s work as anticipating realism demonstrates how far ahead of literary tastes her writing was. I argue that Stoddard’s first novel goes beyond even realism to give readers a “foretaste” of naturalism instead (77). While these critics and journalists applauded Stoddard’s talent and even campaigned for wider critical notice and

readership of her work, her novels' lack of popularity affected not only their initial reception by the reading public but still impacts critical assessments of her work today.

Not surprisingly, the way in which critics position Stoddard as an author directly influences the assumptions made about how one ought to read her work. Christopher Hager argues that "the sentimental tradition of American fiction, while an indispensable context in which to read and recover *The Morgesons*, is also only the context we have closest at hand, in our critical portfolio, for contending with a strange and resistant text by a nineteenth-century American woman; there is little besides Stoddard's gender to recommend this approach" (701). Indeed, Hager maintains that the author's gender should not dictate the genre that we as critics use to categorize the work, although that is too often the case. He points out that "*The Morgesons* simply is not what we thought fiction of this period, by women or men, was like," thereby challenging standard critical interpretation strategies (Hager 699).

Lawrence Buell and Sandra Zagarell, in turn, note that "in her lifetime Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard was compared to Balzac, Tolstoi [sic], George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the Brontë sisters, but her works were not widely read" (xi). Buell and Zagarell insist that these comparisons were well deserved, and, furthermore, they contend that "Stoddard was, next to Melville and Hawthorne, the most strikingly original voice in the mid-nineteenth-century American novel" (xi).⁴ Stoddard's work bridges the

⁴ Stoddard herself was not satisfied with her contemporary American women writers. In her October 22nd, 1854, column for the *Daily Alta California*, she argued "our truly excellent female writers have been jostled aside. They are not 'fast' enough; having no inner meanings, they attempt nothing beyond the scope of their clear sense We have no Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Bronte [sic], George Sand or Miss Bremer, to offer to our enemies, the critics" ([22 October 1854] 314). In *The Morgesons*, Stoddard reaches toward some of the British women writers she so admired. However, her depiction of New England culture

sentimental, while simultaneously combining traditional Gothic tropes with naturalist philosophies and aesthetic techniques. *The Morgesons*' use of the Gothic creates links, then, to both naturalism and Gothic naturalism. For instance, sentimentalism and eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Gothic novels share with naturalism a focus on the body, as well as the threat, and/or the depiction, of transgression and violence. Because of its unique transgressiveness, *The Morgesons* serves well as a test case of sorts to investigate what the novel holds if read as Gothic naturalism in addition to being a work of sentimental fiction and regionalism/local color writing. In describing Stoddard's work, Buell and Zagarell observe that it draws its energy from her characters' mysterious obsessions, which they

themselves often do not understand and which Stoddard dramatizes through stylized use of the grotesque in dialogue and description. This gothic intensity, in turn, is partly held in check, partly made still more intense by an emphasis on depiction of manners and daily social interaction that anticipates Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman. (xv-xvi)

Buell and Zagarell's assessment of Stoddard establishes much of what still needs to be illuminated in her work. Stoddard acts as a critical transitional figure within American literature. The use of obsession and the grotesque tie her writing to the Gothic, while

and Puritan ancestry marks the text as American and conveys Stoddard's hope to be a seminal American woman writer herself so that she might become an American Brontë.

struggles of instinct, habit, and environment are markedly naturalistic. Buell and Zagarell hint at the ways in which Stoddard writes back to Gothic New England and authors such as Hawthorne, as well as the ways in which her writing anticipates realism, regionalism/local color, and authors such as Jewett and Freeman.

However, by interpreting *The Morgesons* through a Gothic naturalist framework, I argue that readers can appreciate not only her significant connections to canonical American literature but also the unique and experimental nature of her first novel in particular. Blood, an infamous marker of the Gothic as well as of vampire narratives, functions as a crucial concept in *The Morgesons* because much of the novel concerns what it means to be a Morgeson—that is, to share the Morgeson blood—and how that familial heritage will be transmitted to future generations, as well as how the Morgeson legacy will be re-established and passed down by the younger members of the family. Blood also implies the concept of familial determinism, which, linked with gender determinism and free will, establishes the text's Gothic naturalism.

Despite the difficulty in categorizing *The Morgesons*, critics *have* teased out some of its Gothic overtones, such as its similarities to Hawthorne's work,⁵ its veiled depictions of Salem, Massachusetts, and possible connections with witchcraft and spiritualism. Given Norris's previously discussed argument that naturalism develops from a tradition of romance rather than realism, Stoddard's use of the Gothic ably

⁵ Hawthorne read and seemed to think highly of *The Morgesons*, as he wrote to Stoddard saying, “it seemed to me as genuine and lifelike as anything that pen and ink can do. There are very few books of which I take the trouble to have any opinion at all, or of which I could retain any memory so long after reading them as I do of ‘The Morgesons’” (qtd. in Stoddard, *The Morgesons* vi). James Matlack discusses the relationship between Hawthorne and Stoddard in great detail. He notes not only their shared literary interests and similar regional backgrounds, but also points out that the two were in fact related, although Hawthorne apparently did not know of their shared ancestor (295).

demonstrates the connection between romance and naturalism. In fact, Dawn Henwood contends that Stoddard “refuses to relinquish her aesthetic commitment to uphold the high art of uncovering the reality in romance and the romance in reality,” noting her unique ability to combine the genres of romance and realism (43). Indeed, Stoddard’s first novel presents an early example of naturalist impulses infused into other genres. In fact, Stoddard’s heroine possesses a naturalist world view which helps to explain her entanglement within the Gothic. For Cassandra, this Gothic consciousness often acts as a sensual release from the meaninglessness and dissatisfaction she feels.⁶ In other words, the Gothic rescues Stoddard’s novel from full-on hard naturalism, as we will come to know it, and pushes it towards Gothic naturalism instead. Once again, Stoddard’s novel represents hybrid genres rather than the clarity of exemplifying a single mode of writing. The introduction of the Gothic changes the form of naturalism written by Stoddard just as the inclusion of naturalism impacts how the novel incorporates the Gothic. Even as a child, Cassandra explains “I was moved and governed by my sensations, which continually changed, and passed away—to come again, and deposit vague ideas which ignorantly haunted me” (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 11). Here, readers can identify the Gothic, and also sentimental, impulse to record the character’s “sensations;” yet, as Cassandra’s narration observes, there is no clear way for her to interpret these emotions (11). The “sensations” shift quickly and, while Cassandra recognizes the impact that they

⁶ Comparing *The Morgesons* with *Jane Eyre*, Louise Penner argues that Stoddard “writ[es] in accord with Charlotte Brontë’s own transformation of the traditional gothic romance plot, where fear of boredom, rather than, or as well as, fear of physical harm, poses the major threat to the heroine’s happiness” (134). Stoddard greatly admired both Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s work, and *The Morgesons* is often compared with *Jane Eyre* based on the fact that both novels act as *bildungsromane*, both have a first-person female narrator, and both structure their stories around their protagonists’ travels to various locations during adolescence. Interestingly, however, Stoddard maintained *Wuthering Heights* was the novel that most influenced her (Stoddard, Letter to Edmund Clarence Stedman, 4 May 1860 335).

have on her, she lacks the ability to assign meaning to them. The struggle to interpret these sensations and the way that they haunt Cassandra draws closer to the Gothic, then, than the sentimental. However, I would argue there are vestiges of naturalism as well. Cassandra's description of her sensations is merely a different articulation of McTeague's notion of himself as a beast who is conscious of impulses but lacks the ability to comprehend and control them. The difference between Cassandra's and McTeague's sensations lie not in the emotions they express so much as the gendered scripts and genres used to articulate those sensations. As a female character, Cassandra's statement is filtered through the sentimental and Gothic, while McTeague's is filtered through hard naturalism such that their similarities become obscured. Examined in relation to naturalism, then, *The Morgesons* anticipates the gender determinism often apparent in this later mode. At the same time, the fact that Stoddard's work has not been read as naturalist demonstrates the gender determinism applied to female authors at the level of genre itself.

The Morgesons participates in Gothic naturalism as a way to represent the lives of women not yet depicted in fiction. Stoddard must piece together various ways of thinking about and writing fiction to create a composite depiction of women's antebellum lives outside of the boundaries of sentimental fiction. The novel's opening line, "'That child . . . is possessed,'" pointedly challenges expectations of Stoddard as a woman writer and of Cassandra Morgeson as a character, for readers soon learn she *is* that possessed child (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 1). Susan K. Harris posits that Cassandra "discovers that in this [the novel's] mad world of disintegrating families, fluctuating fortunes, and self-

destructive personalities, only the woman who can cling to her selfhood despite the criticism self-possession draws will survive the pitiless universe where neither history, religion, nor family unity can impose order on the forces of destruction” (21). Harris’s description of the novel’s environment also unknowingly sketches the novel’s naturalism through its identification of chance and the harsh realities of life depicted in *The Morgesons*. The use of both the Gothic and the naturalistic allow Stoddard to transgress the typical boundaries of fiction, particularly fiction by women, to convey her singular vision.

While Cassandra’s markedly Gothic nature is a focal point of the text, the novel’s most overtly Gothic character is Charles Morgeson, Cassandra’s mysterious cousin and seducer.⁷ When Charles first visits Cassandra’s family, they admit they have no knowledge of his branch of the Morgeson family. Veronica, Cassandra’s sister, comments that “there are six Charles Morgesons buried in our graveyard” (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 63). Charles replies that he thought “the name was extinct” (63). Given the Gothic context of the novel, Charles’s ancestral name becomes significant. It is as

⁷ Charles Morgeson also acts as the novel’s most explicit Byronic figure. The first night Cassy stays at Charles’s house, she finds a copy of Byron left in the guest room and devours *Don Juan* and part of *Childe Harold*, only pausing because her candle goes out. Notably, she finishes *Childe Harold* before breakfast the next morning. Critics such as Sandra Zagarell have interpreted the book’s being left in the room as an act of grooming by Charles (“The Repossession of a Heritage” 49). Indeed, Cassandra observes “I read Byron, which was the only book in the house, I believe; for neither Charles nor Alice read anything except the newspapers” (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 104). The choice of this book as the house’s only work of fiction, and its placement in the guest room, is certainly crucial for Charles’s seduction of Cassandra. At the very least, Cassandra’s interest in Gothic heroes perhaps signals her sexual awakening. Reading is another hunger of Cassandra’s, and throughout the novel we see her reading both fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, upon visiting Mrs. Tabor with her father, Cassandra borrows the book the woman is reading and claims that “I devoured its pages, and for the only time in that year of Barmouth life, I forgot my own wants and woes” (38). Similarly, when Mrs. Tabor explains that she has no children, Cassandra comforts her by saying, “but you have novels to read” (38). The pleasure Cassandra takes in reading is akin to the pleasure she gains in enjoying good food (and plenty of it), marking her as quite different from the heroines of many sentimental novels.

though Charles is already a ghost haunting the family; he embodies the Morgeson ancestors' continued impact on Cassandra's family. In due time, Charles becomes the worst version of the patriarchal ancestor reincarnated. While the novel depicts great-grandfather Morgeson's desire to escape the influence of the Puritan ancestors, Charles demonstrates that severing the connection to this heritage will not be so easy. Indeed, Veronica's reference to the family's graveyard is quite telling. Despite great-grandfather Morgeson's admonition to forget the ancestors and the fact that he convinced his son to avoid "consult[ing] the Morgeson tombstones for names" for Cassandra and Veronica, the proximity of the graveyard makes that forgetting extremely difficult as the family perpetually encounter reminders of the past (*The Morgesons* 6). Veronica's quick identification of both the name Charles and the number of graves bearing that name attests to her familiarity with, and perhaps the family's obsessive interest in, the graveyard.

Gothic texts are largely defined as such by an intrusion of the past into the present, and *The Morgesons* is no different. The presence of the graveyard posits a continual interaction with the past and with the family's history. Cassandra carefully delineates the family history early on in her narration of her life. Of her paternal family history, she observes "probably some Puritan of the name of Morgeson had moved from an earlier settlement . . . So our name was in perpetuation, though none of our race ever made a mark in his circle, or attained a place among the great ones of his day" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 4). Cassandra regards the ancestors as unremarkable except for the length of time that they have been in America. Furthermore, she notes that this lineage is

only “probably” the case, and she remains unconcerned about the validity of this family history (*The Morgesons* 4).

Cassandra does, however, particularly note that the family lacks a founder; they know of no Morgeson who sailed on the Mayflower or made his (or her) mark on history. Rather, subsequently

there was a confusion in the minds of the survivors of the various generations about the degree of their relationship to those who were buried, and whose names and ages simply were cut in the stones which headed their graves . . . [;] they contented themselves with giving their children the old Christian names which were carved on the headstones, and which, in time, added a still more profound darkness to the *anti-heraldic* memory of the Morgesons. (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 5, my emphasis)

Tellingly, “*Morgeson—Born—Lived—Died—were all their archives*” (*The Morgesons* 5, original emphases). Given the tradition of selecting baby names from those of the ancestors buried in their graveyard (a deeply Gothic concept as it contemplates a literal rebirth of the ancestors through their namesakes), Locke Morgeson, Sr.’s⁸ admonition not to name his grandchildren after the ancestors connotes a significant break from the long, if not illustrious, Morgeson ancestry.⁹ Both Locke Morgeson, Sr.’s and Jr.’s anxieties

⁸ I am using Junior and Senior to distinguish between the two Locke Morgesons. Curiously, the text does not do this, perhaps because Locke Morgeson, Sr. dies early in the novel’s plot. However, the lack of differentiation creates a sense of slippage between the characters of Cassandra’s father and grandfather, and, therefore, also between the generations of the Morgeson family.

⁹ In choosing names carefully and planning their legacy, Locke, Sr. and Jr. betray their investment in the graveyard and its embodiment of the Morgeson heritage. Yet, although great-grandfather Morgeson seems to be forward-thinking, he actually becomes quite totalitarian. For example, he promotes Locke Morgeson,

about inheritance and ancestry are not about paying respect to the deceased ancestors but about making themselves the founders of a new line of glory and prosperity for the Morgesons. They, as founders, will be remembered not just by birth and death dates on their headstones but, finally (after generations), for a level of individuality and success heretofore missing from their family line. The naming of Cassandra and Veronica acts as a crucial first step in defining this new period in the Morgeson family.

The hopes of the male patriarchs of the family are that someday the names on Cassandra's and Veronica's graves will mark them as different from all the Morgesons that came before. However, given that Cassandra and Veronica both marry before the novel's conclusion, we see that they no longer bear the Morgeson name and that this heritage will be left to their younger brother, Arthur. Strangely, there is no mention of how or why Mr. and Mrs. Morgeson choose the name of their only son. On Cassandra's first meeting her brother, Mrs. Morgeson asks her, "'Do you like his name—Arthur?'" and nothing more is said about his naming (23). Additionally, because Locke Morgeson, Sr. passes away before Arthur's birth, Arthur is the only one of the Morgeson children not named by his great-grandfather. Arthur's name and naming thus acts as another differentiation between the son and heir and his older sisters.

The naming of the Morgesons' children is not the only connection to the familial past that the novel exposes. If one definition of the Gothic is the past returning to haunt

Jr.'s marriage, has the couple live with him after they are married, supplies Locke, Jr. with the capital to start his business, and even tells Locke what to name his children. In many ways, he replaces the ancestral power that he attempts to elide. Later, Locke, Jr. remarries Charles Morgeson's widow. In keeping with his complicated relationship with his father and his other ancestors, he cannot choose even his second wife without the help of familial connection.

one, then Charles Morgeson subtly appropriates the familial tie to do just that as he reminds Cassandra's family of their undesirable Puritan inheritance in the proliferation of 'Charles Morgesons' buried in the graveyard. That is, the Morgesons, specifically Cassandra, have to confront the ramifications of their hereditary line in the figure of their familial contemporary, Charles Morgeson.

The graveyard itself also acts as a marker of time, a concept Cassandra's narration returns to again and again in *The Morgesons*. The novel's epigraph comes from Balzac, noting that "time is a clever devil" (Title Page). A *bildungsroman*, of course, is deeply focused on time as it represents the process of maturation to readers. *The Morgesons* certainly depicts the passage of many years, focusing on the interactions between different generations of the Morgeson family and inter-generational conflicts within other families (such as the Bellevue-Pickersgill Somers, a tribe deeply entrenched in their maternal blue-blooded legacy). Cassandra's narration also refers to time as she often meditates on the present, dismissing the past and the future as both being inaccessible. While living in Rosville with Charles's family, Cassandra observes

I missed nothing that the present unrolled for me, but looked neither to the past nor to the future. In truth there was little that was elevated in me. Could I have perceived it if there had been? Whichever way the circumstances of my life vacillated, I was not yet reached to the quick; whether spiritual or material influences made sinuous the current of being, it still flowed toward an undiscovered ocean. (80)

Here, Cassandra uses the sea as a way to describe her consciousness, her very way of being, and I will return to the novel's invoking of the sea at the end of this chapter. In her description, Cassandra experiences what happens in the present but it does not touch her to "the quick," and she remains awash in the stream of time (80). The sea symbolizes a repository for the experiences of being, of consciousness; however, the present is also actually inaccessible in any useful or meaningful way for Cassandra as it remains an experience of only the surface of life and little more. In counterpoint, although the past and future seem to be inaccessible, the graveyard acts as a material and Gothic example of this coupling of past and future.

Obviously, the graves of the ancestors and the notation of their birth and death dates represent the past. However, the graveyard also represents future time in that the current iteration of the Morgeson family understands that they, too, will end up in the graveyard someday; thus, in a curiously Gothic fashion, the novel renders past, present, and future as one and the same. Stoddard's conflation of times is most prominent in *The Morgesons* with its focus on family conflicts; however, she continues to be preoccupied with it in her later novels as well. For example, in *Temple House* (1867), the protagonist, Argus Gates, remarks "you will be obliged to endure the fact that at last the future will be but the past. The present sifts the future through the mind, grain by grain, fine as dust; crag and bank, coast and continent, crumble and slide into a shoal abyss, which is yet wide enough to dissolve them" (189). Stoddard here links the passing of time with gradual changes in the natural world through her depiction of time as erosion. In *The Morgesons*, Stoddard connects the passage of time to deep time itself, a notion indebted

to geological chronology, spanning eons and vast swathes of time that extend beyond human comprehension. *The Morgesons* joins the concept of deep time to the actual sea, a natural landscape that is not only referenced often but one that is also linked with Cassandra's personality and becomes a source of comfort in her adulthood. While naturalism emphasizes an individual's lack of free will through the forces of determinism, deep time minimizes an individual's ability to act as an agent by showing his or her time on earth to be miniscule when compared with natural landmarks such as the sea. In addition, the use of the sea to represent deep time also illuminates the Gothic sublime. In its linking of deep time with the sublime, the sea similarly emphasizes the powerlessness of an individual because it is both awe-inspiringly beautiful as well as terrifying due to its strength and massive size. Stoddard uses deep time as just one framework through which to understand temporality within *The Morgesons* as she juxtaposes this extremely long view of time with more human measures such as the family's graveyard and their different generations of ancestors.

In the same way that the graveyard marks both the family's historical past and the future resting place of the current generation of Morgesons, the presence of infants and young children in the background of the novel demonstrates that concerns about familial ancestors and heredity are not concerns over a history that is complete and finished but about one that is still unfolding. Even as readers witness Cassandra's maturation through chronological time, Stoddard often includes references to babies among the families she depicts. Unusual in and of itself, the inclusion of these children is made more strange because Cassandra has little maternal feeling or interest in them. Yet, this motif persists

throughout various locations and among different characters Cassandra encounters. While the infants of the families depicted in the novel are not crucial characters, these small children are often mentioned or placed in the background of what happens throughout the plot, such as the birth of Cassandra's brother, Arthur, Alice's time spent with her children, and the parading of the Somers's infant before guests. These babies and small children act as a reminder that the family is not defined merely by its adult members but also by those who will inherit the family property and carry forward the family name. While Arthur is the heir in Cassandra's immediate family, Mrs. Somers's infant plays a notable role in the inheritance allocated for the rest of her children. None of the Somers children will inherit the money from Mrs. Somers's family (the Bellevue Pickersgills) until the youngest of the siblings reaches age twenty-one. The birth of yet another Somers infant, then, means the adult children will have to wait an additional twenty-one years before they receive their inheritance. Again, there is a curious and ongoing reordering of time effected through minor characters.

The Morgesons depicts time in thoughtful ways and attempts to capture characters' experience of time; however, Stoddard's focus extends not only forward to the youngest family members but also backwards to the family's ancestral origins. The novel's critique of the family's Puritan legacy (a marker of the American Gothic) and its focus on inherited tendencies constitute a bridge to naturalism and hereditary determinism. Hawthorne, the most notable New England antecedent for discussing Puritan ancestors, depicts the determinism of Puritan legacies in a more straightforward manner. Too much similarity with Puritan ancestors—often depicted as a corrupt

genealogy— almost always implies that a character is doomed within the narrative. *The House of the Seven Gables*, for instance, deals with similar issues of familial heredity and determinism as well as consternation over discussions of how inheritances will be passed down within families. However, in Stoddard's work, the determinism is much more contorted. The Morgesons attempt to sidestep their Puritan roots only to be confronted by Charles's embodiment of a disastrous patriarch. *The Morgesons* thus demonstrates that merely disavowing one's familial heritage does not erase that legacy or its effects on current and future generations. Analogously, naturalist hereditary determinism also cannot be evaded so easily.

Other families in the novel also experience complicated systems of familial determinism. Most notable is the alcoholism of the Somers men. However, the outcomes of Desmond and Ben Somers also portray a more malleable form of determinism, as Desmond reforms and recovers from his alcoholism, while Ben succumbs to it. Cassandra herself comments on the hereditary determinism of Ben and Desmond's family. After her marriage to Desmond, Cassandra notes that the Somers family does not and will never accept her because, as she remarks, "the ground plan of the *Bellevue Pickersgill* character could not be altered" (269, my emphasis). It is interesting that Cassandra attributes this dislike not to the Somers family but to the matrilineal inheritance, believing that she can attribute personality traits to one side of the family or the other. However, Cassandra also remarks "how strongly he [Desmond] was marked with the family traits," even though Desmond later overcomes the alcoholism with which male members of his family struggle (196). Curiously, Cassandra is also

distantly related to the paternal branch of the Somers family, yet she never includes herself as part of her calculations of familial heredity, focusing more intensely on the maternal side of the family tree. Cassandra's focus on the maternal side, then, conveniently allows her to sidestep an evaluation of her own heredity. Cassandra's concentration on this familial line is very interesting because the maternal side provides a dual inheritance of both dominant family traits and monetary legacies. Here the reader sees a reversal of the Morgeson family, wherein the paternal legacy is dominant. Instead, the maternal side is foregrounded in the Somers family because of its blue-blooded genes and monetary strength. The depiction of the Somers's family traits and their outcomes demonstrates that while blood is paramount, it is only one factor among many that determine the outcomes of these characters.

The use of the Gothic in *The Morgesons* does not pertain solely to ancestral legacies but also to the current group of Morgesons, particularly Cassandra's uncle Charles. With the introduction of Charles, the novel enters full Gothic mode for a time. Cassandra's listlessness momentarily lifts as she and Charles participate in an emotional affair that they never consummate.¹⁰ However, the reader can never indulge in the romantic and sexual tensions between these characters (as he or she might within other Gothic novels) because Alice, Charles's wife, and his children are often present when Charles and Cassandra meet. However, his family's presence does little to deter Charles's flirtations and only adds to the uncanny nature of Charles, his house, and his

¹⁰ All three of Stoddard's novels feature a romantic relationship between a young woman and a much older paternal figure. However, in *Two Men* and *Temple House*, these relationships end in marriage. In *The Morgesons*, the more overt recognition of incest and the presence of Charles's family mark this relationship as far more troubled and dangerous than those in the later novels.

interactions with Cassandra. What differentiates Charles and Cassandra's relationship from quasi-incestuous and predatory relationships foregrounded in other Gothic novels is that Cassandra's reaction to Charles and their affair remains ambiguous. Unlike the innocent heroines of Ann Radcliffe's novels, who would seemingly go to any lengths to protect their virtue, Cassandra quickly becomes aware of Charles's intentions but does little to protest against them. She acknowledges that the affair is wrong, yet cannot extricate herself from it. Cassandra's self-destructive behavior is a trait shared with many later Gothic naturalist heroines.

Cassandra's behavior towards Charles raises the larger question of her agency within the novel. Even as a child, Cassandra is characterized as willful, rather than submissive. For example, during a visit from a local minister, Mrs. Morgeson asks if he believes "that Cassandra can understand the law of transgression" (18). Even though Cassandra is still a child at this point, she experiences "an acute perception that it was in my power to escape moral penalty, by willful ignorance . . . [and] that I could continue the privilege of sinning with impunity" (18). Throughout the novel, Cassandra functions as an agent who manipulates the moral code. However, she does so by feigning a lack of knowledge and agency. Her actions anticipate strategies also employed by some of Louisa May Alcott's heroines, particularly Jean Muir in *Behind a Mask; Or, a Woman's Power*, which I will discuss in the next chapter. To act as a female agent requires sleight of hand and the ability to distract onlookers who might criticize or even curtail the heroine's agency. As exemplified by her interaction with the minister, Cassandra recognizes an opportunity to enact her agency, but she cannot make this apparent to

anyone else because the act of agency becomes contingent on *not* knowing, lacking access to knowledge, or, at least, never demonstrating her hidden knowledge. As is the case with many later Gothic naturalist heroines, Cassandra recognizes a performative quality to female agency. Acting as an agent is not merely about seizing the opportunity to take action or even deciphering what action to take, but is also often contingent upon operating within prescribed codes of feminine behavior, particularly for the young Cassandra who has little autonomy.

In addition to her complex relationship with agency, Cassandra is distanced from the moral code of other traditional Gothic heroines in various ways. While Jane Eyre removes herself from the temptations of Rochester once she discovers his wife, Cassandra does not feel a similar compunction. Although she resists Charles's advances and recognizes the destruction a relationship with him would cause, even after his death she acknowledges to Alice that "I was strangely bound to him. And I must tell you that I hunger now for the kiss he never gave me" (129). At a moment when Cassandra could easily deny her relationship with Charles and keep it a secret, she owns up to it. Rather than deliver an apology, she admits her complicity in the affair. Cassandra confesses that she acted as an agent, even though she understands the condemnation it will bring upon her actions.

Given these complex depictions of the recognition and enactment of agency, how are readers to understand Cassandra's agency? Furthermore, what is the relationship between agency and determinism? Blood metaphorically links Cassandra and Charles through their shared relatives, but it also literally manifests itself in a critical scene. In a

tense moment between Charles and Ben Somers, a wine glass is broken, spilling the liquid on Charles's hand, and Cassandra "saw it staining his wristband, like blood" (114). Charles and Ben snipe at each other, competing for Cassandra's affection, and she notes "a convulsive sob choked me, a strange taste filled my mouth, I put my handkerchief to my lips and wiped away streaks of blood" (114). Christopher Hager notes that "at the scene's peak sits the bloodied handkerchief, a white field inscribed in red, a gothic text" (720). Hager's analysis of this moment registers the way language breaks down as Cassandra attempts to voice the unsayable: her desire for her married cousin and her revulsion over this same desire. Cassandra's emotion goes beyond expression so that all she *can* do is cough up blood, the most visible manifestation of her distress. In many of the interactions between Charles and Cassandra, she lacks agency, reverting to the more submissive behavior of a Gothic heroine. Discussing the strange relationship between Charles and Cassandra, her friend Helen remarks "the same blood rages in both" (115). The circulation of wine and blood throughout this scene reiterates Charles's embodiment of the Gothic, making him almost vampiric.

While the red wine construed as blood certainly has multiple valences, conjuring thoughts of menstruation and penetration, Helen's comment ushers in the idea of bloodlines. Helen refers to blood in the sense of temperament, and Cassandra echoes this sentiment, saying their blood is "mulled wine,—thick and stupid" (115). However, Cassandra and Charles do literally share the same blood because they are both Morgesons. The ancestral tie is far from forgotten in their uncanny affinity for one another. Charles's representation of the ancestral past informs naturalist notions of

heredity and determinism. Just as race, gender, and class become determining factors in much of nineteenth-century fiction, family inheritance also creates a set of expectations and constraints upon an individual's development. Genetic inheritance does not become all-encompassing, but it does exert a great influence in *The Morgesons*, as Cassandra establishes when she expounds upon the Morgesons' Puritan connections and their long history in the area. It is as though the Morgeson blood running through Charles and Cassandra both haunts their relationship and creates a kind of magnetic inevitability, or deterministic quality, to their attraction. It is the similarity of their blood and temperament which draws them together. The Gothic and the naturalistic thus are combined in their ill-fated interactions. While both Charles and Cassandra inhabit Gothic archetypes of the villainous patriarch and heroine, respectively, and those archetypes certainly shape their exchanges, the familial determinism which binds them also creates a limited number of (negative) outcomes for their relationship.

Indeed, even Charles's death does not negate his influence over Cassandra. It is only after Cassandra meets Desmond that she realizes "the face of Nemesis [her name for Charles] was veiled" (198). However, after believing herself safe from Charles's power, Cassandra relates "my eyes roved the garden, seeking the nucleus of an emotion which beset me now—not they, but my senses, formed it—in a garden miles away, where nodded a row of elms, under which *Charles Morgeson* stood" (201, original emphasis). Cassandra seems to wish to forget Charles, and yet she continues to call upon her memories of him and to attempt to access her emotions from that period of time. Charles's impact continues to haunt Cassandra as an adult; he is her psychic inheritance.

In Cassandra's evocative memory, readers observe the Gothic trope of the past erupting into the present.

The uncanny, or *unheimlich*, un-homelike, best characterizes not only Charles and his relationship with Cassandra but the novel as a whole. The uncanny occurs when something formerly familiar becomes strange and frightening. Freud explores the word's etymological roots from the German "unheimlich," translated into English as "'uncanny' and 'eerie,'" but also "'unhomely'" (124). The uncanny is the domestic, familiar, or home-like transformed into something profoundly distressing. In American Gothic, this concept takes on particular significance because the genre depicts family homes or otherwise unremarkable domestic spaces that have become unsettling and disturbing to the inhabitants. Freud also describes the uncanny as a situation in which "the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns" (147). The return of the repressed is, of course, a critical Gothic trope that serves to expose secrets, and the uncanny past returns both to haunt and to harm Gothic characters. In Cassandra's case, her desire for her cousin and his pursuit of her while she lives with his family acts as a subtext for everything else that occurs during her visit. Naturalism deals not as much with the uncanny past as with the process by which a character's entire environment becomes uncanny so that he or she no longer feels at home in his or her world. In *The Morgesons*, it is not so much that what should be familiar becomes strange but, rather, that there are *no* familiar spaces in existence. Gothic naturalism exposes a world replete with the uncanny and bursting with repressed secrets which surface throughout these texts.

Despite the wealth of the Morgeson families' large houses, thriving businesses, and comfortable lifestyle, there are few characters or places which feel homelike and comforting in Stoddard's novel. The uncanny manifests itself particularly in the novel's first half, when Cassandra travels to different relatives' houses to attend different schools. The homes of Cassandra's relatives, as well as her own family's home, all feel strange and unfamiliar. These family homes are cold places where Cassandra feels emotionally estranged from her relatives as well as from the larger social structure of these New England towns.

In addition to the uncanny residences of the novel, many of Cassandra's own relatives exhibit uncanny and unsettling personalities. Given his Gothic nature, it is perhaps understandable that Charles Morgeson becomes the prime embodiment of the uncanny within the novel. Zagarell notes the way Cassandra and Charles share the same set of initials: Charles "is also Cassandra's double, another C.M." ("The Repossession of a Heritage" 49). Within the Gothic context, Charles also acts as a kind of doppelgänger. Freud identifies doppelgängers as a significant source of the uncanny, noting "the double has become an object of terror" (143). Cassandra and Charles share a psychic doubling, despite the difference in gender, in their innate understanding of each other and their ability to exert "influence" over each other (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 89).

The uncanny pervades Stoddard's other novels as well, and, in *Two Men*, Parke Auster observes to his cousin Philippa that "there is something appalling behind the screen of every-day life, countenance, custom, clothes. What is it?" (200). Philippa replies, "'It is us,' . . . scarcely knowing what she said" (200, original emphasis). Parke

and Philippa's exchange encapsulates the use of the uncanny in Stoddard's work overall as well as in *The Morgesons*. It is not the houses themselves which are uncanny in the novel but the people living within the houses and wearing the clothes that are both deeply familiar and deeply disturbing to Cassandra.

Charles Morgeson's house is no exception to the text's presentation of uncanny dwelling spaces. In Charles's house, Stoddard depicts a home that seems ideal in its material aspect, only to reveal its patriarch as having a profoundly spectral and uncanny character. Curiously, although Cassandra's relationship with Charles is startlingly uncanny, his house is superficially more home-like in many ways than Cassandra's own. Alice Morgeson, Charles's wife, is one of the few True Women within the novel. She focuses her energy on creating a comfortable and well-ordered home and also spends a great deal of time with her children. Although "there was little love between him [Charles] and Alice . . . Alice was not unhappy. 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, who had much from her already, for she was devoted and indulgent to them" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 77). Apropos of the novel's critique of gender determinism, Alice's devotion to the domestic sphere does not spare her from the pain inflicted by Charles's affair with Cassandra. That is, Alice conforms to the standards of True Womanhood, but it does her little good.¹¹ The novel suggests, then, that obeying traditional gender roles determined

¹¹ Interestingly, after Charles's death, Alice acts more like a New Woman than a True Woman. In direct contrast to her former domestic devotions, she now intends to both care for her children *and* manage Charles's business interests. She also relates that she shot the wild horse Charles was riding when he died *with her own hand*. She tells Cassandra, "I am changed. When perhaps I should feel that I have done with

by the social context is no guarantee of emotional satisfaction. Even as Alice performs True Womanhood within her home, the fact that Charles and Cassandra engage in an emotional affair under her nose, and seemingly without her knowledge, questions the moral influence the True Woman was said to have over her family and home. Stoddard clearly defamiliarizes True Womanhood itself here into an uncanny concept. Alice's implementation of the values of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity should render hers a comforting, moral, upstanding household, yet Charles Morgeson's house remains the exact opposite.

One unusual exception to Alice's superb housekeeping is the amount of food provided at mealtimes. Cassandra fears she will go hungry because although the food tastes delicious, the portions remain skimpy. In one of her newspaper columns for the *Daily Alta California*, Stoddard bemoaned sentimental heroines who did not appreciate food. She questioned "why will writers, especially female writers, make their heroines so indifferent to good eating, so careless about taking cold, and so impervious to all the creature comforts Is goodness, then, incompatible with the enjoyment of the senses?" ([3 August 1856] 325-26). Clearly, Cassandra's appetite is not an arbitrary detail but a pointed way to set her apart from other sentimental heroines. For the reader, her appetite notes her physical hunger, but it also characterizes her more generally as a creature of the senses, someone who appreciates sensual pleasures unabashedly, not unlike the later naturalist heroine Edna Pontellier of *The Awakening*.

life, I am eager to begin it'" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 131). The absence of the familial patriarch introduces a near instant change in Alice's character such that she recuperates agency.

Charles and Alice's style of eating means less food but also more refined dishes than what is customary for Cassandra. After her first meal at Charles and Alice's house, Cassandra worries "that I should not have enough to eat" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 72). Similarly, after breakfast the next morning, Cassandra fears that she is "'an animal. Did you notice how little the Morgesons ate?'" (73). Charles, who is depicted as a virile man in his prime, seems to have no trouble subsisting on the smaller portions of food with which Cassandra struggles. While Cassandra's hunger demonstrates her animality and lack of feminine daintiness, Charles's disinterest in food underlines his ghostly, vampiric nature. His sustenance comes from his emotional entanglements with Cassandra and his passion for breaking wild horses. While her hunger for food remains unsated, Cassandra's passion for Charles only increases the longer she remains with his family. Charles's Gothic nature denies Cassandra the literal nourishment she craves, while tempting her to indulge her more carnal appetites. In this highlighting of Charles's vampirism, the text subtly notes the predator/prey relationship between Charles and Cassy. This nexus of vampirism, consumption, predator, and prey connects the novel yet again to the Gothic tradition of vampire tales but also to naturalism in the elision of difference between human and animal worlds. Readers only need to examine the Big Four in order to see naturalism's frequent recourse to the animal world or, more frequently, to describing humans as animals to illustrate the connection to animality in *The Morgesons*. While London pointedly expounds on his understanding of natural law in works such as *The Call of the Wild*, Norris repeatedly describes McTeague's nature as that of a beast and Trina's hair, in particular, as being coiled like a serpent in *McTeague*.

Indeed, Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) makes explicit the erasure of the boundary between human and animal in naturalism while injecting a Gothic valence in his portrayal of lycanthropy. In contrast, the employment of the Gothic in *The Morgesons* allows a more intense and surreal breakdown of the boundary between the human and animal worlds. In addition, the overtones of vampirism connect *The Morgesons* to the supernatural world, extending its ties to Gothic naturalism.

In addition to her more ghostly remembrances of Charles, the scars Cassandra bears from the carriage accident which caused his death are a significant and bodily reminder of her cousin's haunting presence. Furthermore, because the scars are located on Cassandra's face, they are noticed easily by other characters, who comment on them several times. Mentions of these scars again introduce the concept of physical blood. Blood is crucial in scar formation because it clots around the initial wound before scabbing over and ultimately leaving a mark on the skin. The blood eventually dissipates, of course, but the scar remains, and for Cassandra this scar acts as a reminder of Charles and their disastrous kinship.

The scars act as a marker of shame but also serve as a reminder of Cassandra's individuality, a word Stoddard uses several times throughout *The Morgesons*.¹² Jennifer Putzi reads Cassandra's scars as akin to the tattoo Cassandra's friend Helen bears of the initials of her betrothed. Notably, both of these indelible marks link the women to chosen romantic partners. In comparing the scars with a tattoo, the scars become not only a symbol of trauma but, curiously, also demonstrate Cassandra's ability to exercise her

¹² In fact, Stoddard uses either 'individual' or 'individuality' nine times within the novel. *The Morgesons*' deployment of 'individuality' typically connotes a unique personality, such as Cassandra's mother or Cassandra herself.

agency. Putzi compares scars and tattoos positively, arguing that by conceiving of her scars as a form of tattoo, Cassandra gains more agency over her body and the way others read it as its own kind of text. Putzi contends that “the scars tell a story, reveal a text, that seems to have no place in ‘civilized’ society” (169). I would disagree with Putzi’s interpretation of the scars as a positive sign of agency. Rather, to link trauma with agency, as the scar undoubtedly does, also makes agency something for which female characters are punished. Because the scar is a result of Cassandra’s choices, its presence suggests she is not capable of choosing wisely, that perhaps her choices are not trustworthy. The presence of the scars argues that utilizing agency as a young woman can only end in disaster.

Interestingly, the initial reason that Desmond notices Cassandra is because of her facial scars. Cassandra’s explanation that she received them “in battle” further piques Desmond’s interest in what these scars reveal about Cassandra (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 183). Critics remain fascinated by Cassandra’s scars in the same way that Desmond is, as though they act as a key to understanding her. Barbara Baumgartner notes not Desmond’s reactions to Cassandra’s scars but the reactions of the women in the Morgeson household. She contends that

their response suggests that, for women, Cassy’s facial disfigurement represents the unmentionable, the forbidden, a threat to female integrity—all they have come to fear and all they have had to repress as adults . . . Cassy’s face serves as a kind of warped looking glass, an uncanny

reflection; her scars may serve to remind these women of forgotten, buried experiences—ones that have violent, even erotic, overtones. (195)

Baumgartner posits that women have the unique ability to interpret the trauma which caused Cassandra's scars but that they choose to ignore their interpretations rather than confront the unpleasantness these reveal. However, Desmond also takes note of the scars and wants to uncover the story behind them. He wishes to have the requisite knowledge to interpret correctly the text that Cassandra's body presents. Although Desmond becomes initially intrigued by the scars, he later taunts Cassandra with the comment "women like you, pure, with no vice of blood, sometimes are tempted, struggle, and suffer" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 194). He then challenges Cassandra to "convince me beyond all doubt that a woman can reason with her impulses, or even fathom them" (195). Initially, Desmond lacks the ability to interpret Cassandra's experience even though he desperately wants to obtain knowledge about her scars. However, he seems to reach conclusions similar to those of the Morgeson women, namely that the cause of Cassandra's scars is virtually unspeakable, a Gothic palimpsest. It is unclear whether the women view Cassandra as an agent or a victim, yet Desmond argues that Cassandra, and women in general, can neither recognize the impulses of their will nor curtail these impulses. At this point in the novel, he questions even the existence of women's agency.

The Morgesons' exposure and critique of gender determinism also sheds light on women's agency. While critics have identified the Gothic elements within *The Morgesons*, they have yet to explore the larger determinism particularly relating to gender within the novel. For example, gender constraints become highlighted when

Cassandra's brother, Arthur, is born. Temperance, a family housekeeper, remarks, "Locke Morgeson [Cass's father] ought to have a son . . . to leave his money to," as though that is the sole function of a male child (23). Notably, Arthur inherits \$10,000 upon the death of his grandfather, John Morgeson, even though John has long been estranged from his family. Arthur's birth marks the continuance of the family line in terms of its property and its name. Arthur guarantees that his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather will in their turn become the ancestors of future generations of Morgesons as time progresses. They, too, could become prominent names in the graveyard as future progeny could potentially be named after them. Temperance continues, saying "girls are thought nothing of in this [re]ligious section; they may go to the poor house, as long as the sons have plenty" (*The Morgesons* 23). Here, Althusser's notion of interpellation becomes helpful, as Temperance in essence decries a gendered hailing of the subject.

Interpellation functions as a way of understanding subjectivity and, in particular, the way people are hailed, or called to take on, certain roles. Althusser observes that

to recognize that we are subjects and that we function in the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday life (the hand-shake, the fact of calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it is, that you 'have' a name of your own, which means that you are recognized as a unique subject, etc.)—this recognition only gives us the 'consciousness' of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition. (1356)

Althusser notes the profound ideological work taking place within mundane social occurrences, such as using someone's name, that create and reinforce the individual's subjectivity. Issues of interpellation and subject formation abound in *The Morgesons*. However, the focus on the naming and hailing of characters foregrounds the ideological dissonance between the roles to which characters are hailed and their lack of enthusiasm for those same roles. For example, other characters often comment on the oddness of Cassandra's name, and Cassandra says more than once that the name does not suit her and that she would prefer to have had her sister Veronica's name. While living with her Grandfather Warren, Cassy attends school and her teacher remarks, "Miss C. Morgeson, we will call you, . . . the name of Cassandra is too peculiar" (34). Cassandra herself also feels that her name is strange, "thinking that Cassandra would have suited Veronica, and that no name suited me," her remark suggesting that she simply cannot be interpellated as a subject (99). Even great-grandfather Morgeson's admonition not to name the girls after their Puritan ancestors uniquely interpellates them and separates them from their familial heritage in a strange way, casting off their genealogical roots. Curiously, however, Locke Morgeson, Jr. is named after his grandfather. The similarity of the grandfather and grandchild's name establishes their connection and shows that although Locke, Jr. longs for individuality, from the moment of his naming he stands firmly in Locke, Sr.'s shadow. While Locke, Sr. wants Cassandra and Veronica to have unique names, his grandson did not have the same opportunity to stand apart, beginning with his own naming. Finally, although Charles retains an old Morgeson family name, this name certainly does *not* exert a positive influence over Cassandra's cousin. These issues of

interpellation demonstrate that the novel's uncanniness resides not only in the characters' homes but equally in the characters' identities.

Temperance's hailing of the subject moves beyond names, however, to the hailing performed by the very gendering of the subject. Although Temperance critiques the social functions boys and girls serve, her speech at Arthur's birth still upholds this gendered dichotomy as she notes the family's need for a male heir (23). Temperance's observations mirror the practice of announcing the baby's gender almost as soon as he or she is born. Temperance elucidates some of the assumptions and value conferred upon announcing a baby's gender. Saying "it's a boy" versus "it's a girl" already begins the process of hailing a certain kind of subject. Temperance is much less subtle, as she spells out exactly what this hailing entails. Boys are called to subjectivity as the inheritors of economic power, while girls are left to their own devices. Mrs. Morgeson further reinforces the novel's gender determinism, saying of her newborn baby "I am glad *it* is not a woman" (24, my emphasis).¹³ Given the emphasis on Arthur's maleness earlier in the same chapter, it is curious that Mrs. Morgeson refers to *him* as an *it*. The neuter pronoun usage marks a departure from the deterministic language surrounding the baby's birth, while this usage also clarifies that whatever 'it' becomes, 'it' had better not be a woman.

¹³ Another example of this gender determinism occurs in Cassandra's description of Aunt Mercy upon her first visit to the baby. The reader witnesses a rare instance of Cassandra's becoming inculcated in this determinism, as the day her Aunt Mercy comes to visit, Cassandra confesses that "she inspired me with a secret pity; for I knew she carried in her bosom the knowledge that she was an old maid" (24). Her pronouncement interpellates Aunt Mercy very specifically, just as Temperance's comments do the same for Arthur. Stoddard also implements playful foreshadowing here, as for much of the novel it appears that Cassy, too, will become an old maid until the novel's final chapter.

Furthermore, Temperance's comments indicate that girls may not even be hailed as subjects at all. Notably, Temperance does not say exactly what girls *are* meant to do, merely that the inheritance economy excludes them. Here, the bloodline of the baby girl remains insignificant while the adult mother's ability to continue and preserve the male bloodline through a male heir remains paramount. While Temperance's hailing at Arthur Morgeson's birth is not easily recognizable as an explicit form of determinism, it creates the framework for how the subject will construe himself or herself. For some characters, this self-construction becomes a self-determinism of which they may not even be cognizant. In that way, the hailing functions much like determinism because it limits the possible outcomes for the subject. Further, the gender determinism clearly *does* delineate the expected trajectory for both boys and girls. The Gothic often depicts gender as a deterministic factor as well, particularly in the figure of the helpless heroine placed in peril. To a large degree, this is the role Cassy fulfills in her relationship with Charles; she is mesmerized by him but also incapable of resisting his advances. In the case of Desmond, his relationship with Cassy leads to marriage, surely one of the markers of female gender determinism, as it is one of only a few possible life outcomes available for women within the novel's setting.

The discussion of gender at Arthur's birth posits that his life trajectory will consist of advancing the family's money and property. However, Cassy is actually the one who retains possession of the house at the novel's conclusion, while Arthur lives with his father and presumably has not yet come of age to inherit. Although Cassy overrides the gender determinism Temperance outlines, it is only through chance, a

crucial force within naturalism because it can counter determinism. Her father, a widower at this point in the novel, remarries and moves to a house with his new wife, Alice Morgeson,¹⁴ while Veronica also weds and moves out, leaving Cassandra in sole possession of the family home. Arthur's monetary inheritance remains intact, while chance favors Cassy and allows her to live independently of her family.

Cassandra's possession of the family home gives her a certain level of independence, but how does it affect her free will and her agency? Limitation or negation is a crucial component of naturalism and one Stoddard employs in *The Morgesons*. Henwood argues, in fact, that Cassandra is a "self-judging, self-determining heroine" (49). Cassy certainly *behaves* as though she has free will, despite the limited choices available for women. However, how much agency does Cassandra truly possess? Harris argues that Stoddard uses the "conventions [of nineteenth-century women's fiction] to challenge the assumption that women are endowed with free will so that they can choose to submit themselves to others. *The Morgesons* thus radically revises the definition of free will in female behavior" (12). Nevertheless, the novel's interest in determinism also critiques the notion of free will, particularly for women. For example, Cassy marries Desmond and seems quite happy at the novel's conclusion. Because Cassy and Desmond choose each other and marry for love, they seem to be exercising their free will. However, if one views their marriage simply as a Gothic convention, it seems to

¹⁴ Alice does not appear in this section of the novel as Cassandra refuses to meet with her. However, it seems that Alice returns to the role of the True Woman following her second marriage. Cassandra notes that her father will "be rich again" following his wedding to Alice (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 264). Additionally, Mr. Morgeson pays "his debts in full, . . . eking [sic] out what he lacked himself with the property of Alice" (265). Mr. Morgeson thus appears to have taken control of Alice's business interests and money after their marriage.

have been predetermined in that the gendered expectations of the Gothic indicate the heroine will be married by the novel's end.

While marriage for Cassandra is a joyous occasion, other women in the novel do not fare as well when following the trajectory laid out for them. For example, when Cassy lives with her maternal grandfather, Grandfather Warren, she briefly describes the life of Caroline, a seamstress, whose life story is steeped in naturalism. Caroline does not have the talent for sewing and instead

she meant to go West, and thought she might make a good home missionary, as she did, for she married a poor young man, who had forsaken the trade of a cooper, to study for the ministry, and was helped off to Ohio She came to see me in Surrey ten years afterward, a gaunt, hollow-eyed woman, of forbidding manners, and an implacable faith in no rewards or punishments this side of the grave. (45-46)

Caroline's story eerily parallels that of Helga Crane in *Quicksand*, who eventually marries a preacher and moves far away from her home with disastrous consequences. The examples of Helga and Caroline underline how naturalist heroines' choices are often revealed to be not only negative but actually self-destructive. Additionally, the similarity between Stoddard's work and that of Nella Larsen demonstrates *The Morgesons*' kinship with yet another naturalist text as well as modernist and twentieth-century aesthetics, once again emphasizing Stoddard's innovative style and subject matter compared with other writers of her own time. Caroline manages to cope with working in Grandfather Warren's household but seems unable to adapt to her life as a missionary's wife in a way

that allows her to thrive. In other words, she has luck at Grandfather Warren's house, but chance does not seem to be on her side in Ohio. Stoddard's Gothic naturalism is not restricted to her heroine but can also be glimpsed in the brief story of this working woman within the novel.

Although Cassandra is the novel's Gothic naturalist heroine, Veronica receives the more naturalistic treatment of the two Morgeson sisters in the text's conclusion. Her husband, Ben Somers, dies because of his alcoholism, and she is left with a disabled baby to care for on her own. Gender determinism casts marriage as the path set out for both Cassandra and Veronica. However, *The Morgesons* demonstrates that the consequences of this determinism vary greatly for women. The novel's conclusion provides a curious intermingling of the Gothic and naturalistic in the resolutions of both Cassandra's and Veronica's stories. Stoddard reverses the trajectories begun earlier in the novel. It would seem appropriate to give Veronica the happy ending featured in classic Gothic novels. Veronica's illness and general oddity throughout the novel make her seem almost supernatural at times, seeming to qualify her as a secondary Gothic heroine within the novel. Indeed, when Veronica questions whether or not her father truly understands her, Mr. Morgeson replies, "If I do not, it is because you have no shadow," linking Veronica to the mythology surrounding vampires and other supernatural creatures (171). Indeed, Abate views Veronica's character as one of the book's strongest ties to witchcraft and its bleak history so associated with the town of Salem. On the other hand, Cassandra's story connects her with many naturalist tendencies, and it seems that she will finish her life alone, acting as custodian to the Morgeson home. However, Stoddard uproots these

trajectories by assigning Veronica the naturalist ending and Cassandra the Gothic one. In many ways this inversion is a very naturalist gesture in itself, as if to suggest that chance operates to allocate these endings rather than any actions taken by the women themselves.

The reversal of narrative trajectories once again illustrates the novel's complicated discourse on hereditary determinism. Feldman notes the questions raised by the novel's conclusion, proposing that "when Veronica's husband dies of alcoholism and her child fails to thrive, we want to know whom to blame. The answer is, no one and everyone: failure was simply their nature; or Veronica should have been less self-absorbed; or Ben's parents twisted his character; or alcoholism runs in families" (227). Feldman notes the culpability of genetic inheritance and plain bad luck, but also clarifies that Stoddard's text provides no simple answers to these questions and that it is up to the reader to sift through these complicated issues. *The Morgesons'* emphasis on heredity, genetic inheritance, and biological determinism mark it, then, as a naturalist text. The novel highlights biological and familial determinism rather than cosmic determinism, or fate, at the same time that it incorporates the Gothic tropes of the uncanny and the continuous return of the repressed.

In the strange way in which the novel reverses the temperaments and narrative trajectories of the Somers and Morgeson siblings in the novel's conclusion, *The Morgesons* suggests that determinism does not have definitive authority over life outcomes. Determinism, in Stoddard's estimation, can sometimes be evaded by personal determination and effort; however, the novel indicates it is almost impossible to predict how and when that will happen. As noted earlier in this chapter, when the Somers family

demonstrates its displeasure at Cassandra and Desmond's marriage, Cassandra observes "The ground plan of the Bellevue Pickersgill character could not be altered" (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 269). Yet, even if the ground plan remains deterministic, surely Desmond himself represents the possibility of alteration in even the most incorrigible of family inheritances. Altering a deterministic trajectory is as much due to chance as any other aspect of naturalism. Ultimately, the novel takes familial heredity and familial determinism very seriously, specifically in the effects on children and young adults raised in environments focused on family legacies, but it leaves open the possibility of evading familial determinism as an adult if chance works in one's favor.

In the case of Cassandra and Veronica, however, the endings they are accorded do not illustrate familial determinism but are instead purely the product of chance. Critics such as Penner and, to a lesser extent, Zagarell, suggest that the novel's ending confers judgment upon the level of individualism and self-development undertaken by Cassandra and Veronica. Examining what these endings reveal about Gothic naturalism shifts the focus to what the endings demonstrate about Stoddard's deployment of determinism. Romance demands one kind of ending, realism another. And, yet, the conclusion of *The Morgesons* manages to embrace Gothic naturalism once more. Veronica's trajectory is one of illness and abnegation, whereas Cassandra's trajectory is one of vitality and consumption. Zagarell observes that "Veronica has arranged her life around a retreat into a sparse, eccentric room of her own which specifically excludes contact with the sea, the novel's symbol of life" ("The Repossession of a Heritage" 51). Cassandra, on the other hand, is continually associated with the sea, denoting her passionate nature and

highlighting her descriptions of herself as an evolving creature or animal, nurturing an appetite for food and for life in general. I posit that it would be more fruitful to view these opposed endings as the product of chance rather than as a kind of authorial punishment or judgment. The use of chance in assigning these characters' endings foregrounds naturalism in the text's conclusion while also commenting on hybridity in the novel's use of genres. Cassandra, the Gothic naturalist heroine, receives a surprisingly happy ending while Veronica, who stays close to home before marrying, receives a much bleaker conclusion. Therefore, the assigning of these very different endings once again raises the question of narrative trajectories and how they fit with established genres. In particular, Cassandra's happy ending questions why Gothic naturalist and other kinds of determinist texts seem to end tragically. Surely determinism can have both positive and negative effects. The conclusion of *The Morgesons* depicts both positive and negative outcomes as they are doled out to unlikely characters.

Reading the novel's ending as the product of chance not only connects the ending to the novel's early naturalistic moments but also highlights a different kind of cultural critique performed through this narrative's conclusion. Rather than judging Veronica's choices, the narrative's ending questions the conclusions of sentimental fiction. In other words, the ending shows that even Veronica (who marries well, stays close to home, and does not enter into the questionable situations Cassandra does) is not guaranteed a *happy* ending any more than Cassandra is guaranteed an *unhappy* one by not following social and moral guidelines; and Cassandra is granted a happy ending despite all her blunders. In the novel's conclusion, Stoddard once again combines the Gothic with the naturalist,

showing that the two modes are compatible in that the conclusions of Veronica's and Cassandra's stories are the same in terms of chance. It is only in experiencing these endings juxtaposed against one another that the reader can understand Stoddard's ability to encompass multiple genres in order to produce something aesthetically unique.

Rather than separating out these divergent narrative trajectories, Stoddard depicts their collision in a short final chapter. News of Desmond's recovery from alcoholism and Cassandra's marriage to him (the fulfillment of the Gothic romance plot) comes just before the depiction of Veronica alone with her child, a very bleak naturalist ending. Curiously, the final words of the book are Desmond's. The narrative abruptly moves backward in time six months to the moment of Ben's death caused by his alcoholism. Lest readers dwell only on the happiness of Cassandra's story, Stoddard leaves the reader with the image of Ben on his deathbed. He is surrounded only by Desmond and Cassandra; his wife and child are notably absent. The novel's final phrase remains appropriately dire for a Gothic naturalist novel: "'God is the Ruler,' . . . 'Otherwise let this mad world crush us now'" (270). Desmond, the speaker of this final line, at first gestures toward sentimentalism before lamenting his and Cassandra's utter lack of agency while witnessing Ben's final moments of suffering. Desmond's final phrase encompasses Gothic naturalism as it leaves the reader with the grim resolution to shoulder on and a resignation to the fact that any of us could be crushed at any moment. Nonetheless, because Cassandra relates this scene retrospectively, the reader also knows that he and Cassandra continue on after Ben's death. They are left not only with the grief caused by Ben's death but also with the difficult situation of aiding Veronica, now

widowed, and her and Ben's child. Desmond's final statement acknowledges the difficult path set out for Veronica and her child, as well as for himself and Cassandra.

Ben's death reflects the teleological drive of the novel as it moves toward a moment of narrative closure for the characters' stories in counterpoint to the novel's use of deep time. Acting in opposition to teleology, deep time is measured through geological standards such as fossils, denoting spans of time it is difficult for the human mind to comprehend. However, as previously noted, the novel references time in multiple ways. The use of deep time and the sea occurs throughout the text but notably increases when Cassandra returns home following Charles's death. Cassandra's childhood family home faces a bay feeding into the Atlantic, and Cassandra notes the view of the water from their house. She describes

how the inlet was pinched by the long claws of the land, which nearly enclosed it. Opposite the village, some ten miles across, a range of islands shut out the main waters of the bay. For miles on the outer side of the curving prongs of land stretched a rugged, desolate coast, indented with coves and creeks, lined with boulders [sic] of granite half sunken in the sea, and edged by beaches overgrown with pale sedge, or covered with beds of seaweed. Nothing alive, except the gulls, abode [sic] on these solitary shores. No lighthouse stood on any point, to shake its long, warning light across the mariners' wake. Now and then a drowned man floated in among the sedge, or a small craft went to pieces on the rocks.

(4)

Despite the general bleakness, and, at time, grotesqueries of this description, images of the sea abound and act as a unique source of solace for Cassandra. Indeed, the sea is a crucial symbol throughout *The Morgesons* because it reflects the natural world of the novel's setting, critically important for those who praise the book's ability to capture New England's antebellum culture. The sea also exists within an entirely different kind of temporality than that of Stoddard's human characters. In *The Morgesons*, it acts as a comfort after death but also as a form of a memento mori in its reminder of mortality. Much like the pull of the tides draws the waves in and out, Cassandra seems drawn to the sea, marking her acknowledgement of herself as an animal and of her visceral connection to the natural world.

Additionally, the sea holds specific meaning in both the Gothic and the naturalistic contexts. As previously discussed, within the Gothic mode the sea acts as the natural sublime, inspiring because of its beauty but also terrifying because of its immense power. As the novel progresses, Cassandra's visits to look at the sea seem to increase, and, especially after the death of her mother, the sea seems to provide maternal comfort that was always lacking in her relationship with Mrs. Morgeson.¹⁵ It becomes a womb-like space at once sensual and sexual to which Cassandra seems able to relate because of its wild nature.

¹⁵ Stoddard's work often employs the sea as a pivotal location for reflection and an experience of the sublime. In her second novel, *Two Men* (1865), Jason, the novel's protagonist, walks the beach following the death of his father-in-law. Watching "the heaving waters creeping towards him in the moonlight, a thought of the Eternity which was eternally creeping towards men came to him" (22). Similarly, in Stoddard's short story "Lemorne vs. Huell" (1863), Margaret experiences a brief moment of freedom from her controlling aunt when she walks to the beach instead of attending church services.

Interestingly, the sea emerges as one of the examples Freud cites in describing the home-like. He quotes Körner, who praises ““the ebb and flow of the waves, dreamy and restful as a lullaby”” (Freud 128). While the domestic spaces within the novel remain uncanny, the natural environment of the sea feels the most home-like to Cassandra. It is as though the animal nature Cassandra refers to in describing herself becomes drawn back to the sea, as though drawn back to a more primordial existence. In relation to her great-grandfather, Cassandra remarks that “when I heard him talked of, it seemed to me that he was born under the influence of the sea, while the rest of the tribe inherited the character of the landscape” (Stoddard, *The Morgesons* 5). Cassandra, too, seems “born under the influence of the sea” (5). Indeed, another sign of Charles’s doubling of Cassandra is his innate perception of her nature, for, as Penner notes, during their first meeting, “He asked me [Cassandra] if I knew whether the sea had any influence on me; I replied that I had not thought of it” (*The Morgesons* 64). Even though Cassandra seems unsure of her relationship to the sea, she almost immediately attests to the accuracy of Charles’s comment. She observes that the sea “was murmuring softly, creeping along the shore, licking the rocks and sand as if recognizing a master. And I saw and felt its steady, restless heaving, insidious and terrible” (64). Cassandra seems irresistibly drawn to the sea, feeling the pull of the tides as she recognizes both its beauty and its power.

Understanding the use of the sea in the text can also help explicate its narrative structure. Zagarell contends that “throughout *The Morgesons* . . . moments of fixity are usually fortuitous and always momentary; each dissolves into a succeeding moment. The succession of vignettes often creates a rapid tempo . . . but not a pattern of either progress

or purpose” (““Strenuous Artistry”” 289). The structure of *The Morgesons* resembles, then, ocean waves washing in and out on the beach. The waves travel back and forth, in and out, constantly moving but ultimately lacking both “progress and purpose” (289). In using the sea as a marker of deep time, Stoddard transitions from a human time stream that emphasizes progress and teleology to a prehistoric, geological time stream in which human progress is no longer the focus. The inclusion of deep time is true of other naturalist texts as well, particularly those with female protagonists. In fact, several of these naturalist texts with female protagonists also include the sea in their negotiations of time. For example, *The Awakening* concludes with Edna’s final journey into the sea, never to return. Similarly, Crane’s Maggie dies by drowning. In these canonical naturalist texts, then, the sea becomes an end point rather than a site of cyclical and repeated motion, at times curiously marking devolution, at others evolution, but concurrently dissolution. Although it does not feature a female protagonist, Crane’s “The Open Boat” also includes the sea as a brutal naturalist environment. As in the examples with female protagonists, the sea is extremely unpredictable in its impact upon Crane’s male characters and highlights a level of randomness in its determinism. Much as the sea can be depicted with great divergence under the mode of naturalism, Gothic naturalist texts often feature endings that highlight ambiguity. Wharton’s *Summer* may be one of the most significant examples of this ambiguity as critics often disagree about how to characterize the novel’s conclusion. In contrast, Louisa May Alcott’s texts are the most notable exceptions to these uncertain endings because her tales are so complex and tightly plotted as to require precise and well-defined endings. However, Wharton’s

Summer, Kelley's *Weeds*, and Larsen's *Quicksand* all conclude not with definitive endpoints but merely with narrative pauses and the recognition that the actions and repetitions of the heroines are far from over. In fact, these endings are more horrific precisely because there is no respite for these women. The heroines of these texts, notably all focused on birthing and caring for children by the end of their narratives, are also trapped in repetitive motion that is both unending and, for them, purposeless because they are lost in disillusionment. In ending with the recognition of human mortality, *The Morgesons* demonstrates that although humans might temporarily access deep time in our encounters with the natural world, we cannot truly escape human time.

Of course, the Cassandra of Greek mythology had access to future time but was unable to use that knowledge to positively influence her own time. In an odd twist on the novel's determinism, Cassandra's name recalls a prophetess who knows the future but whose predictions will not be believed. Jennifer Putzi observes that "like the mythic Cassandra, Cassandra Morgeson can express herself, but cannot control how others interpret her. She has knowledge and can change herself, but cannot necessarily impart that knowledge to others. Stoddard's terse style reflects her awareness of this ambiguity, as does the uncertain ending of the novel" (172). Cassandra Morgeson witnesses the determinism of life but often remains powerless to affect change. Like the mythic Cassandra, Stoddard was able to predict her own future, as she famously wrote to Edmund Clarence Stedman about *The Morgesons*, lamenting "indications are that it will be misunderstood" (Letter to Edmund Clarence Stedman, 22 June 1862 337). She, too, could not alter the future she foresaw, as the book was not a popular success. In an

analogous prophetic manner, Stoddard's first novel forecasts the direction of where American fiction would go in the latter half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries. Her writing (along with that of other Gothic naturalists such as Rebecca Harding Davis) demonstrates women writers' early interest in naturalism, yet the fact that *The Morgesons* has not been identified as naturalist illustrates the deeply gendered perceptions of this genre. It is ironic that even as naturalism expounds determinism, its characterization as a literary genre was so quickly and so narrowly determined as a genre for white, male authors. Admitting Stoddard's novel as an important precursor to the naturalist canon sets the movement's origins much earlier in the literary timeline, demonstrates its capability to incorporate other genres, and challenges stereotypes of naturalism as a male genre. Conceptualizing *The Morgesons* as a work of Gothic naturalism questions how much we, too, have misunderstood about Stoddard's work and about the development of American literary naturalism.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TEMPTATION OF AGENCY: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT AND THE STAGING OF GOTHIC NATURALISM

Louisa May Alcott's name likely does not come to mind when you consider Gothic naturalism, or even naturalism. Alcott is much better-known as the author of children's literature, the most famous being *Little Women* (1868), and a few noted short stories such as "My Contraband" (1863) and "Transcendental Wild Oats" (1873). However, by beginning with a few examples from *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873), I will illustrate the naturalist tendencies of some of her writings before discussing Alcott's lesser-known Gothic thrillers. *Work* tells the story of Christie Devon as she makes her way from her Aunt Betsey and Uncle Enoch's rural home to the city, where she works at a number of different professions and marries on the eve of the American Civil War. Following her husband's death and the birth of her daughter, Christie ends the novel poised to become a community activist on behalf of a diverse group of women. *Work* opens with the delineation of three very narrow possibilities for the outcome of women's lives. Christie believes

one of three things would surely happen, if she lived on there [with her aunt Betsey and Uncle Enos] with no vent for her full heart and busy mind. She would either marry Joe Butterfield in sheer desperation, and become a farmer's household drudge; settle down into a sour spinster, content to make butter, gossip, and lay up money all her days; or do what poor Matty Stone had done, try to crush and curb her needs and aspirations

till the struggle grew too hard, and then in a fit of despair end her life, and leave a tragic story to haunt their quiet river. (13)

In some ways, Alcott depicts a microcosm of nineteenth-century American women's fiction in the three options outlined above. Due to the determinist nature of these three life paths, they resonate deeply with other naturalist and Gothic naturalist texts. Option one, marrying and becoming a "drudge" echoes many of the sentiments expressed, much more humorously, by Marietta Holley's Samantha Allen, and this hard labor is also borne out by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "Old Woman Magoun" (1905), which I will discuss in the third chapter (Alcott, *Work* 13). Similarly, the figure of the spinster who, out of necessity, becomes anxious about money is perhaps brought to its height in Edith Wharton's novella *Bunner Sisters* (written 1892; published 1916), an underappreciated naturalist text by a woman author. Finally, the figure of the suicide reverberates profoundly throughout naturalist texts, particularly the suicides of women such as Chopin's Edna Pontellier, Wharton's Lily Bart, and Crane's Maggie.¹⁶ Of course, Alcott writes *Work* before the writing and publication of some of Chopin's, Wharton's, and Crane's works, but by doing so she clearly illuminates an ongoing concern about the possibilities available for women's lives that will be carried forward and expounded on by women writers and by certain naturalist authors.

Specifically in the passage quoted above from *Work*, Alcott depicts gender determinism, a central component of Gothic naturalism, at its most obvious and explicit.

¹⁶ Not all critics read the deaths of these women as suicides. Interestingly, though, both Edna and Maggie die in water, echoing Alcott's depiction of Matty Stone in the river. Even if these deaths are not interpreted as suicides, it is clear that death is an all-too-common option for female characters.

While critics have pointed to the sentimentalism of Alcott's novel,¹⁷ certainly in its opening chapter, where Christie evaluates her position as a young woman, the text takes on a naturalist valence. Christie is exceptionally aware of the ways in which gender acts as a determining factor within her life. Being a woman in Christie's culture *seems* to mean choosing from among these limited options. Yet, surprisingly, for much of the novel Christie evades all three of these choices as she lives on her own and pursues many different kinds of work. Although she recognizes deterministic factors, Christie does not perceive those elements as in any way devaluing her own agency or her ability to break away from that system. In part, though, Christie *does* recognize that the ability to exercise agency is dependent upon one's environment. Her aunt and uncle live in a rural place where paid forms of employment for women are not readily available for Christie, while "work was always to be found in the city" as Mrs. Flint, proprietor of a boarding house, assures Christie (15). Christie hopes that the change of environment will override some of the gender determinism she experiences.¹⁸

Christie's experience of setting out for the city is not terribly different from that of Carrie Meeber, an exemplary naturalist heroine, in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). Both women journey from small towns to larger cities hoping for work and better prospects

¹⁷ Faye Halpern examines Christie's position as a speaker who deploys sentimental rhetoric in *Sentimental Readers: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of a Disparaged Rhetoric*.

¹⁸ For Christie, another important aspect of the move to the city is that she will escape the authority that Uncle Enos, in particular, exercises over her choices. When Christie first issues her "new Declaration of Independence" (Alcott, *Work* 5), she notes as part of her reasoning that "Uncle doesn't love or understand me; I *am* a burden to him, and I must go where I can take care of myself (6, original emphasis). Although Enos initially supports Christie's decision to leave, perhaps merely because it will mean he no longer has to feed, clothe, and house her, when he learns of Christie's ideological justification for leaving, he scoffs that her "redic'lus notions about independence and self-cultur won't come to nothin' in the long run, and you'll make as bad a failure of your life as your mother did of her'n" (10). Enos demonstrates that his contemptuous disapproval of Christie remains bound up with her heredity, particularly her mother's lack of convention and her father's poverty.

despite their different locations— Christie lives in the northeast while Carrie is in the Midwest— and discrepancy in time frame; Christie’s story is set in the years leading up to and including the Civil War while Carrie’s story begins in 1889. While Christie embarks on her journey just after her twenty-first birthday, Carrie is just eighteen. Much like Christie, when Carrie departs from her hometown, the narrator observes that “whatever touch of regret at parting characterised her thoughts, it was certainly not for advantages now being given up” (Dreiser 1). *Work* demonstrates through Christie the lack of options for a woman in a small town, while *Sister Carrie* demonstrates (and both Carrie and Christie soon learn) that the city also operates under its own system of boundaries and rules, particularly for women. Dreiser’s narrator conjectures that “when a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility” (1). What is striking about *Sister Carrie*’s passage reflecting on the lives of young women in comparison with that in *Work* is that both allow no space for a middle ground or some unforeseen option outside of those outlined by the texts. While Carrie does quickly find herself in morally suspect company, Christie is influenced by both “saving hands” and also those who follow a more “cosmopolitan standard of virtue” (1). Christie’s trajectory is unique in that it is not solely a downward or an upward path but one that encompasses both. Patricia Bizzell notes that “Alcott’s Christie Devon is also a working girl—always in the chaste, and almost in the unchaste—sense of that term,” and throughout the text, she “encounters a series of challenges to her chastity that she meets

successfully” (390). Carrie, on the other hand, does not negotiate similar challenges in the same way, though, ironically, she still proves successful. Carrie initially stays with her sister and brother-in-law, who should fit into the category of “saving hands,” but she nevertheless does become “worse” according to contemporaneous standards of morality (Dreiser 1). Both of these texts position the reader, then, to interpret the characters and the narrative through a very strict and narrow code of possibilities circumscribed by gender, before rather quickly abandoning that initial code and depicting much more complex narratives about how women live their lives.

While *Sister Carrie* follows Carrie, the men who enter her life, and the professions these characters undertake, Alcott undertakes a more panoramic view of Christie’s story. Despite Christie’s evasion of marriage, spinsterhood, and suicide, Alcott includes various portrayals of the three options she initially outlines for women, both through Christie’s own experiences as well as those of other women she meets throughout the novel. For example, Christie befriends women who marry and subsequently have large families for whom to care. However, for much of the text, the reader is left wondering whether Christie herself will end up as a spinster, not unlike the tension the reader experiences in the life story of Cassandra Morgeson.¹⁹

In addition to the gender determinism of Christie’s options, there are also several Gothic naturalist examples of the lives of women, particularly regarding suicide.

¹⁹ In Alcott’s short essay “Happy Women” (1868), she discusses the lives of four spinsters who lead productive and happy lives, refuting stereotypes of pitiful spinsters. Even in her Gothic thrillers, Alcott mentions several times that the fate of single women need not be pathetic or even unhappy. Kate Snow, the protagonist of “A Nurse’s Story” (1866), remarks that as an elderly woman she is “still single, but neither poor nor solitary, for the Carruths [a family who employed her] gave me both home and friends” (355). Additionally, Helen, an unrequited love interest and antagonist in “Ariel. A Legend of the Lighthouse” (1865), is said to have “grown serenely cheerful, though still solitary” in the story’s epilogue (293). In her writings, Alcott often provides alternative portrayals of what it means to remain unmarried.

Notably, Christie at one point considers jumping into a river herself, until a female friend rescues her, and she later witnesses the suicide of Helen Carrol, her charge when she works as a companion. Even in entering the workforce, the narrow options for a woman's life continue to haunt Christie. The suicide Christie witnesses is particularly Gothic as Helen decides to kill herself rather than live with the mental illness from which she suffers. Helen's suicide further foregrounds the Gothic naturalism in *Work* as Christie learns that Helen's mental illness is hereditary; the text explains that Helen's parents understood the hereditary nature of this illness, inherited through the paternal line, but still chose to marry and have children. Even more significant, Alcott notes that not all the Carrol children suffer equally from the inherited illness.

By including a discussion of the illness, its transmission, and the possible ways in which its onset might be forestalled or even prevented, Alcott introduces a form of biological determinism through heredity. At the same time, the novel clarifies that such determinism need not be a hard one and avows that individuals have agency in how they respond to this disease. The discussion of mental illness, coupled with the decay of Helen's familial bloodline, creates a stark Gothic naturalist interlude within Christie's narrative. Alcott was clearly fascinated by this trajectory as she employed a very similar plotline earlier in "A Nurse's Story" and released it under a pseudonym in 1866, long before *Work* was published.²⁰

²⁰ Many plot points within "A Nurse's Story" resemble or are even replicated in Alcott's retelling in *Work*. The family's mental illness and its hereditary nature are present in "A Nurse's Story" as is the suicide, by stabbing, of the nurse's charge, Elinor. Particularly in the story's early chapters there are Gothic moments, even explicit ones, as Elinor comments that "the sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children, and they must pay the penalty," invoking the return of the repressed as an explanation for her illness (299). The story's latter half, however, is much more focused on a romance between the nurse and a mysterious man who blackmails the family. In its final moments, "A Nurse's Story" veers into sentimentalism and is much

Much like other Gothic naturalist texts, Christie's story in some ways acts as a response to the Cult of True Womanhood and also as an exploration of alternative trajectories for women's lives. Alcott continues and expands upon this refutation in her Gothic thrillers in particular. Alcott's Gothic tales showcase again and again women who sidestep clear social boundaries determined by their gender or who somehow fall into liminal social positions, which they must then negotiate. Especially in her depiction of actresses, specifically those within her Gothic thrillers, Alcott shows them to be not only performers but playwrights and directors. It is through creating alternative narratives and staging them that these women create new identities for themselves and evade the stereotypical options available to them. Alcott's female characters also often recognize the fallibility of the human and, particularly, the male gaze; they often stage their own bodies and those of others as indecipherable texts to outwit male opponents and counteract restrictive gender codes.

Performativity, then, becomes a way of life in these stories, which is not to say that it is always successful. Some of Alcott's Gothic thrillers end with the protagonist's victory, while others conclude with her death. Nonetheless, Alcott depicts unique situations in which women, through performativity, can harness artistry and agency in the face of gender determinism. At the same time, these texts remain deeply naturalist because of the heroines' dependence on chance. Alcott's thrillers thus continually utilize Gothic tropes and set pieces while presenting naturalist conundrums of gender

different from the stark and violent conclusion to the episode as it is presented in *Work*, such that *Work*'s version of the story is actually more Gothic naturalist than the melodramatic "A Nurse's Story."

determinism and agency. The Gothic thrillers insist that female characters do have agency, even in deeply determined, or even overdetermined, situations.

The Alcott so skilled in depicting the complexities of adult women's lives is the same Alcott famous for her children's literature, particularly *Little Women* and its sequels. Yet, in many ways, the author of *Behind a Mask, or A Woman's Power* (1866) and *V.V.; or, Plots and Counterplots* (1865) is a very different Alcott indeed. On June 22nd, 1862, Alcott wrote to Alfred Whitman, a family friend (and an inspiration for the character of Laurie in *Little Women*). Alcott confesses that

I intend to illuminate the Ledger with a blood & thunder tale as they are easy to 'compoze' and are better paid than moral and elaborate works of Shakespeare, so dont [sic] be shocked if I send you a paper containing a picture of Indian, pirates wolves, bears & distressed damsels in a grand tableau over a title like this 'The Maniac Bride' or 'The Bath of Blood. A thrilling tale of passion,' &c. (79)

Alcott acknowledges the monetary intention behind her writing but also seems to relish the exciting, if somewhat tawdry, melodrama of these page turners as she flirts with various Gothic elements and titles.²¹

²¹ *Little Women's* Jo March also publishes sensation fiction in one of the novel's many autobiographical scenes. Seeing a young man reading a newspaper, "Jo examined the work of art nearest her, idly wondering what unfortuitous concatenation of circumstances needed the melodramatic illustration of an *Indian in full war costume, tumbling over a precipice with a wolf at his throat*, while two infuriated young gentlemen, with unnaturally small feet and big eyes, were stabbing each other close by, and a dishevelled [sic] female was flying away in the background with her mouth wide open" (273-74, emphasis added). The young man pronounces the story a "first-rate" one, although Jo does not give it much credence until she learns that the author is a "Mrs. S.L.A.N.G. Northbury" and is well paid for her writing (274). The description of the newspaper illustration echoes Alcott's envisioning of a blood and thunder tale as she describes it in her letter to Whitman above. The presentation of sensation stories in *Little Women* aligns with Alcott's opinion, quoted above, which minimizes their aesthetic quality while emphasizing their

Alcott did proceed to write many a “blood and thunder tale,” although she was unwilling to acknowledge her authorship of them to the greater reading public (79). In 1862, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, which Madeleine Stern describes as “a New York weekly devoted to alluring pictures, gossip, and murder trials,” created a contest soliciting stories to be published in its pages and offering \$100 for the winner (“Introduction,” *Behind a Mask* xiv). Alcott wrote her first Gothic thriller, “Pauline’s Passion and Punishment” (1862), for this contest and won the enticing monetary prize, sorely needed by the Alcott family (xvi).²² She published her first thriller anonymously but soon adopted the pseudonym A.M. Barnard for her later Gothic tales.²³ Alcott published over thirty Gothic thrillers in periodicals such as *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* and in the weekly newspaper *The Flag of Our Union*. In a few rare cases, Alcott did allow her name to be attached to certain of her thrillers. For example, “A Whisper in the Dark” (1863), when it was reprinted in 1889 along with *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877), was printed with Alcott’s name, and one of her late Gothic

popularity and showcasing the potential enjoyment both the public and the author share in them. Notably, a few moments later, Jo is “already deep in the concoction of her [sensation] story, being unable to decide whether the duel should come before the elopement or after the murder,” a tricky question indeed (275).

²² When Jo first sees the sensation story in *Little Women*, she copies down the newspaper’s address, while “boldly resolving to try for the hundred-dollar prize offered in its columns for a sensational story” (274). Once Jo’s first sensation story is published, she churns out several of these stories, “for by the magic of a pen, her ‘rubbish’ turned into comforts for them all. ‘The Duke’s Daughter’ paid the butcher’s bill, ‘A Phantom Hand’ put down a new carpet, and the ‘Curse of the Coventrys’ proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns” (276). In Jo’s final work, the “Curse of the Coventrys,” Alcott leaves a cryptic clue to her own sensation fiction as Coventry is the name of Jean Muir’s employers in *Behind a Mask*.

²³ Stern points out that “Pauline’s Passion and Punishment” was not the first time Alcott had used a pseudonym. In fact, her first published work, a poem entitled “Sunlight” (1851), was printed under the name Flora Fairfield (Stern “Introduction,” *Behind a Mask* xiii). It is interesting that Alcott herself adopted various authorial names given that many of her characters assume new names in the Gothic thrillers, albeit for much more nefarious purposes. Stern speculates that A.M. was also Alcott’s mother’s initials, standing for Abigail May, while “‘Barnard’ might have been suggested by the distinguished Connecticut educator Henry Barnard, who was a family friend” (xix).

thrillers, “Perilous Play” (1869), was credited with the initials L.M.A. (“Introduction,” *Plots and Counterplots* 19-23).

Following the publication and enormous success of *Little Women*, however, Alcott concentrated more on writing children’s literature because of its lucrative potential and the name recognition *Little Women* afforded her, tapering off her work in Gothic thrillers. It was much later, during the 1940s, when Madeleine Stern was researching a biography of Alcott that she uncovered Alcott’s pseudonym in talking with “the Alcott collector” Carroll Atwood Wilson and began to trace Alcott’s anonymous and pseudonymous publications (“Introduction,” *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked* xiv). And it was much later still, starting in the 1970s, that Stern began republishing Alcott’s Gothic thrillers for new readers.

Criticism of Alcott and her thrillers often explores her performativity as an author, particularly playing on the trope of the mask cited in Alcott’s title *Behind a Mask*. The criticism of this thriller itself spends a fair amount of energy debating which of Jean Muir’s many masks or performances are ‘true.’ Critics argue that Alcott similarly wore a mask as an author who wrote scandalous thrillers for adults while also penning moral tales for the young. Critics such as Stern, and Sara Hackenberg to a lesser extent, suggest that the Gothic thrillers may indeed be the more authentic of the many divergent styles Alcott employed. Judith Fetterley points out that Alcott’s use of widely varying writing styles at the very least highlights “ambivalence” in terms of her authorial persona (1). However, Keren Fite contends that “Alcott is neither the oblivious amateur nor the mercenary hypocrite. It would be unwise to attempt to replace one all-inclusive allegory

with another. Alcott's literary corpus is a quilt-like narrative that is pieced from a wide range of contradictory cultural and psychosexual scripts" (176). Indeed, Alcott's prolific and wide-ranging body of work raises innumerable questions about the texts themselves and about the position of American women writers in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Much like Alcott's actresses and *femmes fatales*, the Gothic thrillers are rarely what they seem to be at first reading.

Actresses,²⁴ whether professionals or amateurs, are one subset of Alcott's characters who particularly convey gender trouble and instigate challenges to gender roles and conventions and are therefore of great interest in exploring Alcott's Gothic naturalism. Actresses of all kinds also populate Alcott's works across many different genres for different audiences. Actresses feature in numerous of her Gothic thrillers, for example, while Christie becomes an actress for a time in *Work*, and Jo and the other March sisters often perform amateur theatricals in *Little Women*. It is curious that several canonical naturalist texts also reference theater. Crane's Maggie and Pete and Norris's Trina and McTeague all visit the theater, while Dreiser's Carrie Meeber and Paul Laurence Dunbar's Kitty Hamilton in *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) actually work as performers. Furthermore, *The House of Mirth's* *tableau vivant* marks not just the importance of theater but also performativity in naturalism. While the music halls and vaudeville performances the characters frequent act in counterpoint to the hyperrealism of naturalist texts, they also often highlight representations and spectacles of gender.

²⁴ Although when discussing female performers today it is more appropriate to refer to them as actors, I have chosen to use the term actress for Alcott's characters because it is consistent with Alcott's terminology in the texts themselves and also demarcates the unique subject position of actresses as opposed to male performers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

The figure of the actress presents a number of different, and often liminal, subject positions. Actresses in the mid-to-late nineteenth century were not considered prostitutes but were, nevertheless, not considered sexually pure either, and the spectacle of presenting their bodies onstage challenged conventional feminine virtues such as modesty and chastity. Further, the profession chosen by women actresses called into serious question their moral and sexual virtue in a different way than was the case for other women workers because actresses' appearance on stage often utilized them as sexual spectacles. For example, when Carrie Meeber attempts to get a job as a chorus girl in New York, her physical beauty helps her quickly ascend the ranks in *Sister Carrie*. Carrie can pick up the dance steps quickly enough, but it is after she is among "a group of twelve [who] were assigned pretty golden-hued skirts which came only to a line an inch above the knee" that Carrie is noticed for promotion by the manager and ballet-master (Dreiser 270). Presumably in selecting twelve women to be given costumes with short skirts, the manager was strategic in awarding these costumes to his most attractive dancers, perhaps regardless of their talent. The manager points several times to Carrie's beauty as the reason to highlight her as a performer, saying "'she's good looking. Why don't you let her head that line?' . . . 'She'll look better there than the woman you've got'" (276). The manager reflects that Carrie "knows how to carry herself" and promotes her to head yet another column of dancers, resulting in Carrie's receiving an additional beautiful costume and being "especially gratified to find that her salary was now eighteen instead of twelve" (276). Carrie's sexual attractiveness translates into better positions within the company and, crucially, better pay.

In Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*, Kitty Hamilton works in black theater in New York. Several times the salacious costumes of the female performers are highlighted. Although the theatrical scene purports to be a picnic, the narration indicates the women were "dressed in costumes that were not primarily intended for picnic going," and "Kitty was enchanted. The *airily dressed* women seemed to her like creatures from fairy-land" (Dunbar 57, emphasis added). Indeed, Mrs. Hamilton objects multiple times to Kitty's performing onstage because of the costumes she will wear. Mrs. Hamilton insists to Kitty that "'I'd ruther see you daid any day'" and observes "'de way dem gals shows demse'ves is right down bad to me'" (93). *The Sport of the Gods* thus demonstrates the allure of the theater for women, while also echoing social attitudes concerning female bodies onstage, and augmenting the objectification of female performers hinted at in *Sister Carrie*. Female actresses are, assuredly, an unusual example of working women in the nineteenth century, but they are also an example of working women artists, although they are not always portrayed as such. The theater manager Carrie works for does not consider her as an artist at all, and Mrs. Hamilton views Kitty not as an aspiring performer but as a *déclassé* show girl, knowing she will be exploited because of her good looks. Naturalism, then, explores the objectified female body, whether it is focused on Crane's Maggie, a spectacle on the street, or Carrie and Kitty, paid to be theatrical spectacles onstage.

Interestingly, Alcott does focus at times on the artistry and stagecraft of female actresses, managing to move beyond these women's function as onstage spectacles and presenting them as more complicated figures. Alcott portrays her actresses as having

limited autonomy, but, more importantly, she explores the ways in which these actresses make use of their artistry and the craft they have learned from being onstage to enhance and increase their agency, often covertly. Ironically, Alcott often depicts this stagecraft at work in drawing rooms rather than on literal stages. Yet the difference between the drawing room and the stage is not so obvious, as the thrillers often feature elaborate games of charades performed on a makeshift stage in *Behind a Mask*, the masquerade balls in “A Marble Woman: or, The Mysterious Model” (1865), or in-depth discussions of Shakespeare in “Ariel. A Legend of the Lighthouse” (1865). The hyperrealism of canonical naturalist texts extends in Alcott’s work to these drawing room performances, which often carry high-stakes consequences for female characters.

Discussing Alcott’s Gothic thrillers, Stern argues that “of all the characters she [Alcott] adumbrated in these narratives the one who came most completely to life and who obviously was as intriguing to her author as to readers was the passionate, richly sexual *femme fatale* who had a mysterious past, an electrifying present, and a revengeful future” (“Introduction,” *Behind a Mask* xiv, original emphasis). It is not merely coincidence that many of the *femmes fatales* who enliven Alcott’s Gothic tales are also actresses. Indeed, unlike the rural women Alcott depicts at the beginning of *Work* who have sparse possibilities available to them, or the ordinary actresses who become Christie’s colleagues in *Work*, Alcott portrays her actresses in the Gothic thrillers as having the ability to circumnavigate the rules and restrictions applied to nineteenth-century women. Similar to Christie Devon, Carrie Meeber, and Kitty Hamilton, actresses themselves, the actresses of the Gothic thrillers are keenly aware of the gender

determinism that restricts them but use their capacity as performers to create new alternatives for themselves. As I will discuss, these actresses' agency depends upon chance, the choices they make and, perhaps most significantly, on their stagecraft and performance.

Alcott's Gothic thrillers often hinge upon people keeping secrets, hiding their true personalities, and sometimes even living under assumed identities. As such, whether characters in these stories act on the stage or not, they are often performing in their daily lives, either to protect themselves or to advance an agenda. The body itself also becomes performative as it is disguised through costume and makeup. Some of Alcott's works, such as *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (written 1866; published 1995), also depict characters that cross-dress and even impersonate other ethnicities and races in order to don a false identity. In this way, Alcott utilizes performativity to trouble both the categories of race and gender.

In addition to literal actresses, Alcott incorporates multiple types of performativity into her Gothic tales. Performativity encompasses acting not only in front of a passive audience seated in a theater but, as well, enacting a performance in everyday life. Susan Manning distinguishes between the performance of various kinds of artists onstage and "performance as a mode of cultural production composed of events bound in time and space" (177). Manning argues that "in its new usage, the connotation of the verb [to perform] shifts from the achievement of an action to the embodiment of an identity" (177-78). Alcott's work often portrays literal actresses whose relationship to truth rather than artifice is often questioned and who engage with identity-driven

performance (as articulated by Manning) offstage in addition to their performances onstage. Key to this understanding of performance is the work of Judith Butler, who argues that performativity is crucial to identity formation and that the repeated actions we perform actually constitute our identity. Therefore, gender in particular is a crucial performance and a construction based on the many choices you make about how you perform and signal your gender to those around you. Judith Butler asks “if gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?” (11). By depicting performativity on several different levels, then, Alcott deals with the questions raised by Butler, particularly the question of gender as a form of determinism.

Even in hard naturalist texts, gender determinism operates on characters while, at the same time, gender traits and practices might be extremely slippery. While Mac’s masculinity acts as a driving force for his actions in *McTeague*, Trina’s gender becomes defamiliarized and made strange. Her femininity ignites McTeague’s desire, at the same time that “the woman in her was not yet awakened; she was yet, as one might say, without sex. She was almost like a boy, frank, candid, unreserved,” though she, too, often acts immaturely like a little girl (Norris 19). Norris includes this kind of description twice, later observing Trina “was almost like a boy. At once there had been a mysterious disturbance. The Woman within her suddenly awoke” (70). There is immense gender trouble in Trina’s initial presentation as a boy and then her subsequent description in which she becomes a “Woman” instantaneously (70). The example of *McTeague*

demonstrates that Alcott's inclusion of gender trouble is not, then, unique to her Gothic thrillers but, in fact, shared with canonical naturalist texts.

A Long Fatal Love Chase interrogates at length the idea of gender as performative. The text begins with the entrenched gender stereotypes of the Gothic tradition, female ingénue and virile male aggressor, before introducing moments of gender trouble wherein stereotypical traits might be inverted, male and female traits combined or even abandoned altogether. Performativity, coupled with gender trouble, circumvents the various prescriptions of gender determinism and demonstrates one way in which things might be constructed differently in such a way that does *not* preclude “agency and transformation” (Butler 11). In *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, Philip Tempest wins Rosamond Vivian in a card game with her grandfather, seduces her, and convinces her to marry him. Rosamond later learns that Philip has a living wife as well as a child, nicknamed Lito, and that she has unwittingly committed bigamy. Much of the subsequent action features Rosamond fleeing Philip, who pursues her across several different European countries.²⁵ Along the way, Rosamond falls in love with a monk, Fr. Ignatius, which further infuriates Philip. Hoping to kill Ignatius, Philip sinks Ignatius's boat only to learn that he has instead killed Rosamond. Philip then stabs himself so that he might possess Rosamond even in the afterlife.

Despite *A Long Fatal Love Chase*'s Gothic machinations, which at times seem so stereotypical as to be overdetermined, the novel also injects into its narrative stunning

²⁵ Alcott often sets her Gothic thrillers outside of the United States, perhaps to attract readers through the inclusion of glamorous and exotic locations but, just as likely, to allow her to write about a society outside the influence of puritanical moral codes and operating under different gender codes than the American Cult of True Womanhood.

examples of gender trouble. For example, in one attempt to confuse her pursuers, Rosamond works with Honorine, a Frenchwoman who befriends her, and Lito to evade capture. They decide that Anton, a servant boy, will dress as a girl to pose as Rosamond, while she will disguise herself as a boy. Although Anton is “awkward” in the role of a girl, Rosamond “made a charming boy, with short, dark curls about her head and Anton’s rusty velvet suit and rough mantle. Her small feet were hidden in big shoes, the brim of the hat shaded her face, and Lito had darkened her fair skin with the pigment which he carried to renew the olive color of his own face” (164). Despite the fact that Rosamond’s figure is small compared to Anton’s, the loosely fitting clothing and large shoes camouflage her body, while her cropped hair establishes her boyish appearance.

Notably, Rosamond’s masquerade extends to her racial appearance as well as her gender. However, the narrator does not comment on the racial aspects of Rosamond’s performance, and she seems to blend in easily with Lito’s Greek ethnicity.²⁶ There *are*

²⁶ The portrayal of race and ethnicity is quite complicated throughout Alcott’s fiction. For example, some of her short stories such as “My Contraband” (1863) and “M.L.” (1860), which feature interracial romance, were considered too controversial to publish when they were written. In “My Contraband,” for example, there is a sustained discourse on race as Miss Dane, the protagonist, confronts social attitudes towards race and tries to articulate her own position such that the issue continuously erupts throughout the text. However, here in *A Long Fatal Love Chase* the assumption of an alternate ethnicity is glossed over as a mere plot point. Additionally, in some of her other Gothic thrillers, Spanish or Italian ancestry is often stereotypically and derogatively tied to a passionate nature. “Perilous Play,” one of Alcott’s final Gothic thrillers, features Rose St. Just, described as “pale and yet brilliant, for the Southern eyes were magnificent, the clear olive cheeks contrasted well with darkest hair; lips like a pomegranate flower, and delicate, straight brows, as mobile as the lips. A cluster of crimson flowers, half falling from the loose black braids, and a golden bracelet of Arabian coins on the slender wrist were the only ornaments she wore” (687). Moreover, “Rose St. Just was as beautiful as her Spanish mother, but had inherited the pride and reserve of her English father (687). Rose is made extremely exotic through her Spanish ancestry. In the passage quoted above, her passion is curiously subdued, and the story portrays this as a decided problem. Rose’s perceived failure to live up to the stereotype of the passionate Spanish woman has left her single. Once Rose embraces passion, with the aid of hashish, she expresses her love and accepts the passions of a male suitor. Although Rose shares Spanish and English ancestry, her portrayal is informed almost solely by Spanish stereotypes. Gender remains a crucial element in Alcott’s presentation of race. It is not merely that Rose is passionless in a way that does not compute with others’ perceptions of Spanish heritage. Rather, it is also that Rose is not conceiving of courtship the way a woman should. The idea that she might

several comments, however, about the growing level of comfort Rosamond experiences in her male masquerade. Although Rosamond looks the part, “she was too shy and feminine at first, but Lito taught her to take a larger stride, to look boldly up and swing her arms, now modestly folded” (164). The physical aspect of this gender masquerade, which might seem the most problematic, is actually the easiest for Rosamond to project, while it is the masculine attitude that takes her more time to learn. The repeated actions of shortening her stride and taking up little room in her movements convey the performance of femininity, while here she has to unlearn those tendencies and take up different repeated actions to perform masculinity. Presumably Rosamond was once taught how to be feminine, and Lito fairly easily teaches her how to assume masculinity, or at least boyishness.

After Rosamond evades capture, she, Lito, Anton, and Honorine travel through France, and, although Anton changes back into his male attire, Rosamond “felt at ease and enjoyed her freedom so heartily that she decided not to change but to go on to Amiens in her new costume” (167). Rosamond quickly acclimates to her new gender performance and, moreover, seems to enjoy it. Alcott begins to break down the material constructions of gender and race in these passages. While the body is very easily transformed from female to male, the socialized aspects of gender such as the repeated

not reciprocate affection in the hope of being married challenges traditional notions of gender, much as her reserved nature does not comply with Spanish stereotypes. Alcott seems more nuanced in her portrayal of African Americans in her controversial short stories, while in other texts her presentation of race and ethnicity becomes almost careless. Ann Daghistany Ransdell reads another of Alcott’s Gothic thrillers, “The Abbot’s Ghost, or Maurice Treherne’s Temptation” (1867), as an “historical allegory” reflecting “American politics of the Reconstruction” (573-74). Sarah Elbert’s Introduction to *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* provides another crucial source on Alcott’s portrayal of race in her fiction as well as biographical information on Alcott’s racial politics. Finally, Larry Reynolds’ chapter on Alcott’s *Moods* (1865) and her radical politics in *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* also addresses some of these issues.

actions of how a person stands, moves, and projects his or her sense of gender take more work to change. *A Long Fatal Love Chase* demonstrates that the construction of someone's masculinity and/or femininity is determined not by the physical body but much more deeply by mannerisms and social affectations, in line with Butler's argument that gender is constructed by the repeated actions a person performs. In addition, this example of crossdressing and gender performance in the text questions the power naturalist determinism wields beyond a person's biology. The novel demonstrates that gender is not a fixed concept but a highly mediated one that is deeply susceptible to alteration. While Alcott's texts certainly portray gender determinism as a part of social life, the equal weight given to gender performance attests to the fact that gender determinism is not a monolithic force in Gothic naturalist texts.

The previous example of cross-gender performance in *A Long Fatal Love Chase* might seem to imply that female to male transformations are easier than male to female ones, given Anton's awkwardness and the fact that he quickly changes back into masculine dress. However, later on in the novel, Alcott introduces another example of a male character disguised as a woman that suggests feminine masquerade may not, in fact, be difficult or uncomfortable for men. Philip's henchman Baptiste, who "passed for a Frenchman but was an Algerian by birth," boards a ship with Rosamond, Fr. Ignatius, and Vetr y, a Paris police captain searching for Baptiste (76). Crucially, Vetr y knows that Baptiste is likely in a disguise. Nevertheless, Vetr y allows Madame Montez, the woman later revealed to be Baptiste, to pass by him without a second thought. The narrator notes of Madame Montez that "she was a tall woman in deep black with dark curls about her

face; a respirator hid her mouth and a crepe veil partially concealed her face. Fine black eyes and a pale olive skin were all a hasty glance could discover” (290). Surprisingly, Ignatius describes the woman in black as “a handsome, fierce-looking lady, Spanish I fancy, and a widow” (291). Both men are completely convinced by Baptiste’s disguise, even characterizing Madame Montez as good looking albeit “handsome” and “fierce” (291). As with Rosamond’s masquerade, the physical aspect of deception becomes very easy to assume.

Furthermore, and perhaps more critically, Madame Montez’s appearance is not the only element she uses to convince fellow passengers that she is a woman. After fooling Vetréy, Ignatius, and Rosamond, Montez “crossed the deck and paused near the seat Rosamond had left. Her sweeping skirts concealed the bench and while affecting to look pensively down into the water she opened the book and read the name on the flyleaf,” discovering Rosamond’s current alias (291). Indeed, Madame Montez goes so far as giving “a courteous remark to the garrulous old sisters” nearby (291). It is clear that Baptiste understands not only how to manipulate feminine dress, here using a skirt to cover his snooping, but also uses postures and gestures to conceal his real purpose and can speak in what passes as a feminine voice. In other words, Baptiste does not just glide silently along the deck in feminine clothing but creates quite a character in Madame Montez who adheres to the rules of polite conversation and feminine deportment. Interestingly, Alcott’s narrator heavily contributes to this performance. Until Rosamond recognizes Baptiste, the narrator refers to Madame Montez using feminine pronouns so that Baptiste’s performance deceives the reader as well. While Montez’s behavior gives

readers no clue as to her true identity and gender, the language of this chapter also betrays no difference between Montez and any of the other women depicted. Although the scene depicts visual cues as highly deceptive, readers who can only imagine how Madame Montez appears are fooled not by appearances but by the language used to describe Montez. Alcott thus allows readers to experience Montez's performance in a unique way that still manages to convey the surprise felt by other characters in the novel. These examples of crossdressing demonstrate one possible strategy characters utilize in evading gender determinism.

Despite the performativity Alcott portrays in both of these masquerades in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, at the end of each of these performances, she returns to a more physically determined interpretation of the body. For example, when Baptiste is finally captured, he is identified by "'T. F.' (*travaux forces*), the brand of the galleys" upon his arm (298, original emphasis). Although this brand does not relate to gender and merely verifies Baptiste as someone sentenced to hard labor, it does call attention to the body as the site of an irrefutable form of evidence relating to identity. Rosamond's encounter with a physically determined body, on the other hand, is much more ambiguous than that of Baptiste. Still wearing Anton's clothes, Rosamond discovers a woman's corpse with a suicide note attached. She quickly exchanges the corpse's name, Madelaine Constant, for her own on the note. Rosamond judges that when notice of the death reaches the papers, the men chasing her will believe she has committed suicide, once again echoing the narrator of *Work*'s sentiment that suicide is an all too likely trajectory for unconventional female characters. Rosamond observes, "I do not fear the description [that will likely

appear in the newspaper]. She [the dead woman] had dark hair, and dark eyes probably, was young and slender, with fair skin and delicate hands, well dressed and evidently of respectable birth. I saw this as the plan flashed into my mind and knew that any description would apply to us both” (169-70). Curiously, the physical body again acts as a point of evidence, but it is also something that can be staged, much like a prop, to generate false interpretations. While naturalism often depicts how the body’s biological elements can be read deterministically, Alcott’s Gothic thrillers verge into the surreal and the supernatural, showing the difficulty of reading the body. Alcott shows that determinism of the physical body is not as absolute as that portrayed in many canonical naturalist texts. Specifically, gender, which may seem the most fixed aspect of determinism, can be elided to a large extent through performance.

Notably, Rosamond is still wearing her masculine disguise when she finds Madelaine, such that the dead woman’s body acts as a mirror image, but one that contradicts Rosamond’s current gender performance. Madelaine’s body serves to remind Rosamond of the vulnerability of her own body and the danger she faces. Rosamond’s evasion of gender determinism (and also of Philip) succeeds at this point in the novel, but if she is captured, Rosamond would face consequences for her actions, and, in fact, her final encounter with Philip causes her death. Her gender performance is ultimately not without risk.

Rosamond’s plot hinges on the physical similarities between herself and Madelaine but, more importantly, it also depends upon Philip and his men trusting in one’s inability to tamper with the corporeal body. Rosamond believes her pursuers will

not consider the fact that someone may have interfered with the scene of the suicide. Critically, Rosamond finds Madelaine's body and stages her name switch long before Baptiste dons his performative disguise in terms of the novel's chronology. Rosamond's assumptions about Philip prove correct, as he later confesses that although Madelaine's "body had been buried, . . . the note, the name, the description *were enough*" to convince him it was Rosamond (186, emphasis added). While Alcott demonstrates that the body's physicality cannot be completely erased, she also illustrates the body's profoundly performative capabilities. Merely by doctoring the suicide note, Rosamond enacts a transformation of sorts with Madelaine's body. Birgit Spengler comments that "during the early decades of the nineteenth century, concepts of vision changed from the idea of a disembodied, monocular and objective faculty—a model of human vision that was based on the *camera obscura* and Cartesian perspectivalism—into that of a human faculty that was subject to physiological error and physical manipulation" (38, original emphasis). Indeed, many of Alcott's stories portray this change in vision. Rosamond's actions take into account a human vision capable of error and of being tricked, while Phillip operates on the premise that vision is objective and incapable of being tampered with by others, a difference illustrating, albeit unintentionally, the difference between Gothic and classical naturalism.

As exemplified by *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and occurring throughout Alcott's stories, as is the case in much classical naturalism, performativity relies heavily on voyeurism. Much like the panopticon, in these stories someone is always watching. Characters often turn their gaze on other characters to gain a sense of when they

themselves are being observed. Whether or not characters *are* being watched then dictates their behavior. Discussing middle-class Americans' fascination with performance, particularly parlor theatricals, Karen Halttunen notes that "the hypocrisy of the confidence man and the painted woman did not lie simply in a discrepancy between what they practiced and what they preached. Their art, as depicted in the conduct-of-life literature, was far more subtle: they could manipulate facial expression, manner, and personal appearance in a calculated effort to lure the guileless into granting them confidence" (xv). Alcott's heroines, like these painted women, are exceptionally adept in cultivating the trust of those around them, using their faces and bodies as performance tools, while employing their intellect to help position those around them in advantageous ways. Alcott's female characters especially betray to the reader the fact that their actions are often explicitly staged and performed with the knowledge that another character is watching.

In addition, female characters use an awareness of voyeurism to influence the voyeur's interpretation of what he or she witnesses. Feminist theorists writing about film, such as Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, have explored the role of the heterosexual male gaze in shaping how audiences look at film and the power structures encoded in the gaze and in the act of looking at another person. Mulvey argues that "women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (62-63, original emphasis). Rather than remaining an object at which to be gazed, much like Carrie and Kitty are onstage, Alcott's protagonists attempt to influence interpretation

to gain an advantage over their social situation. Teresa de Lauretis succinctly characterizes the standard function of the gaze when she writes that “the woman is framed by the look of the camera as icon, or object of the gaze: an image made to be looked at by the spectator, whose look is relayed by the look of the male character(s)” (87). Note de Lauretis’s use of passive voice in describing the woman’s role: “the woman is framed by the camera” (87). Typically, the woman has no role outside of that of an object. Startlingly, though Alcott’s actresses appear to be mere spectacles, they themselves are also performing the role of framing. The actresses in these stories use their stagecraft to frame the position and perspective of the men, and sometimes the other women, who gaze at them. The observer’s interpretation of what he or she sees thus relies on careful staging by the female performer. Props, lighting, costumes, makeup, and the way spaces are laid out all play a crucial role in creating a performance and influencing the observer and his or her interpretation. Alcott’s heroines are hyperaware of the male gaze and are keen to use it to their own advantage. In naturalist texts, not only women but all kinds of characters are effectively framed by their gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. They are framed not only in the sense of the way they are visualized but are also predisposed to be framed by certain representations and interpretations of themselves. Alcott’s characters directly confront the male gaze and naturalist determinism through their performances.

For example, in “La Jeune; or, Actress and Woman” (1868), Arthur Brookes, a wealthy Englishman, falls in love with Natalie, an actress known as La Jeune, whom “all Paris had been running after . . . that season, as it was after any novelty from a learned

pig to a hero” (Alcott, “La Jeune” 82). Brookes’s older friend Ulster opposes any notions Arthur has of marrying Natalie or maintaining a serious relationship with her, arguing that he knows Natalie’s “class; they are all alike, mercenary, treacherous, and shallow” (81). Ulster presents actresses as a species unto themselves, alien to the rest of humanity, while also likening them to a kind of freak show by comparing La Jeune’s novelty to the spectacle and rarity of a learned pig. Brookes, however, insists that Ulster must meet Natalie before judging her.

The two men then visit the theater to see Natalie perform, where Ulster admits “she played admirably” (83). However, only Ulster witnesses a curious moment when Natalie waits in the wings, and “forgetting that she could be overlooked, La Jeune leaned back with a change of countenance that absolutely startled me. All the fire, the gayety, the youth, seemed to die out, leaving a weary, woeful face, the sadder for the contrast between its tragic pathos and the blithe comedy going on before us” onstage (84). An instant later, “her cue came, and she swept on to the stage with a ringing laugh, looking the embodiment of joy” (84). After this disarming moment and subsequently meeting her in person, Ulster becomes convinced that Natalie is putting on an act for Brookes in an attempt to win his affection, thereby gaining access to his wealth. Ulster stalks and spies on Natalie and believes that he has discovered four secrets about her. First, he believes she has a male lover. Next, he thinks Natalie gambles. Third, he feels sure that Natalie takes opium, and, finally, he believes Natalie is in love with him. Natalie answers all of Ulster’s assumptions, proving them to be false interpretations of what he has seen or overheard. In reality, Natalie is suffering from a fatal illness yet still performs in order to

support a mentally disabled husband. She loves Brookes but does not want to marry him or take his wealth.

The reader thus ultimately learns that Ulster has misread Natalie from beginning to end and, more, importantly, that his ‘objective’ observations hid a private agenda. Ulster assumes that Natalie’s acting ability onstage has been used *offstage* to manipulate Brookes and, by extension, himself. In fact, Natalie’s grief in the stage wings is no act; although she tells Ulster she was suffering from a painful shoe buckle, in retrospect the reader sees she is grieving as her life comes to a close, or perhaps was in physical pain due to her illness. To be fair to Ulster’s interpretation, Natalie does later utilize her performance skills for manipulation. Instead of Natalie’s manipulating Brookes through performance, though, it is *Ulster* whom Natalie manipulates and Ulster who, in fact, performs for Natalie over and over again, acting sympathetic in order to conceal his attempts to belittle her. In conducting his investigation, Ulster himself performs disingenuously for Natalie as he believes that “if I would execute my purpose, I must convince her that I was a friend, an admirer, a lover even” (89). Rather than acting as a neutral observer who weighs what he sees and then comes to a conclusion, Ulster vows “I am right, I’ll prove it . . . I’ll convince you that she [Natalie] is all I say” (87). Ulster believes that watching Natalie closely will yield the evidence he needs to announce his bold claims.

Ulster first disguises his investigation by fabricating emotion that he does not feel for Natalie. He seems to consider himself a strong enough performer that Natalie will be duped by his feigned affection. Ulster understands intellectually that changing his

behavior around Natalie will impact the way she reacts to him. He knows that she will be watching him and he must act accordingly so that she does not become suspicious of him. He fails to take into account, however, that Natalie can also alter her behavior to impact *his* reactions and interpretations of her. It is not clear if Ulster thinks Natalie is not clever enough to perform in front of him or if Ulster believes he is such a good detective that she will not realize he is spying on her. The reader learns both of these assumptions are incorrect because Natalie reveals in the text's conclusion that "I heard your boast, your plot and pledge, made in this room a month ago, and resolved to teach you a lesson" (93). Natalie has beaten Ulster into shame at his own game. She plays into Ulster's assumptions about actresses in order to expose the falseness of those very same assumptions. In effect, Natalie anticipates Ulster's deterministic outlook and uses this to her favor.

Curiously, however, Ulster fails to realize that at the same time he is watching Natalie, *she* is watching *him*. There is a predator/prey dynamic at work in Natalie and Ulster's relationship, not unlike that in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. While Philip literally tracks and hunts Rosamond across Europe, Ulster stalks Natalie by watching and following her, hoping to ensnare her by catching her in a lie. Furthermore, it is only *after* Ulster vows to expose Natalie as a woman trying to trap Brookes into marriage that she begins manipulating Ulster. Surprisingly, given his idea that Natalie is feigning emotion for Brookes, Ulster presumes that his voyeurism will yield knowledge of Natalie's secrets and will validate his interpretation of her. As is the case with male voyeurs in canonical naturalist texts, Ulster believes in the infallibility of his own gaze and this confidence

proves to be his downfall in the realm of Gothic naturalism where performativity becomes so powerful. Isabell Klaiber argues that “the cultural images of women—innocent angel or coquette, even devil—are so much standardized that they may easily be feigned by La Jeune, while they provide the narrator with ready interpretations” (223). For Ulster, appearance is all. However, Natalie’s character demonstrates that reading appearances creates patently false interpretations. Ulster acts on the assumption that his gaze is infallible, again like Philip in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, not accounting for mistaken vision or deliberate manipulation of the gaze.

While observing La Jeune, Ulster becomes deeply affected not only by her performance as an actress but also by her personality *offstage*. However, Ulster cannot accept that an actress might convey emotion without guile or ulterior motives. It is not only gender but also profession that Ulster assumes to be deterministic. He vows not to be taken in by Natalie but to prove that she is the mercenary, shallow actress he assumes her to be. Ulster arrogantly proclaims, “I read men and women like books, and no character is too mysterious for me to decipher” (Alcott, “La Jeune” 87). Ulster utterly fails to account for the difference between fiction and life. In fact, by having Ulster read too deeply, too deterministically, into all of La Jeune’s movements, the story demonstrates that Ulster does not interpret but instead himself overdetermines Natalie’s motives and completely misreads her intentions and the actions she undertakes. Here “La Jeune” challenges a hard form of determinism by exposing it ultimately as too simplistic a framework for understanding the totality of a person.

Even more amazingly, in cultivating an artificial love for Natalie, Ulster believes he does come to feel for her “a more ardent love . . . than any I had known in my youth” (92). This acts as a fascinating inversion of Natalie and Brookes’s relationship. Natalie is assumed to be performing a false love for Brookes, yet in performing a false love for *Natalie*, Ulster discovers deeply felt emotion. His love, achieved through performance, becomes transformative in his confession to Natalie as he professes to love her and understand her secrets, yet he never considers her feelings for Brookes as anything but false. “La Jeune” portrays performance as incredibly complicated, deeply felt, and a series of repeated actions and emotions with real-world repercussions. Ulster’s actions correspond with Butler’s thesis linking repeatedly performed actions with identity in a way that the characters’ disdain for performance makes surprising.

After professing his love to her, Ulster reiterates that Natalie is “like *an open book*” that he can easily interpret (93, emphasis added). Natalie reminds him that “you know nothing of my past; that *my heart is a sealed book to you*, and that you have seen only the gay, frivolous side I show the world” (92, emphasis added). In many ways, Ulster’s actions highlight the value of performance itself. In pretending to care about Natalie, he actually does begin to care about her (or at least thinks he does). What is dangerous, then, is not the performance of feeling but, rather, Ulster’s initial premise that simply by observing someone he can intuit the secrets of her soul. Although Ulster conceives of himself as an astute emotional detective, the story shows that not only is he manipulated by Natalie’s various performances but that his own performance manipulates himself more than it does any other character. Performance becomes a method for

obtaining self-knowledge but, specifically in Natalie's application, it also becomes a way to manipulate, or even to create, false knowledge. "La Jeune" relentlessly critiques Ulster's position of overdetermining Natalie through the performative frameworks the story deploys.

Even after Natalie corrects Ulster's interpretation by exposing the real secret of her illness and husband, he does not resist his impulse to interpret her actions and maintains that "never in her most brilliant hour, on stage, or in salon, had she shone so fair or impressed me with her power as she did now. That was art, this nature" (95). Ulster narrates "La Jeune," so the reader has access only to his perceptions of Natalie. Yet, how is the reader to trust Ulster's judgment of either Natalie's art or nature? Again, Ulster misses the point. The story does not ask its reader to separate the 'truth' of nature from the 'artifice' of performance. Instead, the story challenges the notion that we can understand in simple and unchanging terms the complexities of another human being. Gail K. Smith argues that "Alcott's confidence women can be seen as wearing masks that may only cover other masks beneath. The masked 'self' of the successful confidence woman escapes definition, because self and mask are ultimately indistinguishable" (57). Natalie is not a con woman in the way that Jean Muir of *Behind a Mask* is. Yet, the futility of trying to differentiate between 'truth' and 'artifice' is borne out by "La Jeune," as it is a story that questions our human ability to verify and correctly interpret what we see. The interaction between Natalie and Ulster, then, suggests a negative answer to Butler's question about the determinism of gender and the possibility of it being constructed in a way that permits "agency and transformation" (11). However, the story

highlights the disastrous nature of Ulster and Natalie's relationship, in part, by juxtaposing it with Brookes and Natalie's relationship. Thus, relationships between men and women do not have to be based solely on misunderstanding but can present instead a source of friendship and a rejection of gender determinism.

Ultimately, "La Jeune" vindicates Natalie and Brookes rather than Ulster. Natalie's emotions have been virtuous throughout, illustrating that emotion felt onstage or offstage can be equally profound. Natalie characterizes Arthur Brookes as a "true, faithful" friend, and at the end, "Arthur gather[ed] the frail creature close to his honest heart, *reading his reward in the tender, trusting face* that turned so gladly from me [Ulster] to him" (Alcott, "La Jeune" 96, emphasis added). Arthur's final gaze at Natalie helps illustrate the different ways of looking at Natalie that Arthur and Ulster each utilize. While Ulster watches Natalie seeking evidence to prove what he believes he already knows about her, Arthur watches her facial expressions in order to understand what she is feeling. Therefore, the story portrays both a negative and a positive version of the male gaze. It is not gender that determines a person's gaze so much as his or her motivations in looking and the method in which a person observes others. Ulster reads Natalie's story as a Gothic melodrama in which a tawdry actress feigns affection for a wealthy suitor to secure that wealth for herself. Subsequently, Natalie's cunning exposure of Ulster refutes his interpretation of her while simultaneously revealing that her story is much simpler, much more tragic, and much more naturalistic than anyone has guessed. The reader, then, is left to sift through the Gothic and naturalistic lenses through which different characters view the events of "La Jeune." These brief examples from *A Long Fatal Love*

Chase and “La Jeune; or, Actress and Woman” illustrate the complex networks of identity, performance, and interpretation that Alcott deploys in her Gothic thrillers. Alcott’s thrillers portray the gaze as a primary element in the deployment of determinism but also demonstrate that women characters are especially positioned to recognize when the gaze is focused on them and to then circumvent its determinist impulses. I will now turn to two of Alcott’s longer Gothic thrillers, *V.V.; or, Plots and Counterplots* (1865) and *Behind a Mask: or, A Woman’s Power* (1866), to demonstrate Alcott’s use of actresses who attempt to find agency through performance.

V.V. begins with the dancer Virginie Varens and wealthy Scottish nobleman Allan Douglas planning to secretly marry, flouting Virginie’s engagement to her cousin Victor Varens. Crucially, proof of Victor and Virginie’s engagement has been tattooed on Virginie’s wrist in the form of a love knot and the initials V.V. Unbeknownst to Virginie and Allan, Victor overhears their plans to wed. Victor then discovers Virginie and Allan together in her rooms the next morning where he stabs Allan, not realizing that the couple is already married. Victor thereafter blackmails Virginie into obeying him, threatening to frame her for the murder if she does not acquiesce.

The story then moves to a house party at Lady Lennox’s estate. The women staying at the home, Lady Lennox, the mysterious widow Mrs. Vane, the young Diana Stewart, and her chaperone Mrs. Berkeley, are gossiping about Earl Douglas, who looks remarkably like Allan Douglas. Mrs. Vane quickly endears herself to Douglas, causing a rift between himself and Diana, who have been secretly courting. Mrs. Vane also has an unusual servant named Jitomar who is said to be from India (a servant of the deceased

Col. Vane who was stationed there) and is mute. Readers then learn that Douglas hates Virginie Varens and possesses both a lock of her hair and her blood-stained dancing slipper. Further confusing the plot, during the first night of Douglas's stay at the Lennox house, a woman's arm appears in the night and steals Douglas's ancestral iron ring, only to replace it a few moments later.

To thicken the plot further, Mrs. Vane reveals to Diana that she is married to Douglas, that they have a child together, and that Douglas abandoned her because she had lost her beauty, and Mrs. Vane takes Diana to visit the son, who does resemble Douglas. That evening a woman grabs Douglas in the dark and kisses him passionately before disappearing like a ghost. A scream awakens the house, and they discover that Diana, who had been taken ill, has abruptly left the house. The next day Diana's body is found at the bottom of a water-filled pit. Douglas finds a footprint near the pit that he believes matches Virginie Varens's shoe. As Mrs. Vane leaves Lady Lennox's house, Douglas notices a footprint left by her and realizes it is identical to the one left by the pit, causing him to believe Mrs. Vane and Virginie Varens are the same person.

Douglas then asks Monsieur Duprès²⁷ to help him ascertain whether or not Mrs. Vane is, in fact, Virginie Varens. Because of Mrs. Vane's clever use of costumes, makeup, and performance, Duprès cannot be sure of her real identity. Therefore, Douglas and Duprès drug Mrs. Vane and bribe a maid in order to gain admittance into her house at midnight. They enter Mrs. Vane's bedroom, where she is sleeping deeply

²⁷ Duprès's name is curiously similar to that of Poe's famous detective, Auguste Dupin. Further, Duprès disguises himself as a Monsieur Dupont when he arrives in England. Given Duprès's function as amateur detective, and the reliance on his powers of observation to determine whether or not Mrs. Vane is Virginie, Alcott's story seems to reference Poe's detective.

due to a drug they administered. Douglas and Duprès unlock and remove a large bracelet constantly worn by Mrs. Vane, unveiling the tattoo of Virginie Varens, marking her first engagement. They also find Virginie's marriage certificate, a locket with a portrait of Allan Douglas, and a child's toys.

The following day, Douglas confronts Virginie. He reveals that he is a cousin of Allan Douglas and has solved his relative's murder. That is, he has unmasked Victor Varens, who posed as Mrs. Vane's servant Jitomar (among others), and now reports that Victor accidentally killed himself during a duel. Douglas also reports that Virginie's son is dead, giving Virginie a glass of wine as she absorbs this news, and he decides she will be imprisoned in an isolated Scottish tower for the rest of her life so that she cannot bring scandal to his and his cousin Allan's name, or to the memory of Diana Stewart. However, unbeknownst to Douglas, Virginie wears an opal poison ring, the contents of which she pours into the wine. She dies just as Douglas tells her that "escape is impossible" (143).

Teresa A. Goddu observes that "the conclusion of the story [V. V.] is cast as a competition between female art and male detection" (126). These dynamics of art and detection run throughout the text. At times they are posed as female art versus male detection, but there is also male art and female detection in the text as well. For example, before Virginie agreed to marry Allan Douglas, she read his physiognomy (another example of a physical marker tied to the body) and "saw truth in the honest eyes, read a pride on the forehead that no dishonor could stain" (Alcott, V.V. 83). Early on, the text portrays interpreting the physical body as quite straightforward. However, when Virginie

first appears as Mrs. Vane she argues that “our faces are such traitors, that unless we have learned the art of self-control, it is not best for us to scorn such harmless aids as fans, screens, and veils. Emotions are not well-bred, and their demonstrations are often as embarrassing to others as to ourselves” (89). Mrs. Vane reinforces the legibility of the body although, clearly, in light of the narrative’s focus on the need for detection in order to understand the female body, reading the body here is not so simple. Mrs. Vane’s statement about faces betraying emotion may be true of other people but certainly not of herself, since she remains in complete control of her performance while at Lady Lennox’s house. Rather, it is others who need to tread carefully and who ought to question their interpretations of people’s physical appearances. Lady Lennox herself asserts that “one can see *at a glance* that she [Mrs. Vane] is of high birth” (90, emphasis added). Here the gaze is incredibly casual and taken for granted as something that conveys powerful information almost instantaneously. Lady Lennox, of course, is quite mistaken in interpreting Mrs. Vane as someone of aristocratic birth. Illustrating Goddu’s point, Douglas explicitly positions himself as a detective early on in the text, as he seeks an introduction to Mrs. Vane so that he might “see what I can make of her” (92). While early on the text depicts several times the ease of reading the body, this concept breaks down very quickly within V.V. In V.V., the narrative offers, then, a more extended discourse on the body, the gaze, and performativity, expanding on the examples of these elements already discussed from *A Long Fatal Love Chase*.

It is the text’s triad of Gothic episodes that occur at night that deal most significantly with the corporeal body as a site of evidence. When Douglas’s ring is

stolen, the narration reveals that “a muffled hand and arm appeared . . . [;] it was a human hand” that took the ring (Alcott, V.V. 96). Curiously, however, the following morning when Douglas tells the story at breakfast, he states that ““it was a *woman’s* hand that took the ring”” (101, emphasis added). He admits that “the room was dusky, and the hand muffled in something dark,” but “the wrapper slipped aside, and I saw white human flesh, and the outlines of a *woman’s arm*” (101, emphasis added). When questioned concerning the beauty of the arm, Douglas observes it was ““very beautiful, I should say; for in that hasty glimpse it looked too fair to belong to any servant”” (101). Douglas, then, presents a scrap of lace he found in his room following the theft. Yet, rather than simply state the arm was likely a woman’s because of the lace, he insists it was the momentary sight of the arm and hand that gendered it as a woman’s. The momentary glimpse of the physical arm completely overdetermines Douglas’s conclusions. Not only must the arm belong to a woman, but the brief glimpse of the arm in a dark room also establishes the class of its owner, as Douglas also maintains it could not have belonged to a servant. A singular body part is thus quickly gendered and classed under Douglas’s gaze. At this point, Douglas nevertheless views his own gaze as objective, much like Philip and Ulster did in the earlier texts.

Similarly, the second Gothic episode of V.V. reveals both the ability of the gaze to be mistaken and also the need to quickly rationalize the irrational or supernatural. Douglas notices a window left open late at night and as he goes to close it “was startled by an arm flung violently about his neck, lips pressed passionately to his own, and a momentary glimpse of a woman’s figure dimly defined on the dark curtain that floated

backward from his hand” (111). Douglas assumes the specter is Diana Stewart, although “the light had been too dim to reveal the partially shrouded countenance, or more than a tall and shadowy outline” (111). The reader later learns the shadowy figure is actually Mrs. Vane. Again, an event that proves the human gaze to be deeply flawed portrays Douglas’s perception of the encounter as one in which, although he saw very little, he draws immediate and definite conclusions. Alcott thus critiques the unquestioning interpretation powers of the male gaze.

Footprints are also a key point of evidence in this story, which alter Douglas’s understanding of the gaze. Notably, the footprints are initially much easier for Douglas to interpret. Unlike the arm and the shadowy woman in the dark, the footprints testify to the body’s presence but are noticed only after the body has left the scene. There is time to examine and verify the footprints in a way Douglas cannot do in his earlier Gothic encounters. Douglas notes that the first footprint he finds consists of “a narrow sole, a fairylike shape, a slight pressure downward at the top, as if the wearer walked well and lightly, yet danced better than she walked” (118). Realizing that this footprint might belong to Virginie, Douglas retrieves the blood-stained shoe and “laid the slipper in the mold of that mysterious foot. It fitted exactly! Outline, length, width, even the downward pressure at the toe corresponded” (118). In order to verify his observations, “Douglas pressed the slipper carefully into the smooth clay beside the other print, and every slight peculiarity was repeated with wonderful accuracy” (118). In the case of the footprints, Douglas’s gaze can be corroborated with the aid of the shoe. Douglas does not rely solely on his gaze in this example, unlike the case in the previous episodes.

However, the evidence of Virginie's footprint, and its match with Mrs. Vane's, does not prove to Douglas that Mrs. Vane is Virginie Varens. In fact, the forensic evidence of the footprint does not actually assure Douglas of the conclusions *he* draws.²⁸ Instead, Douglas becomes quite suspicious of his ability to interpret the female body, so much so, in fact, that Douglas calls upon an additional observer to help him unmask Mrs. Vane's identity.

M. Duprès is that other character who attempts to contest Mrs. Vane's art with his visual detection skills. Indeed, when Duprès meets Mrs. Vane, he "fixed a searching glance upon her. His keen eyes ran over her from head to foot, and nothing seemed to escape his scrutiny" (124). Nothing escapes him, but what he actually sees does not reveal much either. Mrs. Vane's "figure was concealed by a great mantle of black velvet . . . [;] the heavy folds of her dress flowed over her feet; and her delicately gloved hands lay half buried in the deep lace of her handkerchief" (124). Duprès initially concludes that Mrs. Vane is far too old to be Virginie, but he and Douglas agree that they need to "study" her in greater detail (125). In fact, Duprès confesses that Mrs. Vane "baffles me somewhat, I confess, with her woman's art in dress" (128). Duprès and, by extension, Douglas are forced to recognize the human gaze as fallible. The gaze has become a

²⁸ Alcott's engagement with forensic evidence seems to anticipate Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), which deals extensively with fingerprints. At a pivotal moment in a court case, Pudd'nhead produces fingerprints he has collected to prove that the identity of the criminal is different from that of the defendant because their fingerprints do not match. Pudd'nhead argues that "every human being carries with him from his cradle to his grave certain physical marks which do not change their character, and by which he can always be identified—and that without shade of doubt or question. These marks are his signature, his physiological autograph, so to speak, and this autograph can not be counterfeited, nor can he disguise it or hide it away, nor can it become illegible by the wear and mutations of time" (158). The novel as a whole complicates Pudd'nhead's argument, as it ceaselessly questions whether aspects of identity, particularly race, are essential or constructed. I would argue that *V.V.* aligns more with constructionist models of identity as the body more often eludes interpretation than acts as a site of irrefutable evidence. The focus on *footprints*, rather than *fingerprints*, also lends itself to a less essentialist reading as footprints are far easier to camouflage or even distort than are fingerprints.

deeply gendered issue, as Duprès depicts female dress codes as a type of impenetrable hieroglyph he cannot interpret. The female body, if not quite supernatural or monstrous, certainly veers into similar territory in its ability to baffle human observers.

When Duprès and Douglas finally gaze at Mrs. Vane unimpeded by her clothing (at least in terms of her wrist and arm), makeup, or performance, it still takes a great deal of effort to understand whom they are seeing. In order to peer beneath Mrs. Vane's bracelet, they need to unlock it, requiring the use of a "case of delicate instruments and a bunch of tiny keys" in order to find one that will open the bracelet (133). The narration depicts this scene of detection as a tableau not unlike an autopsy. The narrator observes that

for a moment a mysterious and striking picture might have been seen in that quiet room. Under the crimson canopy lay the fair figure of the sleeping woman, her face half hidden by the golden shadow of her hair, her white arm laid out on the warm-hued coverlet, and bending over it, the two masked men, one holding the lamp nearer, the other pointing to something just above the delicate wrist, now freed from the bracelet, which lay open beside it. Two distinctly traced letters were seen, V.V., and underneath a tiny true-lover's knot, in the same dark lines. (134, original emphasis)

It is only after the discovery of the tattoo that Duprès believes "'it is enough, I am sure now'" of Mrs. Vane's hidden identity (134).

Over and over again in the text, then, men misread Mrs. Vane's appearance. Keith Newlin, in discussing the way naturalist authors document events and present observations to readers, argues that "naturalists are more concerned with the symbolic or emotional potential presented by 'the human document,' and their descriptions tend to reflect their interest in showing the emotional resonance of a scene, which they then present to the reader as a spectacle for amusement or instruction" (106). Newlin's language recalls the notion of the gaze in his juxtaposition of "'the human document'" with spectacle (106). Virginie, in the novel's concluding tableau, is laid out like a document for Duprès and Douglas to read. Readers, if they have paid attention, already know what the men will find when they examine Virginie. The reader must read not looking to Virginie's body for evidence but to note how this final scene of reading the body differs from those that precede it in *V.V.* The final discoveries of the marriage certificate and the tattoo become legible in a way that Mrs. Vane's physical appearance does not, as the tattoo and legal document signify within the language of patriarchy and ownership. Notably, the tattoo is described as "the brand" (134), and even Virginie acknowledges that "Victor has the first claim" of marriage and "has set his mark upon me" (83).²⁹ Duprès and Douglas, then, insist on a hard form of determinism that seeks objective knowledge in the body. In contrast, Virginie uses the body as a site of performance, drawing on her theatrical background and deliberately manipulating the gaze.

²⁹ It is interesting that Alcott chose to use a tattoo rather than a birthmark, for example. The tattoo is not an innate physical marker but one that is put on as an ornament or, here, as a mark of possession not unlike the case of Helen in *The Morgesons*, who also bears a tattoo as a mark of her engagement. Not a biological marker, Virginie's tattoo is instead a man-made symbol. It does not mark her unique identity so much as it denotes her as an object.

Unlike the moment in *A Long Fatal Love Chase* when Rosamond discovers the corpse and uses it to fool those who see the gaze as infallible, in V.V. Douglas's perspective on his own gaze changes throughout the text. Although he initially believes the gaze to be objective and factual, by the story's conclusion he recognizes, at least intellectually, that the gaze can be manipulated easily. Crucially, Virginie deceives Douglas one final time through sleight of hand as she uses her poison ring to escape Douglas's punishment. In the end, Douglas's awareness that he needs to question what he sees does not prevent him from being tricked yet again by Virginie. Her use of the poison ring also represents a final attempt to grasp agency. Given no alternatives by Douglas, Virginie overrides any jurisdiction he claims over her by choosing her death over any earthly punishment. Left with even less choice than Christie in *Work*, Virginie chooses that final option of suicide, poisoning rather than drowning herself.

Virginie Varens and Jean Muir of *Behind a Mask* are the diabolical sisters of Alcott's Gothic tales. Both actresses, both assuming false personas to obtain their goals, these women careen into the lives of oblivious aristocrats before taking control of the social landscape to use to their advantage. Klaiber notes "the crucial moral difference between characters such as the impostor Virginie . . . and Jean Muir . . . is often overlooked; unscrupulous Virginie even puts up with her victims' death to achieve her mercenary goals . . . [;] furthermore, she is explicitly condemned by both the other characters and the narrator; poetical justice has her commit suicide" rather than be punished for her crimes (216). Jean, too, though, shares something of a bloodthirsty streak as the text notes her elation when it appears Ned Coventry has died in a train

accident before he could betray her. Both women play a risky game, and, while Virginie escapes punishment, it is Jean who more truthfully could be said to win a happy ending. Goddu contends that “unlike Jean, who can be integrated into the domestic sphere through marriage and her sentimental productions, Virginie must be exorcised from society since she refuses to invest in one man or in her sentimental role” (126). Jean, instead, gambles on multiple men and deeply depends upon playing a sentimental role to bring to fruition her obtaining a coveted socioeconomic position.

Behind a Mask begins with the arrival of governess Jean Muir to the Coventry household, where she is to tutor sixteen-year-old Bella. Mrs. Coventry is an invalid widow who feels she cannot attend to her daughter’s education and who leaves the running of the household to Lucia, a cousin. Jean appears to be a young Scottish woman of nineteen; however, the reader learns Jean is a divorced actress closer to thirty years old, who uses makeup, false teeth, wigs, and performance skills to dupe the Coventrys. She first seduces the younger son, Edward (nicknamed Ned), then the older son, Gerald, causing the brothers to fall out. In fact, Edward violently attacks Gerald because he thinks Gerald has won Jean’s love. Edward eventually learns that Jean had to leave her previous post because she seduced the family’s son, Sydney (coincidentally, a Coventry cousin). Edward gives Jean three days to leave before he exposes her. In those three days, Jean secures a marriage proposal from Sir John, Edward and Gerald’s wealthy uncle. At the same time, a train crashes nearby and Edward is falsely presumed dead. Ultimately, Edward reads Jean’s private correspondence to prove her guilt to the family.

However, Sir John and Jean are already married, and Jean's new husband refuses to hear anything detrimental about the new Mrs. Coventry.

Critics such as Fetterley, Elizabeth Schewe, and Isabell Klaiber have commented at length on the gender dynamics, performativity, and the class critique in *Behind a Mask: or, A Woman's Power*. Rather than further belabor those points, I will unpack the Gothic and naturalist elements of the text. *Behind a Mask* opens with a classic Gothic premise: a governess traveling to a country house to enter a new position with a family. *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) make use of the same convention but to very different effects. Whereas *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* position their governesses as quite helpless, even portraying the degree to which governesses might be victims of sexual coercion by their employers, and playing up their victim status as Gothic heroines, Alcott's Jean Muir makes use of the traditional tropes of the governess to gain power. Jean Muir may play the role of the victim in front of the Coventry family but only in order to subtly manipulate other characters to her advantage. The role of the Gothic heroine and meek governess is used to great effect because of its conventionality. Knowing that her position is overdetermined by her gender and class, Jean preys upon the family's expectations to elicit specific reactions beneficial to her plan.

When Jean assumes the role of governess, the rest of the family members understand their roles in relation to her because of the social conventionality of those relationships. Her initial shyness communicates her status as a True Woman to the family. The fact that multiple men fall in love with her only to be rejected out of propriety is not questioned or seen as odd, at least by the other men. However, as

Elizabeth Schewe contends, “because Muir is able to perform virtuous womanhood and upper class femininity, she reveals that virtue and class distinction are not natural but learned, performances that may hide, rather than reveal, personal and family history” (579). Jean’s performance enables the family to step into comfortable and familiar social roles, at the same time that Jean’s disingenuousness enacts a critique not only of her performance but also of the roles performed by the rest of the characters. For example, in one instance, Jean attempts to convince Gerald that her former employer’s son, Sydney, is harassing her because she refuses to reciprocate his feelings. Perfectly assuming the stance of the pitiable Gothic heroine, Jean asserts that ““he [Sydney] menaces that which is dearer than life— my good name. A look, a word can tarnish it; a scornful smile, a significant shrug can do me more harm than any blow; for I am a woman—friendless, poor, and at the mercy of his tongue. Ah, better to have died, and so have been saved the bitter pain that has come now!”” (Alcott, *Behind a Mask* 411). Playing the part of the helpless governess ironically improves Jean’s agency in the house. The governess typically has agency only in relation to her charges. However, by assuming the position of a woman whose life continues only at the mercy of others, Jean actually wrests a greater amount of agency from the situation by subverting people’s assumptions about governesses. Alcott often slyly uses examples of women rejecting agency or, in Jean’s case, giving the appearance of doing so, to demonstrate the necessity of women acting as agents. “Thrice-Tempted” (which I will discuss at the conclusion of this chapter) foregrounds the rejection of female agency to an even greater degree than does *Behind a Mask*. Jean’s example here shows once again how elusive female agency and its

narrative representations can be. It is only in seeming to play the True Woman and declining to act as an agent that Jean can best manipulate those around her to achieve her desired outcomes.

For instance, Gerald feels he knows exactly how to respond to the pitiful creature Jean embodies and asks her to ““promise to let me give what help I can; and, Jean, never say again that you are friendless”” (412). Gerald’s desire to help Jean actually places him at *her* mercy, as she gains his aid and is able to prevent her schemes from being discovered. At the same time, Gerald’s inability to see through Jean’s performance critiques his masculinity as well as his position as the eldest son of this aristocratic family. There is certainly a discourse of masculinity within *Behind a Mask*; for instance, Bella reports that Jean thought Ned ““was manly, and that was more attractive than beauty in a man”” (377). Gerald then ponders the subject of masculinity, observing that ““energy is more attractive than beauty in a man.’ She is right, but how the deuce *can* a man be energetic, with nothing to expend his energies upon?” (377, original emphasis). Notably, Gerald *does* become more energetic and active as the story progresses. At the same time, due to Jean’s prodding, Ned obtains a commission that had been indefinitely postponed due to Gerald’s laziness in obtaining it, and Sir John receives more attention and care from Jean than he does from the rest of the family.³⁰ The interrogation of masculinity throughout *Behind a Mask* demonstrates that gender determinism affects not only women but men as well. Gerald is constrained by gender and class in different ways

³⁰ Similar arguments could be made concerning several female members of the Coventry family. Bella receives schooling and Mrs. Coventry’s invalidism seems less severe because of Jean’s coddling and ministrations. Lucia, of course, derives almost no benefit from Jean’s presence as Gerald breaks his engagement with Lucia and barely speaks to her once he receives attention from Jean.

and to a different degree than Jean, but both are bound by masculine and feminine codes. Jean manipulates the gender determinism that pertains to the men, the idea that they should be constantly taking action, and turns it to her own advantage, preying upon their need to be active and their desire to appear attractive to her. Indeed, if there are actions Jean cannot be seen to undertake herself, she often enlists male characters to act as unknowing surrogate agents in her stead.

Sara Hackenberg, surprisingly, argues that Jean's interactions with the family are "on the whole, positive and empowering for the Coventrys" (442). Hackenberg contends that Jean particularly helps the Coventry men as she incites them to take action and become more masculine the longer they interact with Jean (442-45). I would agree with Hackenberg that certain individual comments or actions made by Jean do not explicitly harm the family. However, viewed cumulatively, her actions inflict a great deal of harm. Both Ned and Gerald are ultimately emasculated, first by being pitted against each other for Jean's romantic attentions, and later by being passed over for their much older and less attractive, though wealthy, uncle. Shosuke Kinugawa argues that the male characters are important performers in *Behind a Mask*, as they act out individual notions of masculinity but also respond to Jean's definition, which equates manliness with energy and activity. Kinugawa notes that "it is this combination of homosocial competition with the female gaze that motivates Gerald and Edward's embracing of a new form of masculinity. Sir John is not exempt from the design of masculine competition either, as his devotion to Muir is depicted as being largely motivated by his feeling of superior manliness over younger men" (399). The competition Jean triggers *may* heighten

expressions of masculinity, but it certainly does not unify the men as family members. Jean's schemes also reveal Mrs. Coventry to be rather a fool for allowing such a con woman into her family. Jean's actions might be perceived as positive in the sense that they shake the family out of its complacency, but the rivalries and violence instigated by Jean's presence, which particularly impact male family members, also leave lasting damage.

In addition to masculinity, the novella also explores the types of performance available within femininity. For Jean Muir, these performative identity positions relate to gendered codes of feminine behavior as well as to the classed behavior predictable for a governess. Muir is expected to behave as a governess might in a piece of sentimental fiction, and *Behind a Mask* relentlessly experiments with the tropes of sentimental literature such that keen readers will easily detect the multiple valences of this story. The text incorporates sentimental structures and the tropes of the governess to which the Coventry family responds, while readers also witness rare moments in which Jean deconstructs her performances, has a moment offstage where she drops the role of demure governess, or strategizes about her end game. The role of the governess, as depicted in sentimental and Gothic fiction, is essential to Jean's performance and the Coventry family's willingness to accept her overly meek persona. As both men and women perform in *Behind a Mask*, Kinugawa argues that "the difference between Muir and Gerald in terms of their relationship to their masks crystallizes one of the two central issues of this novella: the unique agency endowed upon those aware of the performative nature of subjectivity" (389). Both Jean and Gerald experience gender determinism, but

a key difference between the two is that Jean understands how to harness performance to function within narrow codes of gendered behavior. Gerald, on the other hand, initially observes Jean's performance, remarking "'scene first, very well done'" when Jean faints shortly after arriving at the Coventry home (Alcott, *Behind a Mask* 364). Yet, as the story progresses, Gerald seeks to look beneath a performance to what is 'real,' not considering identity *itself* as an act of performance. Gerald, unlike Jean, fails to recognize the performative nature of identity, particularly as it relates to gender. As is the case with Ulster in "La Jeune," Gerald cannot see past the dichotomy of the natural versus the artificial.

Jean capitalizes on the performativity of identity quite adeptly, even manifesting as an otherworldly creation to the Coventry men in a way that is unsettling but also desirable. Indeed, Jean is often described by Gerald Coventry as a supernatural creature, initially as "'a most uncanny little specimen'" (365), then "the Scotch witch" (383) or "his fair-haired enchantress" (395). Furthermore, Jean creates an effect like a "spell" (409) upon Gerald, who later declares "Jean, I think you are a witch. Scotland is the home of weird, uncanny creatures, who take lovely shapes for the bedevilment of poor weak souls. Are you one of those fair deceivers?" (436). Jean replies, "I *am* a witch," and goes on to warn Gerald to be careful of her, a rare moment when Jean does not act in her self-interest (436, original emphasis). Part Jane Eyre and part Bertha Mason, Jean Muir³¹ deftly negotiates her dual position as Gothic naturalist heroine and supernatural witch.

³¹ Sara Hackenberg perceptively notes that Jean Muir's name is remarkably close to that of Jane Eyre (438).

In addition, although Jean refers to her larger plan to marry into the family several times, such that the reader realizes she has her moves carefully plotted out, it is increasingly clear as the story approaches its conclusion that her ultimate success depends upon luck and chance as much as it does her planning. Once Edward learns of Jean's failed affair with Sydney, Jean's dependence on chance becomes much more obvious. Hoping to secure a marriage proposal from Sir John Coventry, the patriarch of the family, Jean visits his house. Although Jean

had grown very calm, . . . it was the calmness of desperation. She had hoped that the first tears would produce the avowal for which she waited. It had not, and she began to fear that her last chance was slipping from her. Did the old man love her? If so, why did he not speak? Eager to profit by each moment, she was on the alert for any hopeful hint, any propitious word, look, or act, and every nerve was strung to the utmost.

(430)

Acting the part of the meek governess yet again here, Jean cannot actually say that she would be thrilled to marry Sir John. Instead, she constructs an elaborate ruse using pantomime to allow him to interpret her willingness to marry him. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser contends that "Jean's dilemma [that she must either secure a proposal from Sir John or leave her position] and its resolution illustrate how the sentimental ideal of womanhood demands an opposing shrewdness" (51). Yet, Jean's shrewdness alone is not enough to obtain what she desires. Despite all of Jean's careful planning, her fate lies in the chance that Sir John will see her pantomime and, more crucially, that he will correctly

interpret her actions as portraying affection for him. This scene presents a rare scene of one of Alcott's actresses relying on the male gaze to correctly interpret what it views. If Sir John does not interpret Jean's performance correctly, she seems to be out of chances and out of luck.

Jean's plot barrels on, growing more and more tenuous as it nears its conclusion. After securing a betrothal to Sir John, "all the next day, Jean was in a state of the most intense anxiety, as every hour brought the crisis nearer, and every hour might bring defeat, for the subtlest skill is often thwarted by some unforeseen accident" (Alcott, *Behind a Mask* 437). Muir's emotional frenzy acknowledges her understanding of how chance can either help her or completely unravel her goal of marrying into the wealthy Coventry family. Initially, it appears that Sir John may be ill and that his health might prevent their wedding from occurring. Instead, it is another chance occurrence, a train accident, which impacts both Jean and the Coventry family. The unpredictable train accident first helps and then hinders Jean's case, as Edward Coventry is initially presumed dead before appearing at the family home, an eerily Gothic moment as it is as though he has returned from the dead. Ultimately, Jean's success or failure depends upon a singular moment. Following Edward's reappearance and, with it, Jean's impending exposure, she packs her trunk and rides to the train station as

a sense of utter weariness came over her, and she longed to lie down and forget. But *the last chance* still remained, and till that failed, she would not give up The first glimpse of Sir John's frank face would betray the truth. If he knew all, there was no hope, and she would go her way

alone. If he knew nothing, there was yet time for the marriage; and once his wife, she knew she was safe, because for the honor of his name he would screen and protect her. (443, emphasis added)

Separating this passage from the overarching Gothic romance plot of *Behind a Mask*, Jean's crisis is quite naturalist. Her future and her fate depend upon whether or not Sir John has met with Edward, who will expose Jean. In fact, earlier Jean vows that "'if this [final chance of wedding Sir John] fails, I'll not go back to my old life, but end all at once'" (427). Jean's final crisis establishes a starkly naturalist trajectory. Either chance will facilitate her success, or she will commit suicide, linking her predicament to so many other female characters in American literature.

Judith Fetterley, in an early critical analysis of *Behind a Mask*, uses language that echoes Darwinian and naturalist notions, particularly the idea of competition among a species and the idea of the survival of the fittest. She argues that Jean's "emotions are 'normal'— the desire to win; the desire for revenge; the desire to manipulate, dominate, and control. Not 'feminine' emotions, but certainly 'human'" as the characters in *Behind a Mask* "all agree that mastery is the best game in town" (Fetterley 11). Fetterley's catalogue of emotions sounds close to some of McTeague's driving psychological factors, connecting Jean with classic naturalist characters. As Fetterley points out, however, Jean's human drive to compete has to be continually curtailed or concealed in order for her to be accepted as feminine. Hence, Jean is in a position of strategic paralysis when she visits Sir John. She has to appear utterly guileless, while playing a

covert game to find a husband and escape ruin. Jean's position is not unique among female protagonists, for Fetterley notes that

to be a good 'little woman,' one must possess acute consciousness, consummate acting ability, psychological strength, self-control and a capacity for hard work. Yet the role of little woman demands that the person playing it appear to be totally unself-conscious and even unconscious, completely 'natural,' weak, timorous, out of control, and passive. To put it succinctly, Jean must manage to get everyone obsessed with her while appearing neither to desire nor to attract attention. (7)

Thus, Jean approaches a Gothic naturalist situation with both determination and overdetermination. She recognizes the tenuous position she occupies while also seeking to master the situation. She refuses the hand she has been dealt but must in the end rely on chance and her ability to perform to save her. Some forty years later, we will meet a much sweetened version of Jean in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

Having examined several examples of Alcott's works which illuminate various elements of the Gothic and naturalism, I will now conclude with one of Alcott's lesser-known Gothic thrillers, "Thrice-Tempted" (1867), which explicitly showcases her Gothic naturalism. "Thrice Tempted" relates the story of two women vying for the affections of the same man. Ruth has "no beauty but much strength of character" (61), lives with her ailing grandmother and was "left . . . a comfortable fortune" by her father (64). In sharp contrast, Laura is "a tall, brilliant girl, dressed with a taste and skill that enhanced her beauty, and bearing about her the indefinable air of one which instantly marks those who

have been luxuriously nurtured from birth” (“Thrice Tempted” 61). Ruth is engaged to the handsome and wealthy Walter Strathsay, heir to a Scottish title and ancestral home. Laura, said to have a bevy of suitors, quickly covets Walter after she sees Ruth’s locket portrait of him and learns of his wealth. Soon, Ruth discovers that Walter and Laura have been corresponding secretly and have developed romantic feelings for one another. Walter leaves Ruth’s residence so as not to further his relationship with Laura. Following the discovery of her friend and fiancée’s betrayal, Ruth is tempted three times to allow her rival, Laura, to die. First, she learns of a deadly disease infecting a neighboring town that Laura frequents (using the pretense of doing charity work while secretly sending letters to and receiving them from Walter). Ruth is deeply tested but *does* warn Laura of the disease. However, Laura still contracts the illness. Ruth nurses her, discovering ongoing correspondence between Laura and Walter. One night, Ruth watches a drape catch fire while Laura sleeps nearby. Again, although she is tempted to do nothing and allow the fire to kill Laura, Ruth puts out the fire and saves her ‘friend.’ In both of these two temptations, Ruth is pulled out of her inability to act by remembering Walter. Laura’s illness then worsens, and she appears to have died. In saying goodbye to Laura, Ruth touches her forehead and feels it to be damp. Ruth tells no one of her suspicions, and Laura is buried. The day of Walter and Ruth’s wedding arrives, but Walter remains missing all day. Walter finally appears and tells Ruth that he knows what happened to Laura because Ruth told him the story in her sleep and he has confirmed it by visiting Laura’s grave.

“Thrice-Tempted” foregrounds Gothic naturalism in its presentation of the forces of chance, as well as in its presentation of female agency as something perceived to be unnatural and therefore dangerous. Indeed, the story continually complicates the very definition of agency for women as Ruth wishes to act in her self-interest by *not* taking action, instead leaving things to chance. Counterintuitively, she attempts to relinquish agency to achieve her goals, instead leaving chance to eliminate Laura. Ruth would rather be a passive witness to Laura’s death than either expose Laura and Walter’s betrayal or resign herself to losing Walter. “Thrice-Tempted” castigates cultural notions of agency for women and indicts Ruth’s complicity with these limited, and limiting, definitions of women’s agency. However, the story refuses to present Ruth as someone lacking agency and also refuses to absolve her of her choices. Ruth clearly *does* have agency, and “Thrice-Tempted” ceaselessly interrogates her passive enactment of it. The story’s investigation of agency is made much more chilling by its Gothic overtones, which amount to a female retelling of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839).³² Alcott’s story reanimates Madeline Usher, the beautiful, deadly woman central to Poe’s narrative theories, in Laura who is buried alive while casting Ruth as a female Roderick Usher. However, “Thrice-Tempted” portrays its female characters in much sharper focus and scrutinizes their actions.

While the narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” seems powerless to change the events set into motion, “Thrice-Tempted” pivots from one critical opportunity for intervention to the next. Each of these moments of possible intervention contains the

³² “Thrice-Tempted” also curiously resembles “Ligeia” (1838) in the strange love triangle between one man and two women prompted by the death of Ligeia. Ligeia continues to live on and haunt her husband and his new wife just as Laura’s presence lingers after her death to haunt Walter and Ruth.

potential to catapult the story in a number of different directions based on Ruth's choices and actions. Comparing Alcott and Poe in relation to the confidence story, Gail K. Smith argues that "unlike Poe, Alcott does not always wish to leave us with a clear picture of what is real and what is false" (50). Smith's comparison holds true in relation to "Thrice-Tempted" as well. Readers are hard pressed to determine what a real act of agency is and what it is not. Given the story's examination of agency, though, how are readers to interpret the final revelation of the story? Does Ruth have agency in the moment of telling Walter what happened to Laura? Being responsible for what you do while asleep seems like a stretch to definitions of agency. Further, the story posits that Ruth is responsible for what she has *failed* to do, no matter how the story is revealed. That is, her omission in not alerting others to her concerns about Laura's damp forehead is just as bad as if Ruth had violently killed her. However, Ruth views leaving things up to chance as a negation of her own agency. If chance rules that fire should overtake Laura's bedroom, who is Ruth to go against it? Many Gothic naturalist texts portray women caught in situations where they have no ability to act. However, "Thrice Tempted" presents a very different dilemma. Ruth believes she lacks agency when over and over again the story confirms the ability, and necessity, of Ruth's taking action.

Ruth relies on chance as a benevolent force to aid her. Both of the times she discovers secret correspondence between Laura and Walter, it is only "accident [that] enlightened her" (70). Ruth fails to account, however, for the possibility that chance might work against her. Indeed, one might well argue that confessing to a horrible crime to one's beloved the night before one's wedding while having a dream is pure rotten luck.

On the other hand, it also could be read as karmic payback. A purely Gothic reading would cast this as the uncanny, or the return of the repressed. The hidden secret returns at the worst possible moment to torment its subject. A purely naturalist reading would cite Ruth's confession as a freak of chance, perhaps noting that in her earlier temptations she might have gotten away with not acting to prevent Laura's death but in this final temptation events work against her. Reading the story as a Gothic naturalist text, I am not so eager to let Ruth escape blame. I would argue that it is Ruth's denial of her own agency that ultimately condemns her within the story. Like so many naturalist characters, she unwittingly acts against herself by not taking action for others.

While there is validity to Ruth's perception of herself as a victim, she never escapes from that limiting mode of interpellation that robs her of agency and options. Unlike Alcott's actresses and *femmes fatales*, Ruth lacks the knowledge to use performativity to her advantage; neither does she possess the cunning of a Jean Muir or Virginie Varens to turn the situation to her own advantage. Ruth uses her victimhood to justify her inaction, reasoning that "'twice I have conquered temptation, and been generous only to be more wronged. Now, I will yield to it, and if a word could save this traitorous friend, I will not utter it'" (76). The narrator notes that Ruth's failure to do anything "left the doubt unsolved" regarding Laura's condition (76). While Ruth's inaction is here just as deadly as taking action, Ruth's perception of the event positions her as someone who lacks the ability to change things. Ruth's conditional language, "'if a word *could* save this traitorous friend,'" posits that Laura might actually be dead, leaving Ruth mistaken about her damp forehead, and therefore blameless (76, emphases

added). Similarly, the characterization that Ruth's doubt is "unsolved" categorizes her inaction as a moment of uncertainty rather than a cold-blooded choice to allow a possibly living woman to be buried alive (76).

The repetitive nature of Ruth's choices and her responses to Laura correspond with one of the interpretive shifts Jennifer Fleissner proposes in relation to naturalism. Fleissner argues that "naturalism's most characteristic plot, as in the case of the modern young woman, is marked by neither the steep arc of decline nor that of triumph, but rather by an ongoing, nonlinear, repetitive motion— back and forth, around and around, on and on— that has the distinctive effect of seeming also like a stuckness in place" (9). Ruth certainly understands her situation as being caught between two untenable choices: not acting and allowing Laura to be hurt or killed or acting to save Laura and inadvertently ruining her own happiness. Ultimately, though, the story shows that Ruth's belief in her own entrapment within these binary choices to be a drastic misinterpretation.

Significantly, Ruth misunderstands not only her own agency but also that of Walter. Reading Walter's secret letters to Laura, Ruth believes "his letters proved that he had not yielded without a struggle, and as she read, Ruth forgave him . . . believing him more sinned against than sinning" (72). While it is clear that Laura is eager to win Walter's affection, the story does not portray Walter as entirely blameless in his relationship with Laura. Yet Ruth absolves him of all guilt. When Walter first meets Laura, Ruth warns him of being charmed by her friend. Surprisingly, Walter agrees that "if this girl is such a siren, I had better shun her for both our sakes" (67). In this early moment within the text, Ruth *does* openly act as an agent, first warning Walter and then

asking him to tell her frankly if he wishes to break their engagement later on as she “can hear anything but deceit” (68). In truly Gothic fashion, this pronouncement reverberates at the end of the text when it is Walter who becomes the victim of *Ruth*’s egregious deceit. The text culminates in a veritable blame game as Walter and Ruth each try to determine what exactly has happened in their warped love triangle. Learning that “a white figure with vacant eyes and pallid cheeks came gliding in” and “told a sad tale of deceit and wrong, of hidden sins and struggles,” Ruth assumes that “it was Laura come back from her tomb” (78). Indeed, Laura’s face has frequently haunted Ruth “in those miserable nights, when the dead face confronted her in the darkness with a mute reproach in its dim eyes” (77). However, Walter reveals it was Ruth herself who confessed, while Ruth maintains “it was you [Walter] who drove me to this” crime (78). In this survival of the fittest competition, Ruth has become the ghostly figure, rather than Laura, and Ruth’s confession, told in a trancelike state, haunts the story’s conclusion. Again, her refusal to take the blame highlights both her determination to succeed and the determinism that is her undoing.

In the diverse grouping of texts I have examined—*Work*, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, “La Jeune,” *V.V.*, *Behind a Mask*, and “Thrice-Tempted”—Alcott deploys complex constructions and deconstructions of the body, gender, identity, and agency which constitute her form of Gothic naturalism. Reading Alcott through the lens of Gothic naturalism adds yet another kind of authorial persona to the several already established in her body of work. Alcott manages to take the potboiler format of the sensation story, a genre intended to entertain newspaper readers as well as to resolve the

author's financial problems, and in many of these Gothic thrillers she creates complex narrative worlds in which Gothic impulses are defamiliarized to startling effect with regard to gender and biological determinism. Furthermore, Alcott subtly anticipates naturalist verities such as the force of chance to determine lives and an impulse to document events for the reader through the framing technique of the gaze. Alcott's stories portray a wide variety of women but place them all in situations that test their agency; some succeed, most do not. Yet, in portraying the intricacies of these characters' choices, their struggles over when to take action, and their often ingenious methods for survival, Alcott moves well beyond the portrayal of little women and, indeed, detonates the stereotypical conventions of nineteenth-century female characters.

CHAPTER THREE

SOUR APPLES: LOST GIRLS, GOTHIC NATURALISM, AND MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

In her acceptance speech for the Howells Gold Medal, awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman argued that the practice of writing regionalist fiction was not as simple as its critics thought. She defended regionalism and the

many American writers who are criticised by men of other nations for making too much use of it, for placing too much stress upon back grounds [sic] of limited areas. I wonder what else is possible. This country is so gigantic both in area and composition that one little work of fiction would make about as much showing against the whole, as a mosquito against the solar system. One really has to go, as it were into a room of this Country in order to have one's work visible. It is very easy for a man living in a country as large as of one of the smallest States to talk. Let him try it. (qtd in Newlin 158)

Freeman certainly did make her mark in one "room" in particular, detailing the character of New England women at length in her fiction. Critics continue to recognize Mary Wilkins Freeman primarily as a regionalist and realist in her fiction, but given her prolific output, there is still much to explore in her work. As Mary R. Reichardt observes, "despite the hundred years and the changes in literary style and criticism that have distanced us from her earliest . . . published works, Mary Wilkins Freeman remains an

anomaly in the American literary tradition: no one quite knows where or even if she fits in” the created canon (“Mary Wilkins Freeman” 73). Much like the case with Stoddard and Alcott, critics have struggled to account for the prolific and wide-ranging nature of much of Freeman’s work. Critics discuss specific texts, such as “A New England Nun” (1887), “The Revolt of ‘Mother’” (1891), “A Church Mouse” (1889), and “Louisa” (1890), over and over again, while much of Freeman’s extensive body of work, including many of her novels, receives sparse mention. Traditionally, critics have viewed the aforementioned stories as the best that Freeman’s work has to offer. I do not question the value of the stories themselves or object to their receiving critical attention. However, I argue that many of Freeman’s other works, particularly her ghost stories, also merit discussion by critics. The ghost stories’ engagement with gender and the Gothic genre most interest me, but they also exemplify Freeman’s excellent storytelling craft, specifically the attention she pays to narrative structure and her complex employment of narrators.

Freeman’s career was quite long and varied. In fact, Reichardt posits three phases of Freeman’s writing career, the first from 1883 to 1889 during which she published fifty-two stories, all but three of which were published in *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Harper’s Monthly*, or *Harper’s Weekly* (“Introduction” vii). Reichardt notes that many of Freeman’s best known stories, such as those listed above, date from this early period of her career. The second phase of Freeman’s career, from 1891 to 1902, is comprised of much more experimental writing before she returned to the regionalist hallmarks of her early work in the final phase of her career from 1902 to 1930 (xiii-xv). Reichardt’s

periodization of Freeman's work helps to organize Freeman's expansive canon, although there are always exceptions and anomalies in any attempt to categorize even one literary work, much less an entire career. *By the Light of the Soul* (1907), for example, is one of the novels Freeman wrote in the final portion of her career, but I would argue that it remains extremely experimental in its aesthetic and its engagement with genre, even as it utilizes many of Freeman's trademarks such as the portrayal of strong-willed characters (particularly women), compulsive behavior, the struggle to fulfill one's duty, and uneasy family dynamics. As some critics do note, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman often writes narratives in which very ordinary characters find themselves in exceptionally extraordinary situations, situations which they themselves never anticipated or expected to experience. For example, in "A New England Prophet" (1898), Freeman depicts a doomsday prophet who stakes his farm and all his possessions on a bet over the date of the end of the world with his brother. Needless to say, the world does not end, and the prophet's brother settles their bet by demanding a weekly allotment of seven mince pies, with extra pies to be allowed for Thanksgiving and Independence Day, made by his sister-in-law. Faced with the knowledge that his prophecies have proven false, the preacher faces not the end times but a new beginning in which he has lost his followers and his standing in the community. The dissonance created between the characters' milieu and their circumstances as well as beliefs only heightens the eerie nature of many of Freeman's works. While there are recognizable generic periods and thematic preoccupations within her canon, by examining Freeman's works in relation to Gothic

naturalism, I hope to invite more varied generic interpretations of Freeman's work in general.

I will discuss a range of Freeman's texts, opening with examples from her novel *The Portion of Labor* (1901) before examining a number of short stories such as "A Gentle Ghost" (1891), "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" (1903), "The Lost Ghost" (1903), and "Old Woman Magoun" (1905). The texts I have chosen all deal with lost girls who suffer abuse from their parents and are often killed as a result. In analyzing stories of abused girls over the course of Freeman's career, the similarity of the stories' plots allows me to focus more deeply on the narrative techniques Freeman uses to convey the storylines. Freeman's work highlights that there is not only a thematic component that can be used to identify Gothic naturalism, but, indeed, narrative techniques can equally mark a story as Gothic naturalist. In particular, I will highlight the use of storytelling, narration, and frame narratives in these stories. The triptych of ghost stories I discuss best exemplifies this as they help chart the progression of Freeman's work from regionalist to Gothic naturalist. Interestingly, the Gothic naturalist tale utilizes the most intricate array of narrative techniques. Because Freeman's stories are very well-structured, her technique is displayed to great effect. However, there are also glimpses of Gothic naturalist narrative technique in the other authors examined in this study. Much Gothic naturalist fiction tries to depict experiences that often remain unwritten in American literature. In giving voice to what is typically thought to be unspeakable (both in the sense of something that is difficult to express through language and a subject matter that is considered repugnant), Gothic naturalist authors must be willing to deviate

from and experiment with traditional storytelling techniques. For example, Elizabeth Stoddard's use of so many different generic registers within *The Morgesons* creates a hybrid text in order to depict a young woman's progression from childhood to adulthood. One genre alone could not capture Cassandra Morgeson's story in a satisfactory way, and so Stoddard experiments with many at the same time. In addition, Wharton's frequent use of ellipses in *Summer*, which I will discuss in chapter four, illustrates her struggle with the unspeakable in the language of the text itself. Freeman's lost girl stories highlight Gothic naturalist narrative technique while also demonstrating crucial failures in communal storytelling. While these stories initially appear to be regionalist texts, closer examination reveals Freeman to be critiquing regionalism itself within the stories at the same time that their genre shifts to something else—Gothic naturalism. Specifically, these ghostly tales demonstrate that regionalism does not adequately convey certain kinds of stories, and, therefore, Freeman turns to naturalism and couples it with the Gothic in order to explore more fully stories about child abuse.

There is scant critical discussion of Freeman as a naturalist, although more recently Jennifer L. Fleissner, Monika M. Elbert, and Donna Campbell have advocated for including Freeman in the naturalist canon. Jennifer L. Fleissner argues that Freeman's works would be a crucial intervention in the classic naturalist canon. Indeed, Fleissner contends that "Freeman's form of regionalism shares with naturalism a belief that these sorts of figures [unusual and even grotesque portrayals of women] can stand at fiction's center stage, rather than being relegated to marginal comic relief, a gesture that often goes hand in hand with a greater attention to the lower class" (121-22). Fleissner

focuses on Freeman's portrayal of domesticity, specifically as it compares to that of other writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sarah Orne Jewett. In fact, Fleissner argues, Freeman's engagement with domesticity is quite different because "what makes Freeman's vision distinct from these feminist accounts (including Gilman's theoretical ones), and closer to what we see in naturalism, is that her *gothic* portrayal of domesticity is not intended simply to demonstrate the need for a more healthfully organized home life, the lurid details of which could finally be mastered" (110-11, emphasis added). Fleissner thus begins to link Freeman's use of naturalism with the Gothic through her depiction of domesticity. I wish to add to Fleissner's observations and will argue that it is not only Freeman's choice of character and subject matter which establishes her naturalism and combines it with the Gothic. In addition, her aesthetic choices and the way she constructs her stories also directly contribute to her Gothic naturalism. Freeman, through the deployment of narrators (sometimes more than one in a single story), attempts to contain the depiction of violence in her stories. Violent acts are described concisely rather than being sensationalized for readers. At the same time, Freeman's Gothic naturalist short stories also engage with Gothic horror by preserving the unsettling effects of violent acts on those who witness them in person or through storytelling. At times writing horror fiction without depicting its trademark gore, Freeman prompts readers to confront Gothic naturalist horror through her unique style.

Monika M. Elbert, like Fleissner, views Freeman's work as a vital corrective to the naturalist canon. She asserts that Freeman "shares with Naturalist writers the bleak vision of life" and that "the old conception of Freeman as prim and provincial New

England regionalist or bastion of Puritan traditions and values must be obliterated if we are to give her the credit due her and place her among the ranks of the most noteworthy Naturalist male writers” (198). Fleissner and Elbert assert that we as critics must build on traditional readings of Freeman to identify the naturalism that remains largely unexplored in her work. By discussing some of her lesser known stories, I hope to contribute to this conversation.

Other critics do not explicitly discuss Freeman as a naturalist, yet the language used to describe her work certainly aligns itself with naturalism. For example, although Gregg Camfield notes that Freeman’s “A Poetess” (1890) demonstrates a “resistance to naturalism” (223), he also describes her works as being “obsessively concerned with individual freedom and the consequences to freedom of social and biological constraints. Freeman’s work repeatedly confronts choices between individual freedoms and social connections, between justice and compatibility. . . . [s]howing that each of us has no choice but to make choices” (215).

Indeed, Camfield uses many of the keywords often said to define naturalism, such as “individual freedom” and its tension with “social and biological constraints” (215). Specifically in terms of Gothic naturalism, Camfield’s contention that Freeman’s work often looks both at the need to make choices and at the fallout once a choice has been made speaks powerfully to the connection between Freeman’s work and that of Stoddard and Alcott.

Although critics often discuss Freeman’s portrayal of domesticity, unmarried women, and relationships between female characters, the use of child characters in her

fiction has yet to be adequately discussed. In fact, many of Freeman's stories engage with lost children. For example, "The Little Maid at the Door" (1898), set during the Salem witch trials, tells the story of a young girl left alone in her isolated family home after the rest of her family have been arrested and charged as witches. In addition, *By the Light of the Soul* features the disappearance of the protagonist's half-sister as a critical episode within the novel which alters everything that follows it. Within Freeman's stories, lost children may be separated or estranged from their family, they may mysteriously disappear for a period of time, or they may die. The children themselves often seem quite ephemeral in Freeman's texts. At times they are ghosts; at other times they may be living children. In either case, the stories and novels tend to focus on the adults responsible for these lost children, oftentimes indicting them for failing to intervene at a crucial moment to protect these children. My discussion of lost children in Freeman's works is inspired by Tanya Horeck's account of lost girls in the work of Joyce Carol Oates. Horeck notes the contemporary popularity of true crime stories and observes that "the victim at this crime scene at which we all regularly meet is, more often than not, a lost girl" (24). Freeman's lost children, too, are most often female.³³

Freeman's stories and novels point again and again to instances in which young girls fail to be protected by their families and those entrusted with their care, such as stepmothers. Although fathers sometimes fail to act in the best interest of their daughters in texts such as *Pembroke*, "Old Woman Magoun," and *By the Light of the Soul*, in these same texts

³³ The character of Ephraim in *Pembroke* (1894) is the most notable exception of Freeman's depicting a boy as a lost child. The novel certainly has Gothic naturalist tendencies, but I have omitted it from my discussion here because, although Ephraim eventually dies, his parents' involvement in his death is far different from the actions taken by parents and caregivers in Freeman's ghost stories or in "Old Woman Magoun."

and in numerous other ones, it is maternal figures who repeatedly fail to recognize children suffering from abuse and neglect or who fail to act when confronted with the evidence of possible abuse. The gendered dynamics portrayed through parental/filial relationships in the stories of these lost children, then, indicate at least one strain of violence perpetrated against young girls which is enabled, if not perpetuated, by other women. Despite the strong will of Freeman's female characters, through the examples of lost girls these texts portray a social and familial structure in which young women have no recourse to will or agency and, simultaneously, a structure in which older women who *do* have some power lack enough knowledge or, sometimes, confidence to break with social codes and extract children from dangerous situations. Alternately, as I will discuss later in the case of "Old Woman Magoun," Mrs. Magoun has only enough power to prevent her granddaughter Lily from falling into worse hands but not enough power to place Lily in a safe environment, protected from would-be abusers. Ultimately, Freeman's stories about lost girls often remain critical of adult figures while also articulating the social binds that restrain adults from taking action. In this manner, Freeman explores naturalist dynamics of choice and agency at the same time that the documentation of the abuse and the presentation of these children as haunting the consciences of adults relate her work to the Gothic.

Choices, as they are explored in naturalism, are differentiated from the way choices are presented in other genres of literature. While choices feature prominently in sentimentalism, for example, the didacticism of that genre makes the preferred or 'good' choice much clearer (if not always easier to make). Naturalism, on the other hand,

presents making choices as a true conundrum. Within naturalism, it is impossible to accurately predict the outcomes of various choices, and it is even more difficult to anticipate the chain of events set off by making a particular choice. Decisions are much murkier within naturalism and even more so in Gothic naturalism where the addition of supernatural forces makes events increasingly unpredictable. Freeman's works featuring difficult decisions and decisions which cause disastrous consequences provide one of her fiction's strongest connections to Gothic naturalism.

The Portion of Labor illustrates significant examples of Freeman's frequent use of naturalist language and theme, while it also includes several episodes featuring lost girls. As a whole the novel is not Gothic naturalist; rather, it is more starkly naturalist (despite its happy ending), but key moments demonstrate the intrusion of Gothic naturalism into the text. I will begin by examining one section of *The Portion of Labor* as a way to illuminate a Gothic naturalist aesthetic within this unusual novel, demonstrating Freeman's use of this genre in her novels as well as in her short stories. The novel focuses on the Brewsters, a working-class family, several of whom are employed at Lloyd's, a nearby shoe factory. Lloyd's factory is one of several large ones in the town and an important source of jobs. However, Andrew Brewster and his sister-in-law, Eva Loud, as well as her fiancé Jim Tenney, are subject to abrupt shutdowns and layoffs at the factory such that their employment is quite tenuous. Andrew and Fanny Brewster's daughter, Ellen Brewster, is singled out from childhood as a special and unusual girl. She runs away as a small child and is taken in briefly by Cynthia Lennox, a wealthy relation of Mr. Lloyd, the factory owner. Cynthia misses a young boy she had been raising and is

unable to deny herself the opportunity to keep Ellen in her home. Ellen eventually does return to her parents but refuses to say who cared for her while she was gone.

Later, Robert Lloyd, Mr. Lloyd's nephew and heir apparent, begins to pursue Ellen romantically. Cynthia Lennox, in turn, offers to send Ellen to Vassar College as a way to atone for preventing Ellen from reuniting with her parents when she was a child (although this atonement is known only to a few characters as Cynthia never confesses her role in prolonging Ellen's disappearance nor does Ellen expose Cynthia). As Ellen is preparing to go to Vassar, Jim Tenney, now Eva's husband and father of her daughter, Amabel, has abandoned his family for another wealthy woman in part, perhaps, because he has been unable to find work after being laid off from the factory. Eva has a nervous breakdown during which she unsuccessfully attempts to kill her daughter and has to be institutionalized in an expensive mental hospital. Realizing that her family cannot afford Eva's care supported solely by her father's wages, Ellen begins to work at Lloyd's and tells Cynthia she will not attend Vassar. After the murder of Mr. Lloyd by one of his employees, Robert takes over the factory and lowers employee wages with no explanation, triggering a strike that Ellen helps to provoke. Once the workers return to the factory in economic desperation following a horrible winter, Robert agrees to reduce the cut in wages, and he and Ellen become engaged at the novel's conclusion.

I want to begin with examples from *The Portion of Labor*, not to cherry pick passages that fit with my theory of Gothic naturalism, but to show that even in later works of Freeman's that are largely left out of critical conversations, there are striking parallels to both naturalism and Gothic naturalism. Donna Campbell argues that "in *The*

Portion of Labor, Freeman approaches the radical expression of naturalism described by Pizer” (“‘Where Are the Ladies?’”156). Pizer’s conceptualization of naturalism is closely tied to the canonical works of the Big Four (Crane, Norris, Dreiser, and London), and he describes naturalist fiction as depicting the world of “the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence” (10-11). In this way, Freeman’s *The Portion of Labor* does match Pizer’s definition of naturalist fiction. It is curious, then, as Campbell points out, that Freeman’s novel is so rarely discussed as a naturalist text. Limited examples from *The Portion of Labor* will help establish Freeman’s incursions into Gothic naturalism before I discuss a series of ghost stories that display Freeman’s ability to tell similar narratives in several different generic forms. In particular, the story of Eva Tenney and her daughter Amabel serves as the clearest example of Gothic naturalism in *The Portion of Labor*, and Amabel serves as another one of Freeman’s lost children.³⁴ I am examining a span of five chapters, from the time when Eva reveals that Jim has run away to the moment when Fanny brings Amabel home after her attempted murder. Eva’s admission that Jim has abandoned Amabel and herself is not only a crucial plot development that greatly impacts the second half of the novel, but it also shifts the novel’s aesthetic for several chapters as it foregrounds the Gothic and surreal elements also seen in naturalism.

³⁴ Ellen’s character, too, acts as an example of one of the lost children because of her running away. I have chosen to focus more closely on the example of Amabel Tenney because the aesthetics and narrative techniques in that portion of the novel more closely resemble Gothic naturalism, whereas Ellen’s running away and her short encounter with Cynthia are more purely Gothic. In addition, the brief nature of Ellen’s disappearance and the fact that she suffers little harm makes her one of the luckier examples of lost children in Freeman’s work. This is not to say that Ellen remains unaffected by the incident, since the connection between herself and Cynthia is crucial to later portions of the novel, but in the other examples I will discuss, there is a greater degree of physical and emotional harm experienced by the lost child.

Specifically, the novel highlights both Eva's and Amabel's severe physical reactions to Jim's departure. Before Eva confesses that Jim has left, she "flung herself . . . on the floor, and fairly writhed. Words were not enough expression for her violent temperament. She had to resort to physical manifestations or lose her reason. As she writhed, she groaned as one might do who was dying in extremity of pain" (Freeman, *The Portion of Labor* 283). Additionally, Eva presents "a face distorted with wrath and woe, like a mask of tragedy," and "she shrieked out, in an awful, shrill voice, which was like the note of an angry bird" (283). Eva thus transforms before their eyes into a grotesque creature. As she recounts Jim's despair and his leaving, "there was something dreadful about her rigid attitude . . . [;] she stood in that horrible inflexibility, with eyes like black stones fixed on something unseeable" (284). Furthermore, "the veins on her forehead grew turgid, her lips seemed to swell, her hair seemed to move as she talked" (285). Eva does not exhibit the feminized ills of the classic Gothic heroine. Nevertheless, she displays the physical markers of her family's tragedy. Unlike the effect of terror, which can connect one to the sublime and progress to different emotional states, Eva experiences horror which she cannot process intellectually or emotionally, and so her body becomes an outlet for this trauma. Although naturalism more often depicts male grotesques such as *McTeague's* Zerkow, *McTeague* himself, and *Maggie's* fat red man, Eva's episode recalls the description of Deborah in Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills* (1861). Deborah is described as looking like Hugh Wolfe, "only her face was even more ghastly, her lips bluer, her eyes more watery"; she is a "weak, flaccid wretch"

(6). As noted by Fleissner, Freeman's use of the grotesque is not only central to her own work but a key component shared with naturalism.

Eva and Amabel present the most explicit portrayal of mothering gone awry in *The Portion of Labor*. For example, Eva "pounced upon her [Amabel] with kisses, with a fury as of rage instead of love" (288). Signaling the transformation of maternal love into violent fury, Eva's strange attack in this scene only escalates later in her attempt to kill Amabel. Donna Campbell pays particular attention to "the novel's theme of perverse maternity" across many different mother/child relationships ("Where Are the Ladies?" 157). Indeed, Campbell asserts "there are no entirely fit mothers here" (157). The portrayal of lost girls in Gothic naturalist texts often coexists with depictions of inadequate mothering. As I will discuss further in my next chapter, just as Gothic naturalism uncovers the devastating childhoods of lost girls, it also critiques idyllic portrayals of motherhood.

As much as Eva and her mothering are affected by Jim's abandonment, Amabel, too, is deeply affected. Amabel also experiences a stark physical reaction to her father's departure, as "she was vibrating from head to foot as if strung on wires . . . [;] she winked rapidly, her lids obscuring and revealing her eyes until they seemed a series of blue sparks. She was no paler than usual—that was scarcely possible— but her skin looked transparent, pulses were evident all over her face and her little neck" (Freeman, *The Portion of Labor* 283-84). The mention here of "her little neck" foregrounds Amabel's physical vulnerability and the forthcoming attempt on her life (284). As is the case with Eva's physical reaction, Amabel loses control of her body at the same time that her

body's reflexes communicate her anxiety. Amabel has much more luck than do many of Freeman's other lost children, which is incredible given her dire experience. The Brewsters take her in to live with them following the hospitalization of her mother, and they feed, clothe, and house her until Eva's release late in the novel. The description of Amabel's and Eva's reactions foregrounds the abject body, a common preoccupation of the Gothic and naturalism, while the grotesque descriptions of both women firmly establish these scenes as Gothic ones.

As is the case in Freeman's ghost stories, it is not only the content of the plot which signals the novel's Gothic naturalism. Rather, Freeman's craft and her narrative techniques perform a vital role in signaling the Gothic naturalism of this section of the novel. For example, in presenting Amabel's attempted murder, Freeman maintains the use of omniscient third-person narration but allows Fanny Brewster, Eva's sister, to relate through dialogue her experience of the attempted killing. Fanny tells her husband and Ellen, "Oh, it was awful, it was awful! There, when I got in there, she had a—knife, the—carving knife, and she had Amabel's hair all gathered up in one hand, and her head tipped back, and poor old mother Tenney was holding her arms, and screamin,' and it was all I could do to get the knife away,' and Fanny stripped up her sleeves, and showed a glancing cut on her arm" (317). Freeman occasionally has one of her characters tell the story of a violent act as a way of presenting some of the darker content of her stories, enhancing the spectatorial and documentary aspects. Instead of depicting a violent event through the narrator, Freeman's narratives often convey the episode through another character that witnesses the event and then later shares it as a story. Although these

techniques are not unique to Gothic naturalism, they are frequently used by Freeman in her Gothic naturalist texts.

Reflecting on the tenets and narrative strategies of local color fiction, Campbell notes that “the act of storytelling itself is central to local color fiction, concurrent with and related to the actions of preserving that the women undertake” (*Resisting Regionalism* 42). Campbell acknowledges that “double-distilling and preserving [through storytelling] cannot capture the immediacy of incident and action that the naturalists prize—but it can . . . create a concentration of experience in miniature” (45). *McTeague*’s Maria Macapa presents the most striking example of a storyteller within naturalism. Yet, the repetition of her stories may not be so different from what critics would normally associate with regionalism. Surely Mrs. Todd in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) has repeated her stories many times as well. Similarly, in Freeman’s ghost stories, which I will examine later, storytelling and the repeating of various people’s narratives remains crucial. What differs between Maria Macapa’s situation and that of Mrs. Todd or Freeman’s characters is the narratee, or the character whom the speaker addresses, and his or her reception of the story. In regionalism, the storytelling likely provokes no action in its narratee. The result of the story is more likely sympathy for another character or increased knowledge about the local community depicted in the text. *McTeague*’s Zerkow, on the other hand, cannot remain a passive listener when faced with Maria’s story of a golden treasure trove. More crucially, Zerkow cannot accept the fictionality of Maria’s stories. In fact, “Zerkow had come to believe in this story infallibly. He was immovably persuaded that at one time Maria or Maria’s people

had possessed these hundred golden dishes Not only had that service of gold plate once existed, but it existed now, entire, intact; not a single burnished golden piece of it was missing. It was somewhere; somebody had it” (Norris 189). Zerkow interprets the story as wholly factual and, in fact, takes action based on his interpretations. On the other hand, storytelling in regionalist fiction often has its origin in gossiping and passing on stories about one’s neighbors. Any good gossip should understand that the enjoyment of the tale can be heightened through exaggeration, and listeners should know to be suspicious about the veracity of such stories. Freeman, particularly in her ghost stories, critiques narratees’ reception of storytelling and their reluctance to take action based on what they have been told. Highlighting his perverse response to Maria’s story, Zerkow’s inability to accept Maria’s tale as fiction leads to him murdering her as he tries to retrieve the gold dishes, establishing very different stakes for naturalist versus regionalist storytelling. Two of Freeman’s ghost stories discussed below result in young girls’ deaths in part because narratees do not act upon the stories they hear. Heightening the stakes for what might otherwise be classed as gossip, then, Freeman’s later ghost stories, surprisingly, use storytelling in a similar way to the example of Zerkow and Maria in *McTeague*.

In her Gothic naturalist stories, Freeman utilizes storytelling to displace the violence in such a way that it remains part of the story but is not experienced by readers firsthand as its own scene in the novel. This displacement allows Freeman’s often plainspoken characters to report what happened very matter-of-factly, rather than having to resort to genteel or covert language to document violent encounters. Having a

character relate the story can also create a greater sense of surprise because it folds the violence into an ordinary scene wherein women are gossiping, as in “The Lost Ghost,” or, as seen above in *The Portion of Labor*, might consist of a woman telling her family what happened while she was out. Freeman uses this displacement strategy not only in *The Portion of Labor* but also in short stories discussed below, such as “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” and “The Lost Ghost.” Freeman’s technique echoes the Gothic tradition of found texts which disclose sordid and chilling tales as the inside portion of a frame narrative such as in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Notably, Freeman does not use this technique in “Old Woman Magoun,” where the story instead presents an extended account of Lily’s symptoms following her nightshade poisoning as the method of depicting her death. Thus, the reader shares in this experience with Mrs. Magoun as she watches her granddaughter die. “Old Woman Magoun,” then, participates in the naturalist tradition of documenting inescapable suffering in great detail. Both the narrative distance created through disclosing violence via characters’ storytelling and the greater immediacy of depicting suffering through narration are part of the Gothic naturalist tradition. Freeman herself effectively uses both techniques.

Such depiction of suffering also contributes to the Gothic naturalism of *The Portion of Labor*. Following the disclosure of Jim’s running away, Andrew Brewster lies in the grass, pondering the chain of events which caused him to drain his savings account such that he does not have the three dollars needed to pay Ellen’s dressmaker. His sentiments present a strong example of the novel’s frequent utilization of naturalist

language. Speaking to himself, he questions “‘if I had to be done to death, why couldn’t it have been for something? . . . Why need it all have been over so little? It’s just the little fight for enough to eat and wear that’s getting the better of me that was a man, and able to do a man’s work in the world’” (295). Andrew registers the miniscule nature of his downfall, the three-dollar bill, as well as the disproportionate role this small sum plays in unraveling his life. The smallness of the bill and its ability to ruin Andrew is particularly Gothic naturalist. Much like the case in Alcott’s Gothic thrillers, the smallest of details can trigger seismic events. Interestingly, though, Alcott uses similar kinds of plot devices mainly with her *female* characters. Andrew’s dire situation is amplified by the fact that he is a man and the head of his household. His emasculation heightens his shame at being brought low by something so seemingly insignificant and the impending revelation of his failure to his family. Further compounding Andrew’s dilemma is the fact that he emptied the family savings account to purchase stock in a mining company which then steeply depreciated in value. Underlying Andrew’s breakdown is the double bind of agency. While so often naturalism questions what actions might be undertaken by characters with limited agency, in this instance Freeman interrogates how a person deals with the results of his or her own agency. How does one reconcile himself or herself to the fallout of making choices? Thus, the novel incorporates chance and misguided agency, much like other naturalist texts, which play a crucial role here in Andrew’s downfall. Interestingly, the mining stock becomes a boon at the end of the novel, earning Andrew a great deal of money, so that both the negative and positive outcomes of chance and choice are explored. Choice thus becomes problematized

because it is so difficult to know the outcomes of choices and whether those outcomes, either positive or negative, might later be reversed.

Andrew's character embodies the novel's most visible engagement with the forces of chance, but his character also foregrounds the emotional responses of naturalist characters. Andrew undergoes an existential crisis under his apple-trees—his version of the Garden of Gethsemane, although the apple trees also connect the garden to an Edenic space, albeit a fallen one. Andrew's dialogue frequently incorporates Biblical language, including the passage from *Ecclesiastes* used as the novel's title. He, too, has a surreal bodily reaction: "with his mouth to the moist earth, feeling the breath and the fragrance of it in his nostrils, a realization of the great motherhood of nature, and a contempt for himself which was scorching and scathing before it" comes to him (295). Indeed, throughout his episode in the garden, "he groaned, speaking with his lips so close to the earth as if it were a listening ear" (295). Andrew "felt that he came from that mighty breast which should produce only sons of might, and was spending his whole life in an ignominy of fruitless climbing up mole-hills. 'Why couldn't I have been more?' he asked himself. 'Oh, my God, is it my fault?'" (295-96). Might not Hurstwood pose a similar question in *Sister Carrie* as he spirals out of control? In *Life in the Iron-Mills*, Hugh Wolfe also experiences a similar moment of desperation. As Hugh sits in his jail cell and watches a dog that has the freedom to do as it pleases, he asks "what had he done to bear this?" (Davis 28). The similar intense self-interrogation and denial of full responsibility shown by Andrew, Hurstwood, and Hugh Wolfe again suggest *The Portion of Labor*'s connections to the naturalist canon. Much like the case with Hurstwood and

Hugh, despite Andrew's soul searching, he is left unaided and, indeed, remains in despair for much of the rest of the novel. Andrew's questions become as tortured as the contortions of Eva's body, and, yet, as he notes, his turmoil is not due to the kind of trauma Eva has had but is due to an empty savings account (and a lie he has told his wife about said savings account). The pettiness of Andrew's situation in contrast to the seriousness of Eva's heightens the Gothic naturalist sense of these scenes. Much like Eva, Andrew feels an extreme helplessness and believes he has no agency through which to rectify his situation.

Ellen's character, in turn, manifests naturalistic elements following Eva's admission that Jim has left. Indeed, Dorothy Berkson goes so far as to describe Ellen as being "like Stephen Crane's Maggie[;] she [Ellen] has blossomed in a mud puddle, an anomalous figure whose narrative arises out of and illuminates the conflicting and interdependent ideologies of class and gender that dominated nineteenth-century capitalist culture" (149). In addition, some of Ellen's statements sound much like those of *McTeague's* Trina, another classic naturalist heroine. For example, Ellen "longed to see Robert Lloyd, to hear him speak, as she had never longed for anything in the world, and yet she ran away as if she were driven to obey some law which was coeval with the first woman and beyond all volition of her individual self" (Freeman, *The Portion of Labor* 302). Ellen's desire sounds remarkably close to that of Trina, marking both characters' crossing a boundary into womanhood and embarking into the new territory of sexual desire. Trina's desire is also described as "something [that] had leaped to life in her—something strong and overpowering. It frightened her now as she thought of it, this

second self that had wakened within her and that shouted and clamored for recognition” (Norris 70). Both of these passages also highlight the lack of agency Ellen and Trina experience when confronted with their desire. Indeed, throughout this section of *The Portion of Labor*, one character after another becomes physically and emotionally undone, not only by Jim’s disappearance and its effects, but more generally by confrontation with their own shortcomings and desires.

Even the visual descriptions veer into Gothic naturalism in these chapters of the novel, such as when Ellen goes to visit her friend Abby Atkins and the Atkins’s house appears visually surreal. As Ellen turns her face away from Abby, “the electric-light from the street shone full in the room, which was wavering with grotesque shadows” (304). Furthermore, when Ellen leaves the Atkins’s house, she passes through the sitting room where “there was a cheap blue shade on the lamp, and Maria [Atkins] herself was clad in blue gingham. All the blue color and the shade on the lamp gave a curious pallor and unreality to the homely room” (308). While the wavering shadows indicate a Gothic setting, the inclusion of the ‘blue room’ contributes a degree of the surreal which does not frighten Ellen as it might in a classic Gothic novel but, instead, merely creates an odd and unsettling effect in an otherwise ordinary space. Echoing the Gothic domesticity noted by Fleissner, Freeman couples the uncanny description of the room with a focus on the Atkins family who, due to illness, are economically worse off than the Brewsters.

The language used by Abby and Maria Atkins and the language used to depict them also express *The Portion of Labor*’s Gothic naturalism. In particular, Abby’s statements reflect the pervasive naturalist language relating to class which runs

throughout the novel. However, naturalism here becomes coupled with the uncanny, ushering in the Gothic as well. For example, Abby reflects on the grinding monotony of factory work and the way a worker becomes like a mechanical apparatus at his or her post. She notes that ““I was lookin’ only to-day at David Mendon at the cutting-bench, cutting away with his poor little knife . . . and there’s where he’s stood for I don’t know how many years since before I was born . . . and I thought to myself, good Lord, how that poor man must have loved his wife, and how he must love his children, to be willin’ to turn himself into a machine like that for them” (306-07). The portrayal of factory work here becomes reminiscent once again of Davis’s *Life in the Iron-Mills*. The narrator there depicts the mill workers as “masses of men, with dull, besotted faces bent to the ground, sharpened here and there by pain or cunning; skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal . . . breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot, vileness for soul and body” (Davis 3-4). Freeman builds upon the squalid conditions described in Davis’s work and adds a mechanical component, as David Mendon appears like an automaton that one winds up to perform the same actions over and over again. In one of the many examples of gender trouble throughout Freeman’s work, David Mendon appears closer to being a Deborah figure than a Hugh Wolfe because he works steadily and faithfully and is portrayed without the possibility of any other creative outlet for his energy. David Mendon thus serves as an object of pity and, like Deborah in *Life in the Iron-Mills*, is recognizable as a victim of determinism due to his class and also his gender, which positions him as the family’s primary wage earner.

In addition to Abby's overt observations on life as a factory worker and its relative erasure of personal freedoms, there are intimations that Maria Atkins, who is sickly throughout the novel, does have some glimmer of a desire for a different kind of labor, although she cannot identify or even imagine what that might be. In relation to Maria, the narration notes that

her slender little fingers used to fly as if they were driven by some more subtle machine than any in the factory. Often Maria felt vaguely as if she were in the grasp of some mighty machine worked by a mighty operator; she felt, as she pasted the linings, as if she herself were also a part of some monstrous scheme of work under greater hands than hers, and there was never any getting back of it. And always there was that ceaseless, helpless, bewildered longing for something, she was afraid to think what, which often saps the strength and life of a young girl. (Freeman, *The Portion of Labor* 309)

Maria remains caught up in a mechanistic determinism which propels even her muscles forward in an unending circuit from which she cannot escape, while also evoking within herself an impulse that offers no kind of succor. Rather, that desire, which cannot quite be expressed even through language, is ultimately draining Maria's energies. The Gothic emerges in Maria's sense that something outside of her propels her forward in her work. The propelling force is notably not uplifting but, instead, "a part of some monstrous scheme of work" (309). The totality of Maria's situation is quite similar to that of Hugh in *Life in the Iron-Mills* in terms of the disparity between the wage work both characters

have to perform and their restlessness to seek out something else. Notably, that restlessness of spirit is also found in *The Awakening*'s Edna Pontellier and will later be articulated again in *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart. Thus, even in small moments that provide a brief examination of a minor character's interiority, Freeman engages with a wide range of naturalist preoccupations in *The Portion of Labor*.

Presenting yet another connection to naturalism, parenting (or the lack thereof) and the breakdown of the family are paramount in classic naturalist texts such as Crane's *Maggie*, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Norris's *McTeague*, just to name a few. Similarly, Gothic tales are also littered with dysfunctional families and parental figures that neglect or seek to harm the children in their care, often featuring incest or other transgressive familial configurations. In naturalist texts, children are often tucked away in the corners, glimpsed only briefly, but they are ideal test cases for the debates of naturalism, particularly that of nature versus nurture. Children may manifest certain biologically inherited traits from their parents, but naturalist writers also depict in great detail the familial and situational environment in which these children live. Naturalist texts typically do not afford children agency, often denying them access to agency to an even greater degree than the female characters I have thus far examined because of their young age. Therefore, children often experience the devastating world portrayed in hard naturalism. It is little wonder, then, that Freeman's Gothic naturalist texts frequently include children as characters and feature their stories as part of larger narratives.

While classic naturalist texts may not feature children as protagonists, even cursory mentions of children demonstrate that they, too, are unable to escape the hostile

environments of so many naturalist novels. For example, Maria Macapa's child dies in *McTeague*, triggering the violent unraveling of Maria and Zerkow's relationship. Moreover, in a less tragic but equally important example, Trina's brother August becomes an afterthought during a trip to the theater to such an extent that he wets himself because no one realizes that he is desperate to go to the bathroom (even though they have given him too much lemonade to drink), and his mother actually refuses to take him to the restroom when he asks her. Furthermore, after August's accident, he is "smacked and shaken" for, apparently, not having a stronger bladder, and, notably, his mother does not take him home after the performance to allow him to change his clothes, leaving him no choice but to sit in his wet garments for the rest of the evening (Norris 84). Although *McTeague* continually fears being made small and emasculated, August's example shows that children should *assume* they will be humiliated and that their requests will not be taken seriously to an even greater degree than is true for other naturalist characters. As I will show in Freeman's short stories, lost children also should assume that adults will be oblivious to their problems, forcing the children to deal with them on their own.

The portrayal of young children in *Maggie*, in turn, is much more frightening than that in *McTeague*. The opening scene of the novel, for example, portrays a fight among rival gangs of children as a gruesome battle within an ongoing war. Jimmie, Maggie's brother, has an "infantile countenance [that] was livid with the fury of battle. His small body was writhing in the delivery of oaths" (Crane 11). Jimmie's opponents are not to be discounted, though, because "on their small convulsed faces shone the grins of true assassins" (11). Jimmie's body displays the rigorous nature of their battle as "he had

bruises on twenty parts of his body, and blood was dripping from a cut in his head. His wan features looked like those of a tiny insane demon” (11). If August does not receive any respect in *McTeague*, Jimmie in contrast fights for “the honour of Rum Alley” (11). Of course, his wounds and prowess in fighting are one of the *only* ways he *can* earn the respect not only of the other children in his neighborhood but also those of rival neighborhoods. Notably, the respect circulates only among the children themselves and does nothing to raise Jimmie’s importance in the eyes of his parents or other adults. The examples of August and Jimmie show two rather different perspectives on childhood, but both demonstrate that if one does not demand respect through aggression, humiliation is the default way in which children will be treated, and even Jimmie is later humiliated by his mother’s rough treatment of his wounds.

More often than not, classic naturalist texts tend to portray male children rather than female ones, so it is striking that so many of Freeman’s lost children are female, not simply as a reflection of the author’s gender, but to depict girlhood within naturalism. Interestingly, Edna and Adele Ratignolle both have male children in *The Awakening*. Yet, the boys themselves are seldom seen and their rare sightings often reveal more about the two women as mothers than it does about the experience of childhood. The narrator notes that “if one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother’s arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing” (Chopin 10). Although the Pontellier boys’ experiences of the world are much less harsh than those of August and Jimmie, there is a similar sense that these boys, who lack for nothing

materially, are also on their own when it comes to being nurtured by their parents, particularly Edna.

Although the boys in *The Awakening* have more symbolic importance than substantive presence, there are also momentary flashbacks to Edna's own childhood and adolescence. These flashbacks are very impressionistic, though, and present almost Wordsworthian spots of time in which Edna recognizes a similarity of feeling between herself in childhood and her present adult life. Several times Edna recalls walking through fields of grass in Kentucky. She remembers, "I could see only the stretch of green before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don't remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained," and she goes on to observe that "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (22). Of course, the imagery of the grass is incredibly vital to the novel as Edna remembers it once again while she swims to her death, "thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end" (156). The recurrent memories of childhood in *The Awakening* do not merely supply more information about Edna as a character but indicate a pattern of behavior that is crucial to the actions Edna takes as an adult. The experiences of childhood, if not wholly deterministic, certainly intrude again and again upon adult experience.

The House of Mirth, in contrast, uses one crucial flashback to Lily's childhood that depicts the experiences of girlhood in naturalistic terms. Of course, *The House of Mirth* is published much later than Freeman's early regionalist works and some of the

ghost stories I am discussing. However, the discussion of Lily's childhood in *The House of Mirth* demonstrates that while Freeman's portrayal of childhood is somewhat different, her works are not the only naturalist texts to write girlhood using the aesthetics of naturalism. Lily's family life is described as taking "a zig-zag broken course down which the family craft glided on a rapid current of amusement, tugged at by the underflow of a perpetual need—the need of more money" (Wharton 31). Indeed, the depiction of the family only continues in more tragic terms as Lily felt "relief" when the father she never really knew—"she seemed always to have seen him through a blur . . . till he was almost indistinguishable"—dies (34-35). Although Lily *did* know her mother, Mrs. Bart is presented as a grotesque mercenary figure whose capacity for consumption seems unlimited and her desire to avoid "dinginess" overtakes any concern for Lily's well-being (37). As with other child characters in naturalist texts, it is difficult to gain a sense of Lily's own character as a child surrounded by such searing pain and animosity. It is significant enough to learn that "there were still times when Lily relived with painful vividness every detail of the day on which the blow fell" that revealed the family's financial ruin (32). As with Edna, childhood memories persist in affecting adult actions, for although Lily's "ambitions were not as crude as Mrs. Bart's" (36), "she knew that she hated dinginess as much as her mother hated it, and to her last breath she meant to fight against it" (40). While the portrayal of male children in naturalist texts tends toward more explicit episodes of violence or neglect, Chopin's and Wharton's texts attempt to capture not only memories of childhood but also to portray their ongoing psychic impact upon adult women's lives. As I will discuss with Freeman's texts, her lost girl stories

typically do not compare the same character in childhood and adulthood. Instead, Freeman often contrasts the experiences of abused children with those of older adult women who fail to protect young girls. Freeman's texts thus foreground the responsibility to protect and care for children as the duty of not only parents but of aunts, neighbors, and other community members as well. Much like other naturalist texts, though, Freeman's stories depict children's abandonment by those who should care for them. While naturalist texts often include children or childhood in cursory fashion, Freeman contributes something new to naturalism's preoccupation with children by placing them at the center of several texts. Indeed, who is more subject to the vicissitudes of her environment and heredity than a child? Certainly, children often lack agency as do so many other naturalist characters, if for different reasons. Freeman's work points to children as prime subjects who should be seen as fundamental to naturalist fiction.

In order to better explain the differences between Freeman's regionalist works and her Gothic naturalist ones, I am using a triptych of stories about roughly similar topics to explain how Freeman uses genre to spin a plotline in three different ways. "A Gentle Ghost," "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," and "The Lost Ghost" tell similar stories of young women who are abused or neglected by their caretakers. Although the plots of these stories are similar, when viewed in terms of presenting a generic spectrum of Gothic naturalism, they become much more distinctly singular. "A Gentle Ghost" lies at one end of the spectrum, the most realist of these three stories and also the least Gothic naturalist, roughly synching with the end of the early period of Freeman's career and the

beginning of her more experimental period. “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” holds a place somewhere in the middle of the spectrum because, although it utilizes the Gothic, it has very few elements of naturalism. Finally, then, “The Lost Ghost” is the most Gothic naturalist as it manages to balance and combine both of these genres. Susan Oaks, writing specifically about the ghost story collection *The Wind in the Rose-Bush* (1903), helpfully explains the structure of many of Freeman’s ghost stories. Oaks argues that Freeman

creates serene, prosperous communities whose members accept and participate in traditional social and moral practices. She introduces a past conflict into this standard existence, in the form of a ghost or ghost story told by one of the characters. The past conflict deals with an individual assertion of will against a strict moral code, which still operates in the present. Freeman’s protagonists accept this moral code without question. They also break it, without being aware of their sin. Each ghost points out a protagonist’s moral failure. The clash between moral appearance and reality produces the thematic tension in Freeman’s ghost stories. (211)

Yet, as I will show, the degree to which Freeman employs these structures and techniques varies across her ghost stories. My goal in discussing these stories is primarily to parse their generic differences in order to better explain what differentiates Gothic naturalism from other genres and to show which of these stories participate in Gothic naturalism. The use of Gothic horror to depict the death of young girls separates Freeman’s Gothic naturalist stories from her regionalist and Gothic ones.

“A Gentle Ghost” begins with four women visiting a graveyard together. They encounter a young girl named Nancy Wren at the back of the graveyard among the oldest graves. Nancy informs the women that she lives nearby, but she also appears to be part of the Blake family, who are buried in a grouping at the back of the graveyard. Nancy states that she has seen Jane Blake, one of the deceased. The women talking with Nancy realize this cannot be accurate as Jane Blake died forty years ago, when the women were girls themselves. Fearing that Nancy “‘ain’t quite right,’” the women leave the graveyard (237). As the four women drive away in their wagon, they notice Flora Dunn, a young girl whose family lives across from the graveyard and next to the local poorhouse, where Nancy Wren resides. One of the four women relates a story about the Dunns’ house being haunted. While Nancy claims to commune with the ghost of Jane Blake, the Dunns have had their own series of supernatural encounters. Following the death of Flora’s sister, Jenny, each night at nine o’clock an eerie moan emanates from the bedroom once shared by Flora and Jenny, ceasing only when Flora enters the room to go to sleep. Mrs. Dunn and Flora believe the sound is the voice of Jenny’s ghost, while Mr. Dunn only hears the noise once, claiming “it sounded more like a cat to me than anything” (248). One night Flora enters her bedroom with a lantern that is nearly out of oil. Upon blowing out the light, Flora immediately hears the noise and realizes it belongs to Nancy Wren next door. Mrs. Dunn and Flora then barge into the poorhouse, discover that Nancy is indeed crying at having to sleep by herself in the dark, and whisk the girl away to live with them. The story concludes with Nancy and her family visiting the graveyard to lay flowers on Jenny Dunn’s grave.

Unlike “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” and “The Lost Ghost,” “A Gentle Ghost” presents an example of Gothic terror, explaining away the supernatural events by the tale’s conclusion.³⁵ Fred Botting explains terror as something that “enables escape; it allows one to delimit its effects, to distinguish and overcome the threat it manifests” (75). In “A Gentle Ghost,” the terror is overcome once the eerie moaning is discovered to be Nancy’s crying. The story ends with the final visit to the graveyard, but this lacks the eerie quality of the adult women’s initial visit in which Nancy appears more like a ghost than a human child. During this final visit, although Nancy wears the deceased Jenny’s clothes, she appears not as a haunting spirit but as an ordinary young girl, thereby exorcising the family’s worry that Jenny’s spirit is restlessly haunting them. Indeed, both the Dunn family’s and the women’s assumptions when visiting the graveyard about encountering ghosts are proven to be false, and even silly, in light of Nancy’s being revealed as the source of the supposed hauntings. The story’s supernatural elements are thus neatly resolved, and logic is restored; there is little of a ghostly or Gothic nature remaining to trouble either the characters or the readers.

³⁵ Although the central haunting of “A Gentle Ghost,” the moaning heard each night in Jenny’s old room, is explained away, there is never any explanation given for Nancy’s claim that she has seen Jane Blake. Indeed, Nancy states twice that when Jane appeared, “she had her white dress on, an’ her wreath” (246). In the story’s final scene, when the Dunns visit Jenny’s grave, Nancy wears “one of the little white frocks which Jenny had worn in her childhood, and her hat was trimmed with some ribbon and rose-buds which had adorned one of the dead young girl’s years before” (251-52). Note also the similarity in the names Jane and Jenny, such that one reading is that Nancy saw Jenny Dunn rather than Jane Blake when she visited the graveyard. Rather than communicating with her family through moaning, Jenny has communicated through her visits with Nancy in the graveyard. Thus, Nancy becomes both the means of explanation of the Dunns’ ‘haunting,’ and assumes Jenny’s childhood clothes and her place in the family as well. Curiously, though, Nancy does not bring up her ghostly visits to the Dunns, and they do not seem particularly troubled by her visits to the graveyard, nor do they question what she is doing during these visits, reinforcing the dissolution of the story’s supernatural elements at its conclusion through textual erasure.

A crucial difference between “A Gentle Ghost” and Freeman’s other stories of lost girls is the level of maltreatment Nancy experiences. While “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” and, to a greater extent, “The Lost Ghost” are more explicitly about the abuse of the lost girls in their stories, “A Gentle Ghost” largely sidesteps Nancy’s treatment at the poorhouse, referencing it sparsely. In keeping with Freeman’s attention to household details throughout her short stories and novels, the description of the poor house, with “a facing of whitewashed stone-work reaching to its lower windows, which somehow gave it a disgraced and menial air” and the fact that “there were, moreover, no blinds,” marks it as a slovenly place indeed (238). Furthermore, Mrs. Dunn notices “the little Wren girl stealing across the road to the cemetery” and argues “‘I b’lieve she runs away. See her look behind her” (244). It is not only Flora and Mrs. Dunn’s testimony which posits that Nancy receives neglectful treatment in the poorhouse. When Flora alerts Nancy that her caretakers are calling for her, “Nancy turned quite pale around her little mouth, and sprang to her feet She flew along ahead through the narrow paths, and was in the almshouse door before Flora crossed the street” (246). Further, when Mrs. Dunn and Flora enter the poorhouse to enquire after the ghostly noise, they “saw little Nancy sitting up in bed, her face pale and convulsed, her blue eyes streaming with tears, her little pink mouth quivering” (250). Unlike later descriptions of abuse which are more likely to evoke horror and repulsion, the vision of Nancy alone in the dark more clearly elicits sympathy and pity, reflecting the story’s turn to genteel realism.

Not the stuff of naturalism at all, then, this story (published much earlier in Freeman’s career than “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” and “The Lost Ghost”) shows a

much more realist version and a thematically lighter telling of a story that Freeman later rewrote to much more disturbing effect. Nancy's heredity is never explored, and Mrs. Dunn's intervention transcends whatever environmental determinism Nancy would have experienced had she continued to grow up in the poorhouse. "A Gentle Ghost" is resolved before it ever reaches the level of naturalist conflict. At one point, when Mrs. Dunn and Flora still believe the noise they hear is Jenny, the narrator asks "what exorcism, what spell of book and bell, could lay the ghost of a little timid child who was afraid alone in the dark?" (247). Ultimately, "The Gentle Ghost" answers this question, not in terms of how to release a ghostly spirit, but in terms of calming a homeless girl who is afraid to sleep alone in the dark. Mrs. Dunn's solution is disarmingly simple: she offers Nancy a piece of cake and allows her to sleep with a lamp in a home where she will be nurtured. In the Gothic story "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" and the Gothic naturalist tale "The Lost Ghost," no such simple solution will be available to the problems of abused children.

"The Wind in the Rose-Bush" begins with Rebecca Flint taking a ferry to Ford Village to retrieve her niece Agnes. During the journey, Rebecca begins talking to Mrs. Amblecrom, who is also taking the ferry with her husband, the town's postmaster. Rebecca explains that her sister was Agnes's mother. Following her sister's death, Rebecca felt she lacked the financial resources to invite Agnes to come and live with her permanently. In the meantime, Agnes's father remarried before he passed away three years previously. Mrs. Amblecrom reacts quite pointedly to Rebecca's mention of her brother-in-law, the now widowed Mrs. Dent, and Agnes. However, Mr. Amblecrom

gives his wife several “warning” glances (7) that prevent her from telling Rebecca little more than “I ain’t seen her [Agnes] for some little time” (6).

Once Rebecca reaches the Dent house, she meets Mrs. Dent, who suffers from “spells” which cause her to gasp and make strange faces (12). In addition strange events occur around the house, starting with an incident in which “the rose-bush was agitated violently as if by a gust of wind, yet it was a remarkably still day” (13). Over the course of Rebecca’s visit, these strange events continue to occur while Agnes never appears. Mrs. Dent offers one excuse after another until Rebecca receives a letter requesting that she return home to help care for a cousin said to have broken her hip. Rebecca does travel home after demanding that Mrs. Dent send Agnes after her as soon as possible. On returning home, Rebecca discovers that her cousin is not sick at all. Ironically, Rebecca herself becomes ill after her travels and writes to several people attempting to locate Agnes. Only when she writes Mr. Amblecrom does she receive a response. Mr. Amblecrom reveals that there were rumors of Agnes being neglected by Mrs. Dent. Although there was “talk of taking action” in the village, ultimately there was “not enough evidence” (37). He reveals that Agnes died a year ago, as a result of Mrs. Dent’s neglect, and there are now stories of the Dent house being haunted.

In “The Wind in the Rose-Bush,” Freeman advances the Gothic aesthetic begun in “The Gentle Ghost.” Surely Agnes exemplifies the return of the repressed so essential to definitions of the Gothic, even if first-time readers may not realize this until finishing the story. Furthermore, unlike the Gothic terror of “A Gentle Ghost,” “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” remains securely in the terrain of Gothic horror because the supernatural

elements are not explained away by the story's conclusion. In fact, not only are the story's supernatural elements still disturbing but their continued presence and the revelation of Agnes's story expose a series of ethical questions that also remain unanswered by the story. Why did Mrs. Dent fail to inform Rebecca of Agnes's death (even if she might have concealed its cause)? Why does she allow Rebecca to stay with her while she continues to hide Agnes's death? How could the village ignore Agnes's abuse to the point that it killed her?

Indeed, it is the story's ethical critique which makes it Gothic but not Gothic naturalist. Unlike "The Lost Ghost" and "Old Woman Magoun," which I will discuss shortly, "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" contains a number of possible intervention points where a different course of action could drastically alter the story's outcome. Most significantly, the village could have stepped in to protect Agnes before the abuse escalated, Rebecca might have invited Agnes to live with her earlier (despite her economic situation), or the Amblecroms might have explained what happened to Agnes when they met Rebecca on the ferry. In "A Gentle Ghost," the reader witnesses that intervention as it occurs. Telling "A Gentle Ghost" through the lens of realism enables the Dunns' intervention to be played out in a more practical fashion. In a Gothic naturalist story, on the other hand, given all the circumstances of the narrative, no other outcome remains possible but that presented within the text. Oaks contends that in "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," "Rebecca misses her chance for virtuous action. She has to live with the ghost that her own self-absorption helped to create" (213). In "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," the Gothic effect is achieved in part by Rebecca's jarring realization that the

time when she could have acted is far in the past but that the effects of that inaction continue. Gothic naturalist stories, in contrast, depict situations in which there are no choices left to be made, no available intervention points. Or, if interventions are still possible, they come at a high personal cost such that they become untenable. In addition, the Gothic is more deeply imbricated in the fabric of a Gothic naturalist story. There may be supernatural experiences witnessed by the characters, but the Gothic nature may be equally present in the story's setting or characters' struggles to come to terms with their own identities and actions.

It is significant that in all three of Freeman's ghost stories the lost children are portrayed as either literal or metaphorical ghosts, implying that it is only through the ghost story that their narratives of abuse will come to light. Certainly, traditional forms of regionalist storytelling are not adequate to relaying stories of child abuse and, therefore, Freeman must use other genres such as the Gothic and Gothic naturalism to share these stories. Agnes in "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" comes the closest to telling her own story if readers take into account her haunting episodes as the only way she has to make herself legible within the text. Yet, the story as a whole clarifies the fact that even Agnes's method of indirect address is misinterpreted. It is only Mr. Amblecrom's letter which finally explains what happened to Agnes in a way that Rebecca can understand. Still, the gendered dynamics of the final disclosure of Agnes's death and the fact that it takes a man's written word to reveal the story of a young woman's abuse displays how sublimated Agnes remains throughout the entire text.

Several different forms of determinism merge in “The Wind in the Rose-Bush.” The toxic environment of Mrs. Dent’s household certainly curtails and harms Agnes while it also amplifies biological determinism as, when Agnes becomes ill, Mr. Amblecrom admits that “medicine [was] not given” to her (Freeman, “The Wind in the Rose-Bush” 37). Even more crucial is the rest of the town’s complicity with determinism. Once they determine there is not enough evidence to legally do anything to remove Agnes from the home, no other attempts are made to intervene. That is, the town of Ford Village participates in the making of the story’s determinism by standing idly by and witnessing Agnes’s abuse and eventual death. They live with the knowledge that Agnes’s death is an unchangeable fact, assuming that no agency or action on their part will alter the situation. Horeck, discussing fictional narratives based on real crimes, argues that “already dead women do not speak from a secure position in the afterlife where they have come to terms with the tragedy that has befallen them; by contrast, their lives are lived moment to moment heavy with the knowledge of their fate, of what already *has* happened to them” (36, original emphasis). Horeck’s argument suggests the determinism of naturalism as she points to stories that have pre-ordained outcomes. In “The Wind in the Rose-Bush,” the crime has already been committed. Agnes is already dead, and there is nothing Rebecca can do to change that outcome.

“The Wind in the Rose-Bush” also begins to approach Gothic naturalism in the characters’ faltering attempts to communicate a story that can no longer be altered. Much like Rebecca, the reader anxiously waits for Agnes’s appearance, only to find that her ability to haunt is all that remains. However, even the story’s hauntings are marked by

their lack of any bodily apparition. The only evidence of Agnes's presence are shadows, wind rustling the rose bush when there is no wind, the smell of roses inside the house, "The Maiden's Prayer" played upon the piano in the dead of night, and Agnes's nightgown laid out on the bed with the arms crossed over the chest and a rose placed on it when the garment has been folded and put away. Nicole Diederich argues that "from the beginning of the story, the non-sign-based communication of the semiotic undercuts Rebecca's attempt to order the situation, a rebelliousness typical of the Gothic" (24). The nonverbal communication in the story underscores not only Rebecca's inability to interpret the situation but also the invisible nature of Agnes's story.

As Mr. Amblecrom's final letter notes, it is not that people did not suspect what was happening in the Dent house, merely that there either was not enough evidence or what evidence there was did not explicitly signal abuse. Much like children in naturalist texts who do not possess agency, Agnes has little agency (even as a ghost) in relating her story. The text portrays a failure of communal storytelling not only in Agnes's attempts to communicate through haunting but even more so in terms of storytelling within Ford Village. Whatever stories might have circulated about Agnes's abuse failed to garner her any aid. Mrs. Amblecrom even omits telling Rebecca the story of what happened to Agnes long after it has occurred. Moreover, the story's final example of storytelling, Mr. Amblecrom's letter, remains incredibly stilted and sparse, foregoing any attempt at detail or even full explanation of the story's events. "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" thus portrays an almost complete breakdown of the storytelling tradition so vital to representations of regional communities. Critiquing the failure of regionalism itself to

represent certain kinds of stories, Freeman must turn to Gothic naturalism to demonstrate the limits of regionalist storytelling and then writes beyond those limits in her own works.

“The Lost Ghost” opens with storytelling— that is, with Mrs. Rhoda Meserve’s visiting her friend Mrs. Emerson to tell her the town’s latest gossip: namely, that a family is renting a house that has long sat vacant because it is believed to be haunted. Although Mrs. Emerson does not believe the ghost stories, Mrs. Meserve confesses that she feels susceptible to the stories because of an experience she had before she was married and which she has never been able to explain. While working as a schoolteacher, Mrs. Meserve boarded with two widowed sisters, Mrs. Dennison and Mrs. Bird. One evening, Mrs. Meserve saw a young girl who kept repeating ““I can’t find my mother”” (207). The sisters confessed that this apparition had appeared several times previously, but they had invested so much money in establishing the boarding house that they did not say anything. The sisters relate the house’s history, which was *not* disclosed to them when they purchased it. Two years previously, the young girl (now appearing as a ghost) lived there with her father and mother. The father, a travelling salesman, was often away, and the mother was considered “a real wicked woman” (213). Indeed, former servants spoke horribly of the woman and said she forced her five-year-old daughter to do the majority of the housework. While the father was away on one trip, the mother ran away with a wealthy, married man. Once their disappearance was discovered, people wondered what had happened to the woman’s daughter. A woman remembered hearing a child cry at night. Neighbors broke into the house only to find the young girl frozen and starved to

death. The girl's father later found his wife and shot her. Mrs. Meserve then relates "the strangest part of it all" (216). Mrs. Bird died suddenly one morning and was then seen walking hand in hand with the young girl, whose ghost was never seen in the boarding house again.

"The Lost Ghost" builds yet again upon the earlier stories of a girl being abused by a maternal figure. The story increases both its Gothic elements and implements naturalism in the depiction of the girl's abuse. Unlike the terror that can be overcome in "A Gentle Ghost," "The Lost Ghost" remains firmly in the realm of Gothic horror. Botting asserts that Gothic horror is often marked by an encounter with death, which is presented "as the absolute limit, a finitude which denies any possibility of imaginative transcendence It is the moment of the negative sublime, a moment of freezing, contraction and horror which signals a temporality that cannot be recuperated by the mortal subject" (75). Horror, then, "marks the response to an excess that cannot be transcended" (75). It is no coincidence that "The Lost Ghost" serves both as an example of Gothic horror and of Gothic naturalism. Naturalism features numerous scenes of horror from the discovery of Maria Macapa's and Trina's murders in *McTeague* to scenes of agonized childbirth in *The Awakening* and the discovery of Lily's body in the conclusion of *The House of Mirth*. "The Lost Ghost" features encounters with death in the form of the girl's ghost as well as in the vision of Mrs. Bird walking off with the ghost after her death. Yet, perhaps the most horrific and, therefore, the most significant Gothic naturalist moment in the story is the discovery of the young girl's body as part of the inside narrative. Much like the case in "A Gentle Ghost," a woman hears a child

crying in the night in “The Lost Ghost.” However, unlike Mrs. Dunn, this woman rationalizes what she hears and does not investigate, perhaps never imagining an horrific incident could occur next door. It is only later that she remembers the young girl who lives nearby but, crucially, they find the child much too late to help her. The neighbors “found that poor child there, starved to death, and frozen, though they weren’t sure she had frozen to death, for she was in bed with clothes enough to keep her pretty warm when she was alive. But she had been there a week, and she was nothing but skin and bone” (Freeman, “The Lost Ghost” 215). Unlike the example of Nancy Wren, there is no way to rescue this child. Helene Myers characterizes the Gothic as “encounters with otherness, often violent transgressions of boundaries, and the excess of fear that such encounters and transgressions breed” (2). Yet, I would argue this definition also captures significant aspects of naturalism as well. “The Lost Ghost” encapsulates both the Gothic and naturalist elements of this statement as the child becomes Other at the same time that she also experiences violent transgression. Perhaps for Mrs. Meserve, Mrs. Bird, and Mrs. Dennison, the appearance of the ghost is the story’s most horrifying event, but for many readers it is the discovery of the girl’s corpse which cannot ever be adequately explained away or rationalized, the hallmark of horror Gothic but also a marker of Gothic naturalism.

Storytelling is paramount in the transmission of both Mrs. Meserve’s story and the story of the lost girl. “The Lost Ghost” has the most complex array of techniques of the lost girl stories as it employs the structure of a frame narrative (Mrs. Meserve and Mrs. Emerson gossiping) while also using different narrators for the frame narrative and

the inside narrative. In other words, the frame of “The Lost Ghost” uses third-person narration, but when the inside narrative (Mrs. Meserve’s experiences as a boarder) begins, a first-person account of past events is given by Mrs. Meserve. Furthermore, within the inside narrative another submerged story (the house’s history) comes to light and is retold. The story’s complexity highlights yet again the difficulty inherent in relating the stories of lost girls and the limits of regionalist storytelling. As discussed in the examples from *The Portion of Labor*, Freeman’s characters distance the narratee from violent events by retelling them as stories rather than depicting them through narration. “The Lost Ghost” intensifies the violence depicted and therefore employs more distancing techniques through the use of frame and inside narratives as well as multiple narrators. Yet, Freeman still captures the horror of the events related by the story. It is as though this story is too bleak to depict outright and must instead be contained by its narrators and wrapped within its frame to prevent its violence and horror from contaminating the narratee and perhaps also the actual reader. Yet, what the story shows is that horror can never be adequately contained. Just as Mrs. Dennison and Mrs. Bird fail to prevent Mrs. Meserve from seeing the child’s ghost, Mrs. Meserve fails to keep her experience secret and is driven to retell it. The story is a horrible one to share; yet, sharing it is one way to try and cope with the confrontation of horror.

In proportion to the horror depicted, “The Lost Ghost” uses the most complex array of narrative techniques of these three ghost stories to contain the tale’s chilling events. “The Lost Ghost” contains one ghost story in the frame narrative (a haunted house in Mrs. Meserve and Mrs. Emerson’s town) and another in its inside narrative (the

story of the lost girl's death). In terms of the story's Gothic naturalism, the inside narrative is of the utmost interest. Unlike "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," which interrogates how Agnes's narrative might have been different if one of the many bystanders had taken action, "The Lost Ghost" plays out a similar plot in which even those who were not immediately involved with the girl and her family, who had no opportunity to take action, confront the consequences of her abuse and death.

In trying to absorb the story of this girl, who remains unnamed, several characters attempt to absolve her parents of wrongdoing. First Mrs. Meserve seems to excuse the girl's father, noting "he about worshiped [sic] the child, too. They said he was a real nice man. The men that are treated so bad mostly are real nice men. I've always noticed that" (Freeman, "The Lost Ghost" 214). While this statement garners sympathy for the father, it also offers an excuse for his not noticing his wife's abusive behavior. Similarly, "Mrs. Dennison said she couldn't really believe that the woman had meant to have her own child starved to death. Probably she thought the little thing would raise somebody, or folks would try to get in the house and find her" (215). Unable to fathom a mother purposefully neglecting her child, Mrs. Dennison excuses the mother's (extremely questionable) motives. Instead of interpreting the mother's actions as a conscious choice, Mrs. Dennison reads them as miscalculations, albeit fatal ones. Indeed, the story notes the mother "was as handsome as a picture, and *they said* she came from good sort of people enough in Boston, but she was bad clean through, though she was real pretty spoken and most everybody liked her" (213, emphasis added). While many naturalist stories emphasize the determinism of heredity and its passage from one generation to the

next, the case of the ghost's mother portrays heredity as much more subject to chance. Here, the mother is anomalous in an otherwise "good sort of" family (213). The lost girl's personality does not manifest her own poor heredity, but she is affected by it nonetheless through her mother's abuse. Perhaps the mother's neighbors take her heredity as a sign that she could never really harm her own child, misinterpreting hereditary determinism as a hard form of determinism that can be accurately predicted.

Mrs. Meserve, unlike Mrs. Dennison, is much more critical of the mother than of the father as she observes "well, whatever she [the mother] thought, there the child was, dead" (215). Little excuse is given for the townspeople who tell the father about neither the mother's affair nor her abuse of the child. As Mrs. Meserve recalls, "it wouldn't have been so easy to find anybody who would have been willing to tell him such a thing as that, especially when they weren't any too sure" (214). Much like the Amblecroms in "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," the nameless neighbors here do not feel it is their place to speak to the girl's father, and the implication is that the sensitive nature of the news they might share in both stories only increases their hesitation. The neighbors' capacity for rationalizing troubling facts leaves the lost girl exposed to the text's brutal determinism as the neighbors reject all opportunities to intervene. Although storytelling functions in line with regionalist fiction in the exchanges between Mrs. Meserve and Mrs. Emerson in the frame narrative, the story's inside narrative betrays another breakdown in communal storytelling indicative of the story's Gothic naturalism.

In relation to storytelling, "The Lost Ghost" emphasizes both the use of gossip and the importance of privacy. The transition to Mrs. Meserve's ghost story is invited by

the gossip she has to share about a new family moving to town. Yet, there is a real method to and structure in the way women share gossip in “The Lost Ghost.” The women sit down to work on their sewing and crocheting while “they were both waiting. Mrs. Meserve waited for the other’s curiosity to develop in order that her news might have, as it were, a befitting stage entrance. Mrs. Emerson waited for the news” (203). It is only after Mrs. Emerson queries ““well, what’s the news?”” that Mrs. Meserve relates her gossip and then her ghost story (203). Presumably, the news of the lost girl’s mother, her affair, and poor treatment of her daughter may have circulated through her town in a similar way as a titillating rumor meant to amuse or scandalize neighbors.

Behind closed doors, then, privacy seems unimportant. Trading gossip with one’s neighbors is part of everyday life. However, when one meets a neighbor about whom gossip is circulating in public, the social code of these villages invokes people’s right to privacy so that concerns should *not* be aired. As Mr. Amblecrom warns his wife in “The Wind in the Rose-Bush,” ““don’t you go to burnin’ your fingers in other folks’ puddin’, Maria”” (8). Debra Bernardi examines Freeman’s portrayal of both privacy and private property, particularly in relation to poor characters and legal concepts of privacy in the late nineteenth century. She argues that “in most of Freeman’s work, then, private space and the intangible right to one’s own tastes and pleasure—that is, the ‘right to be let alone’—are not just luxuries property owners can afford; they are necessary to survival” (Bernardi 152). Certainly, Bernardi’s argument makes perfect sense for regionalist stories such as “A Church Mouse”; however, the triptych of ghost stories I am examining portrays the concept of privacy and minding one’s own business in a very different light.

All three stories affirm the necessity of bystanders intervening, particularly on behalf of children who often cannot protect themselves from or stand up to their caretakers. These three ghost stories argue that investigating suspicions about child abuse must outweigh the discomfort of invading a neighbor's privacy. Storytelling cannot stop at the level of gossip. It has to translate into action to maintain its communal function. The fact that storytelling becomes dysfunctional again signals the story's turn to Gothic naturalism. Subjects of a harsh form of determinism, the stories of lost girls depict the transition from regionalist storytelling to naturalist determinism as Freeman chronicles contemporary social ills.

In both "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" and "The Lost Ghost," the idea of protecting privacy by not meddling becomes a convenient excuse for not sharing stories of abuse with those who might be able to remove the girl from the abusive situation. Oaks asserts that the protagonists of Freeman's ghost stories "do not have true compassion for others, and they cannot recognize, justify, or remedy their own willfulness," which ultimately "narrows the protagonists' physical as well as moral perception" (218). I would agree with Oaks that this is true of some, but certainly not all, of the protagonists in the ghost stories. In "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," there does seem to be a willful ignorance of Agnes's situation. In contrast, Mrs. Meserve in "The Lost Ghost" does little that is morally reprehensible, save for gossiping about a new family coming to rent a house in town. Mrs. Bird (although a secondary character) does seem to have deeply felt compassion for the lost girl. What is chilling about these stories is not that people are ignorant of the girls' abuse but, rather, that no one understands the

possible ramifications of letting this abuse go unchecked or, if they do, their desire to not be seen as meddling busybodies prevents them from speaking out. Not acting to stop abuse adds yet another layer of horror to the Gothic naturalism of “The Lost Ghost.”

I will now conclude with a discussion of “Old Woman Magoun,” which not only continues but actually heightens the stakes of the lost girl story. “Old Woman Magoun” spends much more time both characterizing Lily, the lost girl, and exploring the events leading up to her death. “Old Woman Magoun” tells the story of the title character, Mrs. Magoun, and her fourteen-year-old granddaughter, Lily, who live in the town of Barry’s Ford. Lily’s mother gives birth to a daughter as a result of her relationship with Nelson Barry (Mrs. Magoun asserts the pair were married, but there is no real proof of their union), before dying a week later. Mrs. Magoun raises Lily and keeps her very sheltered; Lily barely knows her father, who has shown almost no interest in the young woman. One day Mrs. Magoun sends Lily to the town’s general store to buy more salt, and while there Lily talks with her father and another man named James Willis. Shortly afterwards, Barry declares that he will take custody of Lily, and he reveals that he intends to use her to pay off a debt to Willis. Mrs. Magoun tries to convince a nearby lawyer and his wife, the Masons, to adopt Lily, but Mr. Mason declines because of her bad bloodline. On their walk home from the Masons, Lily unknowingly eats some nightshade berries while her grandmother stands by and watches. Lily then experiences the painful symptoms of the poisoning and eventually dies. In explaining the cause of death, Mrs. Magoun points out that Lily ate some sour apples and milk at the Masons’ house, which upset her stomach and made her violently ill.

The sparse critical discussion of “Old Woman Magoun” notably does not regard it as a naturalist text. In writing about Freeman’s novel *By the Light of the Soul*, though, Perry D. Westbrook comments that “the setting continues to be interesting, especially the glimpses of decay and demoralization in which people on the undesirable side of the river live. Prostitution, drunkenness, and criminal neglect of children are presented with a ‘naturalism’ that Crane or Dreiser would find to their taste” (128). Curiously, Westbrook’s description of the naturalism of *By the Light of the Soul* also fits “Old Woman Magoun,” down to the geography of the river and the men of Barry’s Ford drinking rather heavily at the general store. In addition, Linda M. Grasso suggests that by using Lily as a form of payment for a debt, Barry initiates a white slavery plot (22). Barry’s lack of interest in Lily until she becomes a commodity with which he can barter exemplifies his willful neglect of his child. Lily’s commodification also ties “Old Woman Magoun” to the naturalism identified in some of Freeman’s other works. Lily’s value lies in the amount of debt she could repay on Barry’s behalf. Maria Atkins and David Mendon in *The Portion of Labor* are analogously commodified as their work is valued by the number of repetitions of their task that they can complete in one shift in the factory. In both cases, the commodification of these characters results in a determinism that defines them for much of the text. Perhaps the Gothic elements of “Old Woman Magoun” distract readers from its naturalism, but I would argue that it is those very elements which point to a complicated depiction of a subtly nuanced naturalism.

By exploring the Gothic nature of “Old Woman Magoun,” the reader can better understand the complicated question of Mrs. Magoun’s agency and its relationship to

naturalism. Freeman has, as we know, more explicit ghost stories and supernatural tales, but even in “Old Woman Magoun,” there are significant Gothic elements, such as Lily’s role as the virginal naïve heroine, Barry’s role as the menacing patriarchal villain, and the frightening, isolated landscape of the forest. Similar to shared thematic concerns, setting is also crucial for the Gothic and naturalism. In “Old Woman Magoun,” the woods become a space where moral choices are no longer easily decided and animal instincts overtake human socialization. Classic Gothic novels often feature ruins and decaying castles, but, as the genre evolved, the type of building was no longer as important as the element of decay. Freeman presents Barry’s Ford as a dying town whose physical decay represents the moral decay of its citizens. Joanne Karpinski approaches the Gothic within the idea of a frontier. She argues that female regionalists constitute their own frontier because “rural New England had become, in effect, a no man’s land in the mid-nineteenth century,” and thus it becomes “a species of frontier for the women who remained in its diminished ports and on its grudging farmsteads” (Karpinski 140). She then points to the overall decay of the New England region to highlight it as a Gothic setting. Indeed, Freeman uses this desolate setting to great advantage in “Old Woman Magoun.”

From one perspective New England appears to be a Gothic wasteland, but others view it as a decidedly mundane space. In discussing Freeman’s supernatural tales, Benjamin F. Fisher writes that she “grounds her horrors amidst the uneventful, well-nigh boringly repetitive day-to-day occupations and recreations of the same New Englanders who elsewhere inhabited her very non-ghostly fiction” (18). I would argue, however, that

even though “Old Woman Magoun” is not a supernatural tale, the use of the commonplace setting which Fisher observes foregrounds the Gothic nature of the tale. In setting a Gothic tale in a very normal town, Freeman actually incorporates the uncanny. Freeman takes a mundane environment, a sleepy New England town, and defamiliarizes it to show the frightening immorality underpinning the town’s ‘finest’ family. Furthermore, the idea of a maternal figure killing a healthy, grown child seems as un-homelike as it gets, injecting an element of horror to the story.

Indeed, the first image in Freeman’s story is that of Barry’s Ford and its location. It is set in “a sort of high valley among the mountains,” and its name derives from “the Barry family [which] was the most important in the place; and Ford because just at the beginning of the hamlet the little turbulent Barry River is fordable” (Freeman, “Old Woman Magoun” 361). The town remains quite isolated because only one spot on the river provides access to Barry’s Ford (before the bridge is built). In fact, it is this isolation which creates the impetus for Freeman’s story. Mrs. Magoun lobbies vigorously for the bridge to be built and “was largely instrumental in bringing the bridge to pass” (361). Notably, when Barry expresses his displeasure regarding the plan to build the bridge, Mrs. Magoun responds, “‘I ain’t afraid of you. I don’t expect you to lay ary log of the bridge, but I’m goin’ to have it built this very summer’” (361). The text does not state exactly why Mrs. Magoun is so keen for Barry’s Ford to have a bridge; presumably, it is for increased ease of travel. Perhaps she foresaw a future in which Lily might live in a nearby town, close to her grandmother but far enough away from Barry to remain safe. No matter the reason, Mrs. Magoun’s exchange with Barry, quoted above,

exemplifies her sense of agency throughout this story. Note the difference between her enactment of agency in getting the bridge built and her near passivity when Lily eats the nightshade berries towards the story's end. Mrs. Magoun's declaration of agency at the story's outset in contrast to how her agency is depicted at its conclusion foregrounds questions of degrees of agency and its efficacy in a Gothic determinist text.

At the outset of her story, her resolve to have the bridge built that summer appears unshakeable. Her comments to Barry clearly indicate her confidence in her own ability to act as an agent within her community. At the same time, Mrs. Magoun's assertion that she does not fear Barry, in light of the trajectory of the full story, demonstrates Mrs. Magoun's underestimation of her opponent or sheer bravado on her part. In fact, she *should* fear him, and perhaps the events of the story would be different if she had taken his initial opposition more seriously. By connecting the town to the larger world, it is as though Mrs. Magoun unintentionally invites malevolent influences into her life and, by extension, Lily's life, and, ironically, malevolence from within the town rather than from the outside. In this early portion of the story, Magoun carries the day, and the bridge is built. However, one of the unintended consequences is that Lily meets and comes under the influences of Jim Willis and Nelson Barry. The story's fatal conclusion echoes this early example of agency and its effects in the depiction of Magoun's agency. Magoun ultimately prevents Nelson Barry from influencing Lily. As with building the bridge, Magoun achieves what she sets out to do in keeping Lily away from Barry; however, she clearly never wanted Lily's premature death to be the mode of protection. I am not arguing that Mrs. Magoun's initial actions in lobbying for the bridge to be built or

opposing Barry caused Lily's death. Nor would I say that Freeman blames Mrs. Magoun's early actions for the tragic outcome of the story. Instead, I would argue that Freeman depicts a world in which the outcome of a woman's agency seems unpredictable but may in fact be already determined, and well-intentioned actions can initiate a chain of circumstances which are beyond a woman's control, a deeply gendered naturalist worldview.

If Lily's journey does not display the importance of chance significantly enough, readers could locate its role even earlier in the story in Mrs. Magoun's determination to have the bridge built for Barry's Ford and her culinary inducement (requiring the extra salt) to elicit the men's participation and labor. Mrs. Magoun vows "'I'm goin' to have it [the bridge] built this very summer.' She did" (361-62). Mrs. Magoun's insistence that the bridge be built sets off a trajectory which ends in her sacrificing her granddaughter to prevent Lily's exploitation by her estranged father. Karpinski points out that "the bridge, initially a symbol of Magoun's ascendancy over [the town's men,] quickly becomes the instrument of her tragic downfall" (149). The mere idea that Mrs. Magoun's intentions at the story's opening could end in such tragedy lends itself to a kind of surrealism and moves the story out of realism and into the interlocking realms of the Gothic and naturalism. Certainly the first time a reader encounters "Old Woman Magoun," the opening pages give no indication of the story's plot, and yet, once one looks back, Freeman includes the necessary clues to mark the path her story will take and the multiple narrative layers she encodes within it.

In addition to the bridge, the only other location noted within the town is the general store where people come to buy supplies, a site of commodification, but also a place where the town's men loiter and drink. Nelson Barry is quickly associated with the general store as he is often found there and he will shortly determine Lily's own commodification. Freeman then measures the town's decay by the state of the Barry family. Barry is "the fairly dangerous degenerate of a good old family" (362), and Mr. Mason refuses to adopt Lily based on her heritage and environment as he argues that "adopting a child is a serious measure, and in this case a child who comes from Barry's Ford [,] . . . we cannot take a child with Barry blood in her veins. The stock has run out; it is vitiated physically and morally," speaking of Lily's stock as one would a spoiled commodity (373). Despite Lily's limited contact with her father and her innocence, her relation to the Barry family condemns her in Mr. Mason's eyes. Although there is no explicit storytelling in Mrs. Magoun's contact with the Masons, it becomes clear that stories about the Barry family and its degeneration have spread to the Masons and form the main evidence as to why they cannot adopt Lily.

Isabel Barry, Nelson's sister and Lily's aunt, provides the clearest example of the Barry family's deterioration. She is referred to twice as "the half-witted sister," and the only moment where she is portrayed in the text gives a frightening glimpse of what Lily's future could have been (371). In Nelson Barry's home, "she had learned with her feeble intellect some tricks, like a dog. One of them was the mixing of sundry drinks" (371). Isabel serves drinks to her brother and James Willis before she is dismissed with the order to "clear out now and go to bed" (371). Echoing the earlier language which

describes her similarity to a dog, Isabel “obeyed” her brother’s command (371). Not even given the care a beloved pet might receive, much less the respect due to a fellow human being, Isabel is another Barry woman who, like Lily, suffers because of her heredity and because of the power Nelson Barry wields. She, too, might have once been a lost girl, or, perhaps, she still is. Barely glimpsed in “Old Woman Magoun,” she becomes yet another female specter that haunts the text much like Lily.

Lest Barry himself escape the hereditary devolution visited upon Isabel and Lily, James Bucky Carter, discussing “Old Woman Magoun” as a revision of “Little Red Riding Hood,” sees Barry not only as a reworking of the Big Bad Wolf but as “indeed the most beastly of Freeman’s few beast figures in her fairy-tale revisions, Willis a close second” (43). Barry, too, becomes reduced to a consuming animal, a predatory one. Much like the animal imagery of *McTeague* or even *The Call of the Wild*, the explicit animal imagery surrounding Isabel and the more covert predatory imagery in relation to Barry marks yet another connection between Freeman’s work and naturalism.

The way heredity changes Lily’s life also emerges as a naturalist theme in “Old Woman Magoun.” Blood will out, and it casts Lily both out of her grandmother’s care and out of a chance at a future. Leah Blatt Glasser argues that “Old Woman Magoun” “allows Freeman to make a tragic statement about the crossing of that bridge between childhood and adolescence for nineteenth-century girls” (11). Although Magoun clearly loves Lily, the story as a whole raises questions about Lily’s upbringing and her ability to transition to adulthood. Lily’s uncanny innocence also links her to Gothic heroines with little experience of the world. Similarly, Lily’s naiveté makes her seem like a child rather

than an adult. Lily's physical appearance is uncanny in that her chronological age deems her a young woman, while her mental age, emotional age, and her body mark her as a child. Additionally, Lily's life acts largely as a repetition of her mother's: Mrs. Magoun raises both mother and daughter, Freeman inserts an intimation that Barry exploited Lily's mother just as he plans to exploit their daughter, and both women die unexpectedly (perhaps both from being indirectly poisoned by Mrs. Magoun). When the reader first encounters Lily, the narrator states she "clasped her doll—a poor old rag thing—close to her childish bosom, like a little mother" (Freeman, "Old Woman Magoun" 362), perhaps eerily mirroring her own mother's birth experience. Lily "looked only a child, although she was nearly fourteen; her mother had been married at sixteen" (362). She chooses to carry the doll with her to fetch salt for her Grandmother, and the narrator again emphasizes the discrepancies between her age and her looks, noting "she was very small, and walked like a child, with the clap-clap of little feet of babyhood. She might have been considered, from her looks, under ten" (364). Lily retains the markers of childhood, and these signifiers make Barry's and Willis's plans for her that much more lurid, stretching out of realism and into the surreal and the grotesque.

Furthermore, it is not just Lily's physical demeanor but her mindset which marks her as a child, as she quickly forgets her grandmother's warnings about not talking to strangers. When Lily encounters a man in the woods, she immediately tells him exactly where she is going and why, and "presently when the man's hand grasped her *little childish one* hanging by her side, she felt a complete trust in him. Then she smiled up at him. She felt glad that this nice man had come along, for just here the road was lonely"

(364, my emphasis). Rather than recognizing one of the situations her grandmother has warned her about, Lily finds comfort with the stranger. The descriptions of Lily's childish physical appearance echo her childlike psychological state, as she implicitly trusts the strange man she meets. Lily thus disobeys her grandmother and remains ignorant of any possible danger to herself. In "Old Woman Magoun," the reader sees, then, that the innocence Mrs. Magoun protects and inculcates severely backfires as Lily has no idea how she should protect herself when she goes out into the world on her own. Limiting Lily's knowledge of the world, instead of making her more obedient and observant, merely deprives her of the knowledge necessary to make wise decisions.

The knowledge of the world Lily possesses can be summarized very briefly: "little Lily had never been allowed to run with the other children of Barry's Ford. Her grandmother had taught her everything she knew—which was not much, but tending at least to a certain measure of spiritual growth" (362). In trying to protect Lily, Mrs. Magoun keeps her isolated; she does not know other children, and she does not know her father who argues to Magoun that "a knowledge of evil is a useful thing. How are you going to avoid evil if you don't know what it is like?" (370). Although Lily initially dislikes her father when meeting him in the general store, she quickly warms to him, as "hereditary instincts and nature itself were asserting themselves in the child's innocent, receptive breast" (366). Lily's biological nature responds positively to Barry's praise and the treats he gives her, and this pleasure overrides any protective nurturing from Mrs. Magoun. The reader might be tempted to blame Mrs. Magoun for Lily's innocence, but reading it from a Gothic naturalist perspective, I would argue that no matter what Mrs.

Magoun had done, biology and heredity would always have had the ability to trump her nurturing. Furthermore, Freeman deftly plays upon the homonyms of Barry and berry in Lily's dangerous forays into the world outside her Grandmother's home. Lily fails to register Barry's ability to harm her just as she fails to recognize the poisonous nightshade berries. Mrs. Magoun, however, perceives the deadly qualities of Barry (although perhaps too late) and feels he is actually more dangerous than the nightshade. Having inculcated Lily's innocence, Mrs. Magoun uses this innocence against Lily in protective yet deadly ways.

Lily's lack of agency marks another central element of naturalism. Lily, much like other Gothic naturalist heroines, believes she has agency and acts accordingly only to discover later that she has entered a trap which precludes her ability to act as an agent. In terms of the story's naturalism, the role of chance in Lily's journey to the woods becomes crucial. The narrator notes that Lily's grandmother typically kept her from going to the general store so that she would not see and be influenced by her father, considered an "evil deity" by the townspeople (362). Finding that she needs more salt to finish the meal she's cooking for the men building the town's bridge, Mrs. Magoun realizes, "'I've got to have some more salt. . . . I've got to go to the store'" (363). Sally Jinks, another woman helping Mrs. Magoun prepare the meal, suggests that Lily go to purchase the salt instead of Old Woman Magoun, and Mrs. Magoun struggles to reach a decision. She looks at Lily "irresolutely" and thinks, noting "it did not seem to her that she could drag herself up the dusty hill to the store. She glanced with covert resentment at Sally Jinks. She thought that she might offer to go" (363). Even Mrs. Magoun's language becomes

tentative as she ventures “‘*Guess I’ll let you go down to the store an’ git some salt, Lily*’” (363, emphasis added). Her language suggests even further hesitation, as though she is still waiting for Sally to offer. It is clear that Mrs. Magoun planned to go buy the salt herself until she hears Sally Jinks’s suggestion. In fact, there are multiple possibilities as to how they could get the salt. Mrs. Magoun, Sally Jinks, or Lily could all go, but because Mrs. Magoun is tired and Sally does not offer, the task almost arbitrarily falls to Lily.³⁶ The action that Lily undertakes in setting off into the woods towards the store sets off a chain reaction, also heavily dependent on chance in terms of whom Lily encounters. The use of chance in Lily’s journey recalls the game of chance lost earlier in the story by her father, which motivates his desire to manipulate Lily to his advantage, and cascades into all the remaining events of the plot, culminating in Lily’s death.

“Old Woman Magoun” also includes an apple which supposedly makes Lily sick. The true cause of Lily’s death is nightshade poisoning, but, before eating the nightshade berries, Lily also consumes an apple given to her by Mrs. Mason. Mrs. Magoun suggests that the apple will make Lily sick as she argues “‘sour apples and milk is always apt to hurt anybody’” (372). When Barry visits the dying Lily, he also comments on the apple: “‘I remember that her mother was very sick once from eating them [sour apples and milk]’” (377). Barry’s memory introduces the possibility that Lily’s mother died from a disguised poisoning, just as Lily does, in order to prevent both women’s sexual exploitation at his hands. Freeman draws very subtle patterns between the life and death

³⁶ When the narrator initially mentions Mrs. Magoun’s plans to cook a meal for the bridge builders, it states that “Old Woman Magoun and *some other women* planned a treat” (361, emphasis added). However, when Sally and Mrs. Magoun discuss who should go for the salt, no one else speaks or is referred to by the women. There is the additional possibility that there were more people who could have gone for the salt, but it is still Lily who completes the errand.

of Lily and her mother, suggesting that Mrs. Magoun has had to recreate the pattern of Lily's mother's haunting death in the killing of Lily herself. Much like Freeman's triptych of ghost stories, "Old Woman Magoun" encodes within its plot a sublimated story of another young woman dying. Here the circumstances are not years of neglect but another killing disguised as an unsuspecting death. Unlike the gossip circulating in Freeman's ghost stories, Magoun constructs a purely fictional narrative surrounding Lily's death to conceal what has actually happened. The story she concocts fits the events of the day, her and Lily's visit to the Masons, and simultaneously fools Barry by recalling certain events of Lily's mother's life. Mrs. Magoun constructs an unimpeachable narrative that protects herself from recrimination and recasts Lily's death as a tragic accident rather than a homicide. Rather than airing scandalous behavior, as gossip does in Freeman's ghost stories, Mrs. Magoun's storytelling instead obscures critical events.

The return of the painful memories of Lily's mother's life and death mark the text's use of the Gothic. The memories of Lily's mother haunt Mrs. Magoun and impact her parenting choices for Lily. For example, Mrs. Magoun refuses to recognize the overdetermination of Lily's familial heritage and life. Mrs. Magoun believes that by making the 'right' choices as a parent she can spare Lily the shame her mother endured. Lily's mother thus acts as a psychological apparition haunting Lily and Mrs. Magoun. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock remarks that "the ghost is the uncanny afterimage of sorrow, pain, and tragedy. If there is a ghost, someone has died or something has gone out of the world, and if the ghost walks, something has been left undone, a crime needs to be

redressed, or a story needs to be told” (105). Freeman’s triptych of ghost stories amply demonstrates Weinstock’s understanding of the ghost story as a genre with the exposure of unknown narratives at its center. The Gothic as a whole performs a similar function in its focus on the return of the repressed and the fallout attending such a return. Critics do not read “Old Woman Magoun” as a ghost story, but given Weinstock’s description of a ghost as an “uncanny afterimage,” Lily becomes the ghostly remnant of her mother who, in turn, haunts the story (105). Weinstock’s understanding of the ghost story also illuminates the various narrative techniques Freeman uses in her ghost stories about lost girls. The increasingly complex use of narrators, storytelling, and even frame narratives illustrates how difficult it is to tell these stories even as the presence of the ghosts attests to the dire need to expose their narratives. In “Old Woman Magoun,” Barry’s crimes still need to be addressed, and the true story of the life and death of Lily and her mother remains to be told. This buried story is the haunting account which Freeman provides for the reader much as she does in “The Lost Ghost,” another Gothic naturalist story.

Another crucial instance of phantasmic storytelling in “Old Woman Magoun” occurs as Lily succumbs to the poison. Magoun sits talking to Lily, envisioning for her not an earthly resurrection but a heavenly one. The reader witnesses her description of a heavenly place while Lily experiences the painful consequences of her poisoning more and more intensely. Mrs. Magoun narrates the story of Lily’s reincarnation in which she will live in peace with her mother in a higher spiritual realm. Mrs. Magoun creates her own fairy tale as she “talked as Lily had never heard her talk before, as nobody had ever heard her talk before. She spoke from the depths of her soul; her voice was as tender as

the coo of a dove, and it was grand and exalted” (Freeman, “Old Woman Magoun” 375). Mrs. Magoun imagines Lily’s reunion with her mother, who “has a little white room all ready for you” (375).³⁷ Mrs. Magoun lulls her into a deathly sleep as she tells her “you shall go to a beautiful place” (375). There is no magical resolution to Lily’s problems, however, so that even though Mrs. Magoun offers her the hope of resurrection, she has to die. One other crucial element that marks “Old Woman Magoun” as Gothic naturalist is that Freeman foregrounds Lily’s pain and contrasts it to the beautiful imagery Mrs. Magoun tries to depict for Lily. Yet, for Freeman’s readers, Mrs. Magoun’s storytelling fails to counter Freeman’s portrayal of the deadly effects of the poisoning.

When one reads “Old Woman Magoun” as a Gothic naturalist text, the fact of Lily’s death is not as crucial as the circumstances of how and why it happens. Once again the reader sees the importance of chance as well as the illusion of an agency which does not really exist. When Lily first sees the nightshade berries intermingled with the blackberries, she says ““those berries look good to eat, grandma,” to which Mrs. Magoun replies, ““you can’t have any *now*”” (372, emphasis added). By not immediately warning Lily that she is admiring nightshade berries, Mrs. Magoun begins to lay the groundwork for sacrificing Lily as a last option to foil Barry’s plans. After being rejected by the Masons, Lily and Mrs. Magoun return to the spot with the nightshade berries, and Mrs. Magoun allows Lily to sit down and rest. Lily comments on the berries multiple times as she decides to eat them. She notes ““these look like nice berries,”” ““they look good to

³⁷ Interestingly, even Lily’s resurrection notes her diminutive nature. The room Lily’s mother has prepared for her is a “*little* white room” (375, emphasis added). Freeman uses the word “little” forty-nine times throughout “Old Woman Magoun,” stressing Lily’s smallness as she faces her father and grandmother. In her next spiritual life, as in her life in Barry’s Ford, Lily will not be permitted to take up much space.

eat,”” and ““why, they are real sweet,”” ““they are nice”” (374). Her descriptions of the berries give Mrs. Magoun several opportunities to stop her, but Mrs. Magoun does nothing, and the story’s descriptions of the strangeness of her voice and the intense expressions on her face intimate that she is acutely aware of exactly what Lily eats. Mrs. Magoun purposely remains mute, not responding until after Lily has eaten a sufficient number of the berries to guarantee her demise. Lily exemplifies the vexed agency of women in Gothic naturalist texts as her situation *seems* to allow her to choose what she will do, while a closer examination demonstrates that her choices have already been made, and she merely follows the script already written for her. Unlike characters such as Lily Bart or Edna Pontellier, who become keenly aware of the limits placed upon their agency and the determinism influencing their actions, Lily remains unaware of the way Mrs. Magoun and Barry manipulate her agency. Although on the cusp of adulthood, Lily remains childlike in her trust in adults which further prevents her from considering her agency in a similar way to other naturalist characters or making use of what agency she does possess. Mrs. Magoun also experiences this contradictory form of agency, as discussed above. While it appears that she controls the situation, she also has intense limits placed upon her agency.

Indeed, reading “Old Woman Magoun” as a Gothic naturalist text invites readers to become even more suspicious about Magoun’s agency as a character. Although it seems as though Mrs. Magoun orchestrates Lily’s death (and she certainly does in several key aspects), she also prevents herself from acting as she sits passively and watches Lily. Fleissner notes that Mrs. Magoun is “acting by not acting, in naturalist fashion . . . [;] the

girl dies, saved from the only future available to her” (222). Magoun lays the trap but leaves the outcome up to an orchestrated act of chance in order to complete it. Does Magoun prevent herself from taking action as a way to assuage her guilt, or does she ultimately lack agency? As is the case in Alcott’s “Thrice Tempted,” Magoun represents another female character in a Gothic naturalist text who downplays her own agency and defers to the forces of chance even as readers recognize that, through that very deferral, these women are making choices. Barry gives Magoun an ultimatum which she cannot simply ignore. Additionally, the Masons extinguish Magoun’s hope that they might adopt Lily and remove her from Barry’s influence, further limiting Mrs. Magoun’s options. I would argue that Mrs. Magoun acts with slightly more agency than Lily but certainly much less than Barry. Lily’s death destabilizes the social order and functions as a loophole through which to escape Barry’s power, but the fact that she has to die questions how much the alternative social order Mrs. Magoun seeks can actually change things. Pattie Cowell helpfully distinguishes between British and American Gothics, arguing that “if the recurring pattern in early British gothic fiction is the re-establishment of a threatened social order, early North American gothics frequently resolve their conflicts by creating an alternative order” (126). Mrs. Magoun tries to initiate an alternative social order, first by keeping Lily from her father, calling for the bridge to be built, and seeking an adoptive family for Lily before ultimately ending Lily’s life. Nevertheless, due to the text’s naturalism, all of Magoun’s attempts, with the exception of Lily’s death, fail to usher in an alternative order. Although the bridge is built, it does not ameliorate Mrs. Magoun and Lily’s situation. While Mrs. Magoun’s lack of agency

does not excuse Lily's killing, the story asks the readers to decipher carefully the motivations and intentions which precede Lily's passing. Although Mrs. Magoun seems to make choices and take action, she, like Lily, finds herself with an illusory agency that becomes little more than a mirage.

In keeping with Gothic naturalist texts, Mrs. Magoun cannot wholly escape the consequences of her actions. The final images of Mrs. Magoun picture her in constant motion as she continually walks across the bridge. The narrator describes her as "very industrious, but people said that she was a trifle touched, since every time she went over the log bridge with her eggs or her garden vegetables to sell in Greenham, she carried with her, as one might have carried an infant, Lily's old rag doll" (Freeman, "Old Woman Magoun" 377). Mrs. Magoun is sentenced to carry the truth of Lily's death with her every step, and Lily's rag doll only intensifies the guilt she bears. Her journeys across the bridge and the talisman of the doll show the constant nature of Mrs. Magoun's pain, testifying once again to the consequences of exercising one's agency or, concomitantly, discovering the dire limits of one's agency.

The concluding images of Mrs. Magoun convey that she feels she is, and should be, punished for sacrificing Lily. Grasso argues that by "facilitating Lily's death, Old Woman Magoun achieves the ultimate revenge: she thwarts Barry's plan by transforming Lily from commodity to human being" (26). She reads Mrs. Magoun as using her agency to transform Lily's death into an act of resistance and salvation for Lily herself. While I agree, in part, with Grasso, the fact that Mrs. Magoun's only options are allowing Lily to be auctioned off to satisfy Barry's debts or die in order to remain safe from Barry deeply

complicate the idea that Lily's death is an act of revenge. The portrayal of Magoun following Lily's death clarifies her position within the story not quite as a victim but surely as an injured party as well as a ghostly figure continually haunted by Lily's death.

Ultimately, Mrs. Magoun resigns herself to the trajectory of Lily's short life. As they set out on what becomes their final walk to visit the Masons, Lily says Mrs. Magoun is holding her hand too tightly. Mrs. Magoun replies she "wouldn't hurt you for nothin', except it was to save your life or somethin' like that" (Freeman, "Old Woman Magoun" 372). Lily tells her grandma that she hurts her hand again in exactly the same language after Lily eats the nightshade berries and the two are walking back home. This time, Mrs. Magoun does not respond and simply loosens her grip. Mrs. Magoun, left without real choices following Barry's ultimatum to relinquish care of Lily, allows her granddaughter to eat the poisonous berries. In gripping her hand so hard that it hurts, she communicates her intention of surrendering to what she feels must happen to protect Lily. In the character and story of Old Woman Magoun, then, there is a narrative convergence. Wishing she had a magical resolution to Lily's problems, Mrs. Magoun instead takes on the role of an executioner. Formerly a life giver, Mrs. Magoun must now end Lily's life. Her story awards her not the happy ending readers often expect but, rather, a bitter ending which echoes her story's haunting Gothic nature, its violence, and, above all, the tale's naturalism. A complicated blending of both narrative modes, the story could not have happened in any other way or conclude with any other ending.

Given Freeman's pervasive use of storytelling as a motif across the stories I have examined, her engagement with regionalist fiction is apparent. However, in "The Wind

in the Rose-Bush,” the demonstration of such storytelling’s failure highlights the Gothic nature of the story, and in “The Lost Ghost” and “Old Woman Magoun,” the failure of storytelling to uphold its communal function contributes to these stories’ Gothic naturalism. Telling young girls’ stories in a way connected to naturalist texts but unique in its own right, Freeman’s work manages to relate these complex narratives while also conveying through her use of various kinds of narration and framed narratives both how easily young girls’ stories can be hidden and how it is nearly impossible for young girls to voice their own stories. Dispensing with the notion that young girls’ lives are sweet, simple, and uneventful, Freeman’s texts demonstrate that the thematic darkness and haunting nature of the Gothic as well as the restrictive forms of heredity, determinism, chance, and futile agency found within naturalism are equally applicable to young girls as to the working class in *Life in the Iron-Mills*, a failed dentist in *McTeague*, or women struggling to find their place in society in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNWILLING VICTIMS: THE LIVING DEAD IN *SUMMER* AND *WEEDS*

Mothers do not have an easy lot in American fiction. Whether fictional mothers are ‘good,’ ‘good enough,’ or ‘bad,’ they all face criticism from other characters and from readers themselves. Margaret Atwood’s poem “Bring Back Mom: An Invocation” threads together the conflicting emotions children may feel towards their mother, including a disdain as well as a deep longing for Mom to step in and make things right. Atwood describes “Mom, who knew the dirt,/ and hid the dirt, and did the dirty work” (107). Furthermore, the poem depicts Mom as someone who “never saw herself/ or us as clean enough” (107). Yet despite all her efforts, she is “reviled to great profit” for the way she takes care of her children “by not loving them enough,/ by loving them too much,” “by some failure of love—” (107). Published many decades before Atwood’s poem, Edith Wharton’s *Summer* (1917) and Edith Summers Kelley’s *Weeds* (1923) depict both mature mothers and young women becoming mothers who suffer similar scrutiny and criticism such as that catalogued in “Bring Back Mom.” Much as the poem depicts children’s failure to understand or, perhaps, a belated recognition of Mom’s struggles, *Summer* and *Weeds* illustrate daughters’ repetitions of their mothers’ victimizations when they fail to learn of and from their mothers’ personal histories. That is, a breakdown in the sharing of women’s stories leads to similar troubles for subsequent generations.

Both *Summer* and *Weeds* engage with the Gothic precisely through the erasure and reappearance of female narratives throughout the text, focusing particularly on the stories of mothers and daughters and more generally on those deemed victims. *Summer* and *Weeds* also explicitly engage with discourses of genetic inheritance and environment. Although both novels have been interpreted as naturalist because of these discourses, *Weeds* more explicitly so than *Summer*, neither has been adequately interrogated as a Gothic text. Wharton and Kelley twist the Gothic so as to present it not through the typical elements of the supernatural but, instead, through the psychological portraits of their protagonists. Kathy Fedorko is unique thus far in placing *Summer* in conversation with some of Wharton's other Gothic texts, and I am inspired by her work in that she uses the portrayal of various psychological states as key indicators of the Gothic. In this way, both *Summer* and *Weeds* rightly deserve the category of Gothic since they are just as frightening as any ghost story in their depiction of two women determined to prevent themselves from unraveling in cultures within which that seems to be the only option for women, and especially mothers, of their class and temperament. Although Gothic fiction often features victims of one sort or another, as does naturalism, *Summer* and *Weeds* present a sustained engagement with victimhood. However, they do so by showing victimhood to be a complex rather than a one-dimensional state, one occupied by men as well as by women, and one which elicits a variety of reactions from the victims.

While the different kinds of victims presented in both *Summer* and *Weeds* lend themselves to naturalist questions of agency and making choices, victims are equally important in the Gothic tradition. However, victims in Gothic texts rarely have the

luxury of conceptualizing their own victim status as vampire bites and phantom attacks in the middle of the night are not accompanied by perceptible warnings to the intended victim. An attentive reader, though, may recognize the clues foreshadowing the creation of victims even though he or she remains powerless to alter the narrative's trajectory. In Gothic naturalist texts, readers can trace not only how people become victims but also the vast range of psychological and emotional responses that come with recognizing one's self as a victim. Although critics over the past couple of decades have begun to explore Wharton's use of the Gothic, *Summer* is rarely discussed in relation to that genre or in conjunction with Wharton's other ghost stories. In turn, *Weeds* has such a small body of critical scholarship that it is nearly always discussed within the context of American literary naturalism or feminist literature. Therefore, its relationship with the Gothic also remains unexplored. I hope that my discussion of these novels as Gothic naturalist will foreground new and different aspects of the texts largely absent from critical discussions.

Both novels present a wide range of female subject positions while also demonstrating that their protagonists come to understand their own subjectivity by comparing it to that of the many other female characters they encounter. Discussing *Summer*, Meredith Goldsmith catalogues the wide range of "homosocial encounters—between Charity and her North Dormer peers . . . [,] between Charity and women glimpsed in mirrors and on streets, and between Charity and women viewed as others to norms of late-nineteenth-century 'heteromaterial' femininity—spinsters, prostitutes, female professionals, and differently abled women" (109). Indeed, Goldsmith goes on to contend that Charity's "daily conflicts revolve around female rivalry—competition for

employment, social recognition, and male attention” (111). Yet, as I will argue, there is also the curious absence of Charity’s mother’s subjectivity for a large portion of *Summer*. Even as the other women of North Dormer and Nettleton influence Charity quite deeply, her mother, Mary Hyatt, does not figure in Charity’s development until Charity herself becomes a mother. Surely Charity’s ignorance of her mother’s story leaves a deep impact on Charity’s understanding, or lack thereof, of her own history and impacts her choices throughout the novel.

In *Weeds*, the role of homosocial interaction is less about competition than it is about Judy’s comparisons of her own subjectivity to that of other women. Yet Judy, like Charity, feels isolated from the other women of her community. Throughout *Weeds*, Judy’s perception of her agency and victimization is much clearer than Charity’s because the novel traces her life over the course of many years and she gains a great deal of maturity quickly after she marries and has her children. Judy’s mother, Annie Pippinger, dies when Judy is still a young girl and is never mentioned again in the novel. However, motherhood and Judy’s struggles with it present a significant portion of the novel’s conflicts so that Annie’s absence becomes quite a potent one. Mothering and a daughter’s relationship to her mother emerge as integral to Charity’s and Judy’s interpellation of themselves and to their subsequent actions. The Gothic nature of both texts manifests itself in the protagonists’ interpretation and, more often, misinterpretation or lack of awareness of other female characters’ personal histories, particularly those of their mothers. While critics often write about the return of the repressed as the sins of the father being revisited upon his children (sons, no doubt), I posit that Wharton’s and

Kelley's narratives figure the return of the repressed in the form of stories, or reworkings of stories, that have been forgotten too quickly or that have remained unresolved. While my previous chapter focused on the limits of communal storytelling and the imperative to share unpleasant stories or take action to prevent them, the storytelling in *Summer* and *Weeds* is very different. In these novels, the storytelling I wish to explore is not shared between two people. Instead, I will interrogate the effects of the stories that we tell ourselves, oftentimes personal and familial histories, and the impact they have on characters' choices.

Written in France as Wharton was working with World War I refugees, *Summer* focuses on teenage Charity Royall, a young woman unofficially adopted by Lawyer Royall and brought to live in the small New England town of North Dormer where gossip travels quickly and personal business never remains private. After Mrs. Royall dies, Charity fends off Royall's drunken advances but also rejects the opportunity to leave North Dormer and go away to school. She begins a secret romance with Lucius Harney, a wealthy and educated young man from New York, when he visits the town one summer. Charity eventually discovers she is pregnant with Lucius's child; however, she also learns that Lucius is engaged to the wealthy and fashionable Annabel Balch, so Charity never reveals her pregnancy to him. After a failed attempt to return to the Mountain and live with her mother (Charity arrives minutes after her mother's death), she marries Royall and returns with him once more to his house in North Dormer. Charity's relationship with Royall and their eventual marriage has often divided critics. Curiously, Candace Waid argues that "Lawyer Royall, representing the regal elites, serves as a

representative of the paternal and social hierarchies that are designed to protect women and the young. *Summer* insists on the benevolence of this patriarch as the authority who shelters human civilization and maintains the hierarchical relations that in Wharton's view give it meaning" (115-16). Similarly, Jennie A. Kassanoff refers to *Summer* as "a story with a happy ending" (113). However, other critics such as Elizabeth Ammons and Dale Bauer are thoroughly repulsed by the marriage between Charity and Royall. More recently, critics have explored the text's expression of female sexuality, its potential critiques of patriarchy, and the intrusion of the maternal. Language and its many failures within the text have also drawn recent critical attention. By emphasizing how the story of Charity's mother circulates within the novella, I hope to identify not just Gothic scenes within *Summer* but a more subtle Gothic structure underpinning the work.

Weeds, in turn, has a much less robust critical body of work although it, too, employs a nuanced Gothic structure as is the case in *Summer*. *Weeds* has been lost and rediscovered several times since its initial publication. Much like garden weeds, it cannot be easily uprooted or eradicated from the American literary landscape as long as the possibility for it to spring up in a future season still remains. It can be read as a *bildungsroman*, a *künstlerroman*, a naturalist novel, a regionalist work, a feminist novel, part of Appalachian literature, or even Southern literature. Charlotte Margolis Goodman, who rightly adds "women's working-class literature" to the genres listed above, argues that "with its focus on the entrapment of a sensitive female protagonist whose spirit ultimately is defeated by the material circumstances, social constraints, and biological imperatives of her life, *Weeds* is a quintessential example of female literary naturalism"

(365). Indeed, much of the criticism on *Weeds* situates it as a naturalist novel and places it in conversation with other naturalist texts, such as *Life in the Iron-Mills* (1861), *The Dollmaker* (1954),³⁸ *The Awakening* (1899), *Quicksand* (1928),³⁹ and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Moving the Mountain* (1911).⁴⁰ Linda Kornasky argues that Wharton and other writers working in "feminist naturalism" likely knew Kelley's novel (198). She observes that "*Weeds* might have caught some or all of these novelists' attention [earlier in the paragraph Kornasky lists Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Nella Larsen, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Ann Petry] given that it had been promoted in the mid 1920's Greenwich Village and New York publishing literary world by well-placed figures, including Sinclair Lewis, who was known—at least by reputation—to these naturalist women writers" (211). Yet, the amount of scholarship on this novel is small, especially in light of the many genres and fields of literature touched upon by this text.

Weeds charts the life of Judy Pippinger, the daughter of Kentucky farmers. Unlike her older sisters, Lizzie May and Luella, Judy is a tomboy who loves the natural world. She later marries Jerry Blackford, and the couple rents a house on a small piece of land on which they begin to farm. Although Judy prefers to be outside helping Jerry work the land, she soon becomes pregnant and must stay in the house to care for their son, Billy. In quick succession, Judy bears two more children, another boy and a girl.

³⁸ For comparisons with *Life in the Iron-Mills* and *The Dollmaker*, see Charlotte Margolis Goodman's "Portraits of the 'Artiste Manque' by Three Women Novelists." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5.3 (Autumn 1980): 57-59. JSTOR. Web. 12 August 2015.

³⁹ For comparisons with *The Awakening* and *Quicksand*, see B.W. Capo's "Can This Woman Be Saved? Birth Control and Marriage in Modern American Literature." *Modern Language Studies* 34.1/2 (Spring-Autumn, 2004): 28-41. JSTOR. Web. 12 August 2015.

⁴⁰ For comparisons with *Moving the Mountain*, see Charlotte Margolis Goodman's "Paper Mates: The Sisterhood of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edith Summers Kelley." *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Ed. Catherine J. Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2000. Print. 160-71.

Each pregnancy is marked by horrible nausea early on, and Billy's birth is portrayed as a traumatic physical event for Judy and one of horror for Jerry as well because nothing can be done for Judy's pain. After having an affair with a traveling preacher, Judy becomes pregnant once again. After a number of attempts to abort the pregnancy and a suicide attempt, Judy becomes ill and loses the baby. She vows never to become pregnant again, insisting on sleeping on a cot away from her husband. Following a period of great strain within the marriage, at one point escalating into physical violence, Judy resigns herself to bearing more children and caring for the family's needs until her body physically wears out, much like what occurred for her ancestors before her and the current generation of elderly women in her community.

Although born in Ontario, Canada, much of Edith Summers Kelley's life was spent in America, and, more crucially, her literary life was steeped in Greenwich Village literary circles and in American literature more generally. Kelley worked as Upton Sinclair's secretary from 1906-1907, befriended Susan Glaspell, and was engaged to Sinclair Lewis for a short time. Later, Kelley and her family moved to Scott County, Kentucky, and actually farmed tobacco, much as Judy's family does in *Weeds*. The Kelley family would later operate a boardinghouse in New Jersey while farming there, thereafter moving to California, where Kelley spent the rest of her life. It was in California that Kelley wrote *Weeds* while also raising her children and maintaining that farm's housekeeping. She wrote one other novel, *The Devil's Hand*, which was inspired by women who worked on an adjoining farm in California and published posthumously in 1974.

One crucial identity category for the characters of both novels is that of the victim. Judy Pippinger, the protagonist of *Weeds*, compares herself as both a wife and a mother to her sister Lizzie May, realizing that things might have been easier for her “if only she could have been a *willing victim*, like Lizzie May. *But she could not*” (Kelley 217, emphasis added). Judy’s realization provides not only insight into her nature, but, more significantly, it provides a new framework for reading characters, and particularly women, in naturalist texts. Much of the naturalist canon makes its characters into victims, regardless of whether they are willingly or unwillingly so. Some characters escape victimhood through pure luck; however, even good luck can be polluted by bad luck or human error so that unscathed characters remain rare. For example, Trina’s great luck in winning the lottery in *McTeague* does her no favors in her marital relationship or in terms of her mental and emotional well-being. Indeed, the lottery winnings are no safeguard against her later victimization by Mac.

Victimhood in *McTeague*, particularly the examples of Trina and Maria Macapa, grows disturbing and grotesque throughout the novel. For example, when Mac begins biting Trina’s fingers, “this brutality made Trina all the more affectionate; aroused in her a morbid, unwholesome love of submission, a strange, unnatural pleasure in yielding, in surrendering herself to the will of an irresistible, virile power. . . . She was a strange woman during these days” (Norris 244). The pleasure Trina takes in her own abuse would be disturbing enough, but Norris compounds her situation by combining it with that of Maria Macapa. Trina and Maria visit with each other often, comparing their injuries from their husbands and

taking a strange sort of pride in recounting some particularly savage blow, each trying to make out her own husband was the most cruel. They critically compared each other's bruises, each one glad when she could exhibit the worst. They exaggerated; they invented details, and as if proud of their beatings, as if glorying in their husbands' mishandling, lied to each other, magnifying their own maltreatment. (245)

Here, shockingly, victimhood is an achievement. It is something to publicize as a twisted mark of one's position as a wife. The idea of a willing victim is pushed to its limit in Trina's and Maria's incarnation of it. Being victimized lends a certain sick status to Trina's and Maria's womanhood. Notably, Maria Macapa advises "'you never ought to fight um. . . . It only makes um worse. Just hump your back, and it's soonest over'" (245). Once again, as in the examples of so many Gothic naturalist texts, choosing inaction seems to be the only form of agency open to women. Sickeningly, Maria's advice comes less than three pages before the discovery of her murder by Zerkow, her husband. Trina, too, will be murdered before the novel's conclusion. These murders are not the fault of either Maria or Trina. However, their complicity in their own abuse raises uncomfortable and complex questions about the choices they make and about the pleasure they take in being a victim. Victimhood is defamiliarized as a state which can be viewed as pleasurable or abhorrent, depending on one's perspective. However, the novel also demonstrates that reveling in one's victimhood begins to strip away one's humanity such that a person becomes little more than flesh, even meat. Immediately following Trina's discovery of Maria's body, her throat slit, she runs out the front door

only to see “directly across the way a *butcher’s boy* was getting into his two-wheeled cart drawn up in front of the opposite house, while nearby a *peddler of wild game* was coming down the street, a brace of ducks in his hand” (248, emphases added). The grotesque juxtaposition of the corpse, butcher’s employee, and dead fowl (consider the irony there as Maria is a figurative dead duck at this point) depicts the dead end of Maria while forecasting Trina’s as well, illustrating the fatal determinism of their naturalist victimhood. While neither of the protagonists of *Summer* or *Weeds* dies, I argue that both women experience a profound spiritual death within the novels.

Judy’s victimization as a mother in *Weeds* operates on quite a different level from that in *McTeague* but one which proves deadly, not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual one. Judy’s comparison of herself with Lizzie May in terms of their victim status subtly suggests one approach to interpreting female characters within naturalism. To begin with, Judy’s wish that she could have been a willing victim, and the recognition that she simply could not have been because of her nature, performs two astounding rhetorical functions. First, Judy’s comment moves to classify all the women (and at least some of the men) in *Weeds* as victims and specifically interpellates Judy and Lizzie May as victims, albeit of different varieties. Secondly, it acknowledges the subjectivity of the victims and recognizes the possibility of different emotional responses to victimhood (perhaps even the masochistic ones of Trina and Maria). Furthermore, Judy’s thought provokes the reader to examine how and by what means she and Lizzie May are victimized and where the differences between the two lie. Judy links their victim status with their duties as wives and mothers and the work associated with those roles.

However, expanding the idea of willing versus unwilling victims as an interpretive tool for a wider variety of texts, readers should consider how characters can be victimized by heredity, environment, facets of identity and the social value (or lack thereof) placed on a person's race, class, gender, and sexuality. An examination of these factors addresses not only victimization but also agency. Once again, a Gothic naturalist text subtly attempts to grapple with the agency of marginalized characters. As is the case with some of Alcott's protagonists, Judy does not disavow agency even as her recognition of different sorts of victims points to the severely limited nature of her agency in *Weeds* (which is also true of other female characters in both *Weeds* and *Summer*). Even as victims, she and Lizzie May each retain agency through which they can respond and react to their situations. The elements contributing to their victimhood also directly relate to their agency, reshaping or curtailing the possibilities they have to act or react. Considering which characters in *Summer* and *Weeds* resist or submit to victimization can better explicate the way each text deals with female agency and its tensions with naturalist forces of determinism.

I recognize that some feminist theorists such as Elisabeth Badinter have called for feminist thinkers and writers to move beyond labeling women only as victims because it stalls the ability to make progress.⁴¹ While I agree with this call in terms of contemporary feminism and am not arguing that victimhood is the *only* lens through which to read these characters, I want to explore victimhood (which is certainly applicable to men as well as women) in *Weeds* and *Summer* in what I hope will be a more

⁴¹ In *Dead End Feminism*, Badinter specifically examines the rhetoric surrounding rape within feminism, its focus on women's victim status, and the larger impact that rhetoric has on contemporary feminism.

nuanced method that is useful both as a way to read the texts and as a way to explore agency within Gothic naturalism. Unwilling victims have been explored at length in feminist criticism, although I would argue that the label used in *Weeds* of *unwilling* victims already recognizes a level of agency often omitted in discussions of victimhood seen as a completely passive state. *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites two definitions of ‘victim’ which are particularly applicable to *Summer* and *Weeds*. For example, one meaning of ‘victim’ is “one who is reduced or destined to suffer under some oppressive or destructive agency” (“Victim.” Def. 2b). Note the passive voice in this definition. In other words, a victim is one to whom something negative is done. Victims are those who are acted *upon* rather than those who act themselves. However, another meaning is “one who perishes or suffers in health, etc., from some enterprise or pursuit voluntarily undertaken” (“Victim.” Def. 2c). The inclusion of “voluntarily” pinpoints the defining factor of being a willing victim. There is a level of complicity within willing victims typically left out of critical discussions of victimhood. In relation to agency, this raises a number of crucial questions. How often do one’s own actions make oneself a victim or lead to self-destructive behavior? Is it a cognitive choice to be a willing victim, or is it an unconscious decision? In other words, the concept of willing victims questions one’s awareness of self-destructive actions as well as sacrificial actions, actions undertaken that harm an individual but that he or she deems valuable enough to warrant the harm sustained. In addition, it is unclear whether the willing victim would identify herself as such or if that is always an external label. For example, while Judy identifies Lizzie May as a willing victim, she also notes that Lizzie May does not seem to feel the same strain

that Judith does as a mother. Instead, “motherhood had improved Lizzie May. She had taken on flesh and seemed to have discovered some source of strength and vitality inaccessible to Judith. . . . and she was always busy scrubbing, dusting, polishing, never tiring apparently of the endless cleaning of things just to have them get dirty again, a species of well doing of which Judith constantly experienced weariness” (Kelley 214). It is possible that what Judy would label as victimization is merely a loving sacrifice for Lizzie May, perhaps replicating sacrifices made by Bill Pippinger and Annie Pippinger for their children’s welfare. Yet, Judy notes that she “thought she loved her children quite as much as Lizzie May loved hers. Perhaps she did; but then quite possibly she did not. What was the matter with herself that she should be a failure?” (215). Whether what Judy considers victimhood is equal to Lizzie May’s sacrifice does not resolve Judy’s dilemma. Why can she not immerse herself successfully in the housework and childcare if she, too, loves her children as much as Lizzie May? She cannot understand why she feels so diminished by her role as wife and mother while Lizzie May seems energized by the same work. By labeling Lizzie May as a victim, the text posits that the suffering which defines victimhood does not need to be perceived by the victim herself, that it need only be recognized by an observer. Once again the tourism/voyeurism of naturalism is at play in the observation of victimhood, not unlike the depiction of female victimhood in *Maggie* (1893). However, the perversity of Trina’s and Maria’s victimization is portrayed very differently from that in *Weeds*. Whereas Trina and Maria compete viciously for the title of ‘most victimized,’ Judy recognizes a level of competition between herself and Lizzie May as different kinds of mothers. Although Lizzie May

takes pride in her self-sacrificing form of parenting, Judy feels no pride in labeling herself an unwilling victim. Judy derives no pleasure from her victimization, unlike Trina, Maria, and Lizzie May.

What these portrayals of women's victimization in both *McTeague* and *Weeds* demonstrate is that, while *individuals* experience the physical and emotional impacts of victimization, the process of labeling one's self as a victim is much more of a social phenomenon because of the comparisons and competition it entails. In contrast with the other Gothic naturalist texts I have discussed, which focus largely on individual characters, both *Summer* and *Weeds* explicitly compare their protagonists with a number of foils. Even in comparison to a novel such as *The Morgesons* in which there are several supporting female characters, *Summer* and *Weeds* go one step further by not only gesturing towards other female characters in the background but also, through the use of subtle details and narration which incorporate the touristic detail of canonical naturalism, portraying the complexity of many of these secondary female characters. The texts present, then, a range of female subject positions even though neither novel's protagonist finds one which ultimately fulfills her personally. Thus, the variety and multiplicity of characters presented as victims destabilizes stereotypical notions of what a victim 'looks like' or how a victim acts and responds.

Summer, too, uses the term 'victim' as a way to categorize women. In North Dormer, "everybody knew that 'going with a city fellow' was a different and less straightforward affair [than courting with a man from the town]: almost every village could show a *victim* of the perilous venture" (Wharton 189, emphasis added). Although

these victims may be hidden away and not discussed by North Dormer's citizens, they are not as rare as readers might imagine. Jennifer Haytock argues that Charity's story as an unwed pregnant woman is far from unique among her peers. In fact, Charity "faces the same choices as every other unwed pregnant girl before her. The young women in the novel perpetually mirror each other, bending and refracting their images back and forth among themselves" (Haytock 49). The victims of North Dormer, no doubt in situations similar to those of Charity and Julia Hawes, are called victims but are treated as though they are criminals who must not be discussed. Even their existence is better left unmentioned and those who do recognize their existence (such as Ally Hawes⁴²) must keep secret any communication with them. Unlike *Weeds*, where victims can be found in almost any household, in *Summer* the term victim takes on a specific sexual and moral connotation in which, although it is the victim who has been mistreated, she (in this case the narrator refers specifically to young women) will be punished by exile—not the perpetrator. A clear example of one of North Dormer's victims, Julia Hawes is often referenced but rarely depicted in *Summer*, and there is almost no insight given into her own interiority. It remains ambiguous whether she considers herself a victim at all, much less whether she might be a willing or unwilling one.

Annabel Balch's character seemingly resides on the opposite end of the spectrum of femininity from victims like Julia and Charity. However, she, too, is rarely represented in the novel. She takes up more psychological space in terms of Charity's rivalry with her than she does actual space on the page. Yet, I would argue her position is

⁴² Goldsmith reads Ally Hawes as a much more deceptive and powerful character than many other critics. Indeed, she even contends that Ally helps to instigate Charity's rivalry with Annabel Balch and that Ally may be jealous of Charity herself.

not one to be envied. Engaged to Harney who impregnates another woman and who marries Annabel out of duty more than desire, Annabel may well be another unwilling victim. Although materially Annabel occupies an fortunate position, Wharton's other works such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* demonstrate the confining strictures placed upon a woman in Annabel Balch's position. While her victimization may be of a different degree than Charity's, Annabel Balch represents another example of one of *Summer*'s many victims. As is the case with Julia and Ally, Annabel's relationship to victimhood is not explored in the complex way Charity's is in *Summer*.

Significantly, Charity thinks quite differently about North Dormer's 'victims.' Watching Harney from his bedroom window, Charity

had suddenly understood what would happen if she went in. It was the thing that *did* happen between young men and girls, and that North Dormer ignored in public and snickered over on the sly. It was what Miss Hatchard was still ignorant of, but every girl of Charity's class knew about before she left school. It was what had happened to Ally Hawes's sister Julia, and had ended in her going to Nettleton, and in people's never mentioning her name.

It did not, of course, always end so sensationally; nor, perhaps, on the whole, so untragically. Charity had always suspected that the shunned Julia's fate might have its compensations. There were other worse endings that the village knew of, mean, miserable, unconfessed; other

lives that went on drearily, without visible change, in the same cramped setting of hypocrisy. (211)

The understanding and empathy Charity expresses for Julia's choices is quite rare in the novel. Haytock observes that "even though the girls' experiences are so similar, each one ends up negotiating her difficulties on her own" (63). Indeed, Haytock intriguingly suggests that Annabel Balch may be pregnant as well as Charity. While Charity can extend empathy towards Julia, she cannot imagine what she might have in common with Annabel Balch and sees her only as a rival for Harney's affection. Even Charity's more compassionate view of these victims still operates under narrow criteria of who can and cannot be considered a victim.

Notably, Charity never anticipates the possibility that she might become a victim. Yet, Charity's statements above reflect on the constrictions of life within North Dormer, perhaps those of Miss Hatchard's life in particular, but also ominously foreshadow the life Charity begins once she marries Royall. In the end, Charity does not discover if Julia's life does have compensations to offset its social stigma because she remains "in the same cramped setting of hypocrisy," doubly constrained by her marriage to her father figure and the knowledge that she is pregnant with another man's child (211). The descriptions of a cramped and hypocritical setting might equally apply to Judy's life in Kentucky. The drabness and unchanging nature of certain lives seems pulled straight out of *Summer* and into *Weeds*. Just as Charity suspects that a life disapproved of by the larger community may not be the worst way to live, so, too, does Judy question community mores because she finds them to be largely empty and meaningless. Yet,

ultimately, neither Judy nor Charity breaks away from her community, perhaps because they become bound there by their responsibilities to their children. The fact that neither woman undertakes an alternative kind of life illustrates the overwhelming overdetermination of women's lives in these texts. Judy overestimates her own ability to withstand trials of every variety. Judy and Jerry's marriage exemplifies this as it begins as a loving partnership only to slowly devolve into affairs on both sides, bitterness, and even physical violence. Charity initially believes that her relationship with Harney is different from those of previous North Dormer victims with men from larger cities. However, *Summer* depicts Charity's perspective as a misreading of their relationship as it succumbs to the familiar patterns about which Royall warns her. Charity's emotions as she gazes at Harney through his window also portray the illicit desire that so often surfaces in Gothic texts and wreaks havoc on its practitioners as it does here on Charity's life.

Charity's misreading of her relationship with Harney underscores that she does not consider herself a victim, even though Royall and the citizens of North Dormer *would* categorize her as one much like Julia Hawes. Throughout the course of the novel, Charity's relationship to victimhood and the question of whether or not she is a victim is revised several times. Kathy Fedorko identifies a common Gothic structure running throughout Wharton's work which helps account for both Charity's understanding of herself and her place within North Dormer. Fedorko argues that

key characters in Wharton's Gothic fiction often go through a traumatic 'coming-to-awareness' process that revises their sense of who they are,

particularly as women and men, and how they relate to their accustomed world. Usually the process is initiated by an uncanny or supernatural encounter in a mysterious house In coming to awareness, characters are often threatened by the abyss of their inner darkness where they confront fearful qualities that Wharton associates with the feminine/maternal: vulnerability and overwhelmingness, but also receptivity, eroticism, intuitiveness, fierceness, mysteriousness, and rage. Depending on their internal fortitude, characters either try to escape and suppress or to accept and assimilate this encounter into their sense of themselves. (xii)

So much of this description connects intimately with Charity's struggles throughout *Summer*. By the novella's conclusion, Charity has certainly had to reevaluate her relationship to her "accustomed world" in North Dormer, and, significantly, Mary Hyatt's house and the brown house where Charity and Harney meet become uncanny and instigate for Charity a different awareness of herself and her history (xii). Furthermore, Charity experiences a number of the traits Fedorko lists as catalysts for awareness, and the narration explicitly references the abyss as a threat to Charity. Through learning about her mother's history and journeying to the Mountain, Charity confronts the abject, uncanny, and grotesque which cause her to revise her understanding of her position in North Dormer from one of empowerment to one of victimhood, and, by the end of *Summer*, one which takes away her agency to make choices.

Charity becomes, then, more and more of a victim as the novel progresses. At certain points, she is even complicit with her status as a victim. Early on, she bars Royall from entering her room and her later explanations of this scene clarify that she understands the sexual threat he presented. Yet instead of going to school, Charity stays in Royall's home and requests that another woman come to live there.⁴³ Readers should note how easily this safeguard is then circumvented as the hired woman who comes to live with Charity and Royall is both too old to physically challenge Royall and so hard of hearing that she likely would not hear Charity if she called for her protection. Indeed, the only safeguard preventing Royall from entering Charity's room is his own shame. Fedorko notes that "although only fifteen, she [Charity] is strong willed and experienced enough to know the potentially dangerous personal consequences of her decision" (72). However, Charity believes she has complete control over the situation and over Royall himself. The narrator notes early on that "in her narrow world she [Charity] had always ruled" (Wharton 167). After Royall's threat at her bedroom door, her demands are met and a hired woman comes to live at Royall's. Charity then feels that "she needed no one to defend her. . . . Nothing now would ever shake her rule in the red house" (176). Charity's assertion, interpreted in light of the novel's conclusion, turns out to be ironic

⁴³ Miss Hatchard suspects Royall of behaving improperly towards Charity. However, Miss Hatchard is so unnerved by the topic of sexuality that she cannot bring herself to speak frankly with Charity or take action regarding Royall's behavior, only telling Charity that "in case . . . in case . . . you know you can always come to me . . ." (169, original ellipses). Miss Hatchard fails to intervene at the critical moment which might have altered the rest of the narrative's trajectory. Charity realizes "that Miss Hatchard had no help to give her" (171). Indeed, Miss Hatchard is startlingly similar to many of Freeman's adult women characters which I discuss in Chapter 3. Afraid of scandal and seeing no respectable way to broach the topic of sexual propriety, Miss Hatchard leaves Charity's problem to resolve itself. In addition, Charity tells Harney about Royall's behavior and, although he is appalled, he also fails to take action to prevent it from happening again. The reader receives no intimation that he discusses the matter with his aunt or another authority figure.

rather than true. Because of Charity's continual misreading of self-empowerment, it is often difficult to decipher how her intentions and actions might have been different if she had understood things more clearly. While many readers would recognize Charity as a victim in her relationship with Royall, and would recognize her as the potential victim of sexual assault in the scene at her bedroom door, Charity walks away from that situation regarding herself as the victor rather than a (potential) victim. Furthermore, it is not until the events of Old Home Week, where Charity first shows symptoms of pregnancy and also discovers Harney's engagement to Annabel Balch, that readers have definitive evidence that Harney has taken advantage of Charity. These discoveries and the dissolution of Charity and Harney's affair necessitate a reevaluation of Charity as both agent and victim at different moments.

As I argued earlier, victims are acted upon rather than active agents in their own right, at least in the moment of becoming a victim, a state which is by no means permanent or definitive. Charity views herself as someone who is an active agent at the novel's outset. Yet, it is only after learning the truth about Harney and in surrendering to Royall's directives to marry him that Charity (and readers) must reassess the extent to which she has been acted *upon* throughout *Summer* even as she believed she was acting as her own agent. Dianne L. Chambers artfully describes Charity's relationship to victimhood and agency through her discussion of Charity's relationship to narrative. She argues that "Charity emerges in these opening pages [of *Summer*] as a female figure with agency. She can articulate her desire— to get out of North Dormer— and she *seems* to possess the imaginative capacity to construct an alternative story for herself that would

allow her to escape” (100, emphasis added). Crucially, Chambers notes that “the marriage [to Royall] is evidence of Charity’s ultimate failure to script an alternative narrative for herself and her child” (122). Here it is helpful to turn to Gayle Rubin’s landmark piece “The Traffic in Women” to excavate how significantly Charity misunderstands her own agency. Rubin explores gift theory and notes that anthropologically women have been the ultimate gift to bond families, clans, and tribes in political unions. However, the woman does not have the right to bestow herself as a gift. She must forfeit this right to a male elder. Rubin explains that “‘exchange of women’ is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin [;] the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves” (46-47). It is alarming how completely Charity’s life is defined by exchanges in which she is trafficked from one man to another. Her father gifts her to Royall as a young girl, and Royall’s behavior underscores his belief in his right to possess Charity in all aspects, as guardian, surrogate father, lover, and eventually husband. Rhonda Skillern perceptively notes the ways in which Royall himself breaks the rules of the gift economy and the incest taboo in keeping Charity for himself. Indeed, she argues that Royall “apparently thinks he should be able to keep her even though, *from Charity’s point of view, Royall is her father*, and thus should not be able to keep her” (127, original emphasis). Royall considers relinquishing his position to Harney but also mandates that he *alone* will negotiate this exchange of Charity from himself to Harney (he is, after all, a lawyer).

Laura E. Rutland notes that Royall's attempts to protect Charity are hypocritical at best. Indeed, she contends that Royall "cannot protect Charity from sexual harm because he has put himself in the position to be perceived as the most dangerous person of all" (438). Crucially, Charity wants her romantic relationship with Harney to be negotiated *only* by herself and Harney. Charity thinks her own choices are free of influence other than that of her own preferences. However, Jacquelyn Scott points out that evolutionary mechanisms influence choice in *Summer* alongside economic ones because Royall and Harney wield far more power than Charity and she ends up "as the *selected* (rather than the selector)" (6, original emphasis). However, Harney's choices, particularly when it comes to marriage, are not free at all (although in this he is bound by his class rather than his gender). On the other hand, Charity recognizes herself as a gift but (in contrast to the anthropological examples Rubin illustrates) one that she alone can choose to give and one that ought to be given freely. Indeed, I would argue that her disillusionment with Harney is that he misunderstands her gift of herself as one that necessitates marriage. She also later learns he has *not* given freely of himself and instead has been 'regifting' himself several times over, the cardinal sin of gift giving, although not forbidden in terms of the traditional exchange of women. Although Charity seems to assert her agency in attempting to act within the gift economy, the rules governing the traffic in women do not permit this assertion without consequences. Indeed, while Royall's marriage to Charity challenges the traditional exchange of women used to solidify ties between families, the novel's conclusion shows that he has enough power to get away with breaking this rule while Charity does not. Ultimately, Charity's desire to obstruct the traffic in women and

her ultimate inability to do so confirms her status as an unwilling victim. Charity's victim status also illustrates the novel's determinism. Despite Charity's acting as an agent and flouting the strictures of gender determinism, these same strictures govern her existence in the end whether she accepts them as valid or not.

How, then, does Charity's marriage with Royall impact her relationship to victimhood? Criticism of *Summer* can typically be categorized by the critic's interpretation of Charity's marriage. Gary Totten, however, complicates this division by arguing that "Charity's acquiescence to Royall's proposal means neither that she simply adopts the traditional role assigned her nor that Wharton views her fate as desirable" (82). I largely agree with him that, although the marriage is grotesque and abhorrent, Charity's decision to marry Royall, if it is even fair to call it that, must be read very carefully. Royall proposes three times and gradually wears down Charity's resistance while, over the course of time, her circumstances change so that she ultimately needs the security and economic support he offers. Royall's first proposal is utilitarian rather than romantic. Indeed, he does not actually *ask* Charity to marry him so much as state his own desire, asserting "'I want you to marry me. . . . The minister'll be up here next Sunday and we can fix it up then'" (Wharton 173). Royall assumes that Charity's only possible response will be an affirmative one. That is, she has the right to say yes but not the right to say no. There is no reason to phrase his proposal in the form of a question when he is already sure of the answer. As is the case with other Gothic naturalist texts, women are presented with what masquerades as a choice while in reality they are placed in a situation where agency is illusory. Not only is Royall's proposal lackluster, but he resembles a grotesque

more than anything else in this scene as “he stood there before her, unwieldy, shabby, disordered, the purple veins distorting the hands he pressed against the desk[;] . . . he seemed like a hideous parody of the fatherly old man she had always known” (173). Charity lets out a “scornful laugh,” unable to take Royall’s statement seriously (173). Counter to expectations, Charity’s sense of agency remains forceful as she rejects him; thus, the label victim is not applicable to this early interaction.

Royall’s second proposal is slightly less blunt and enumerates his feelings more clearly. He tells Charity that “you’ve always known I loved you the way a man loves a decent woman” (217). However, he again does not pose a question to Charity. Instead, he asserts “if you’ll come with me I’ll do it. If you’ll marry me we’ll leave here and settle in some big town” (217). Charity does not laugh but, still, “nothing in his appeal reached her heart, and she thought only of words to wound and wither. . . . What did anything matter that he was saying?” (217). Again, Charity maintains her sense of agency even as Royall’s proposals do not treat her as someone who has the right to say yes or no but, instead, as someone who has no other option but to agree.

The final time Royall proposes, he comes once more to take Charity down off the Mountain noting that ““it was a day just like this, only spitting snow, when I come up here for you the first time”” (298). Royall covers Charity with a blanket and takes her to Mrs. Hobart’s kitchen where she can have something to eat and warm herself by the fire. These actions and Royall’s reference to his first trip up the Mountain to claim Charity when she was a young girl seem to indicate that he is occupying a more nurturing paternal role and is going to care for Charity as one might care for a daughter. Indeed,

after his proposal, he states that Charity ought to be “took home and took care of,” yet Royall clearly wants to care for her as a husband rather than as a father (300). Royall proposes once more, not by asking Charity a question, but by stating what they will do. Interestingly, his language this time is far more circuitous. He states that he will “never feel any way but one about you; and if you say so we’ll drive down in time to catch that train, and go straight to the minister’s house; and when you come back home you’ll come as Mrs. Royall” (300). He leaves the most vital piece of information in his proposal until the end, as though hoping Charity will not notice it. Charity initially responds ““Oh, I can’t—” and never consents to Royall’s proposal, merely following him out of the house as they resume traveling towards the town and the minister (300). Unlike the earlier proposals, Charity resigns herself to the fact that she lacks the ability to refuse Royall. As is the case with so many other Gothic naturalist texts, these proposal scenes again illustrate determinism. Although Charity’s responses differ with each proposal, her actions make no difference to the end result of her marriage to Royall. While Charity’s situation has changed since the first proposal, what is more striking is the change in her self-perception and her recognition of the loss of agency. In a critical survey of the American Gothic tradition, Charles Crow (inspired by Hector St Jean de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*) argues that one of the Gothic’s defining themes is the notion that characters discover that they are not who they thought they were (24). Following confrontations with the Gothic, characters often find that they are less moral and less powerful than they believed themselves to be. I would argue that Gothic naturalist protagonists frequently undergo a similar process. Much like Mrs. Magoun in

her fight with Barry, Charity initially opposes Royall vehemently. In both texts, Magoun and Charity lose these battles of will after discovering they are far less powerful than they thought in comparison to their male counterparts. Certainly, Charity and Judith discover they are much less powerful and resilient at the conclusion of their stories than they thought they were at the beginning of them. In a purely Gothic text, there may have been a point where characters could have chosen to intervene in the course of events.

However in Gothic naturalist texts such as “Old Woman Magoun” and *Summer*, there is little that Magoun or Charity can do to alter their narratives’ events. *Summer*, then, charts Charity’s relationship to victimhood by showing the discrepancies in her own ideas about whether or not she is a victim compared with Royall’s and other characters’ understanding of her as always a victim and never an agent.

I will now turn to some of the supporting female characters in *Weeds* and to Judy herself to demonstrate women’s many different relationships to victimhood. Unlike Charity, who is negatively singled out for being from the Mountain, Judy is positively singled out for exhibiting a form of heredity unlike that of the rest of Scott County, Kentucky. Critics writing about *Weeds* often note the time Kelley spends explaining Judy’s heredity and the fact that she is the exception to the poor gene pool exhibited by many other families in her community. In sharp contrast, Mrs. Pettit, Judy’s wealthiest neighbor, is also noted in relation to heredity. Little has been written about Mrs. Pettit’s ancestry, however. Her heredity functions in an inverse relationship to Judy’s. Judy has unexceptional ancestors but is blessed with a hearty nature and strong physicality, even embodying “a reminder of earlier pioneer days when clear features and strong, straight

bodies were the rule rather than the exception” (Kelley13). In contrast, Mrs. Pettit descends from the first families, and “her haughty aquiline nose, broad brow and penetrating eyes showed that she had intellect and breeding,” but her stinginess causes her and her husband to be considered outsiders among their neighbors (64). Thus, while *Weeds* initially seems to evaluate heredity based on physical characteristics as seen above in the descriptions of Judy and Mrs. Pettit, the novel subsequently undercuts that notion. The Pettits are financially secure but lack social standing, shown to be crucial in times of crisis because the farmers are largely isolated from other nearby towns. Surprisingly, Judy’s pioneer spirit and strength do her little good as her physical resilience only means her body can better withstand the physical hardships of childbirth and farm work which feed her mental anguish and disgust with her life. In true naturalist fashion, *Weeds* depicts heredity not only as coincidental but also as sometimes meaningless in light of the individual’s environment. Therefore, even ‘good’ genes such as Judy’s may not make her life any easier or more pleasurable. In true Gothic naturalist fashion, even advantageous heredity does not allow Judy to escape abjection.

Despite the negative portrayal of Mrs. Pettit, she is one of the few women who is not a victim in *Weeds*. She evades victimhood largely through her class status and the fact that she and her husband inherited land and wealth from *her* side of the family. In fact, Mrs. Pettit is so far removed from being a victim that she could be categorized as a bully instead, presenting a rare example where gender determinism is undermined. It is Mr. Pettit (who was once her father’s hired hand) who bears the brunt of her bullying

and, along with the hired woman Cissy, becomes the victim of Mrs. Pettit's criticisms and demands.

Mrs. Pettit's nearest equivalent in *Summer* is Miss Hatchard who has greater financial means than much of the rest of the town and who similarly interpellates herself as the descendant of one of the town's finest families and therefore as a fitting arbiter of both culture and morality for the town of North Dormer. Dr. Merkle, too, may evade victimhood in *Summer*. Like Miss Hatchard, Dr. Merkle does not share in the monetary concerns of North Dormer's residents or those of the Mountain except to profit from others' misfortunes. Indeed, she is the novel's most materialistic character as is evident when she cruelly blackmails Charity out of all the money she possesses in exchange for her brooch. Yet, the novel does not portray either Miss Hatchard or Dr. Merkle as women to be emulated by Charity. Far from helping women who are less independent and economically secure than they are, they decline to help them through inaction, as in Miss Hatchard's case, or actively extort money from them, as in Dr. Merkle's case. Victimhood, then, is not the worst thing to which people can succumb.

The sympathetic status awarded to victims provides little comfort, however. Judy Pippinger comes to recognize herself as an unwilling victim but only when it is too late to change her situation, suggesting that prior to that moment she never interpellated herself as a victim.⁴⁴ Interestingly, it is Judy's neighbor and friend Jabez Moorhouse (who I would argue is another unwilling victim) who first recognizes Judy's victimhood and

⁴⁴ Judy's revelation that she is a victim also raises questions about whether the recognition of victimhood is helpful, neutral, or even harmful. Charity's relationship to victimhood is far less stable throughout *Summer*; yet, I would argue that there is also a temporal lapse between Charity's victimization in her relationships with both Harney and Royall and her recognition of it. For Charity, too, the recognition of victimhood comes too late to rectify the situation without a number of undesirable consequences.

who also understands that there is little Judy can do to change her status. In the chapter “Billy’s Birth,” expunged by Kelley’s initial publisher Harcourt Brace for being too explicit in its depiction of childbirth, Jabez visits Judy after her first son is born and, unlike her other family members and neighbors who are excited by the arrival of the new baby, Jabez does not conceal his disappointment. He observes that ““I don’t like to see you a-gittin’ yerse’f all cluttered up with babies, Judy . . . that’s haow young folks is. You can’t tell ‘em nothing for their good. . . . They gotta find it out for their selves—*when it’s too late*. Ah well, it’s nater. It’s nater, that must have her fun with all of us, like a cat that likes to have a nice long play with every mouse she ketches’” (Kelley 350, emphasis added). Jabez’s assessment highlights the temporal delay in coming to knowledge: namely, that it happens too late to substantively change things. His depiction of nature, in addition, connects his observation to naturalism and to the dual role nature plays within *Weeds*. In his simile, the cat (and therefore nature) may be merely cruel by toying with the mouse only to release it or it may be fatally predatory in toying with the mouse before devouring it. Both *Weeds* and *Summer* support Jabez’s depiction of nature as a vicious and unpredictable force. Judy takes great pleasure in nature, as is the case with Charity Royall. However, *Weeds*’s detailed description of tobacco farming and the role environmental factors such as the soil, topography, and weather patterns play in establishing the quality of a year’s crop demonstrate how brutally nature can alter the fate of a farming family, particularly tenant farmers such as those in *Weeds* who do not own the land they work. Although nature often oppresses the tenant farmers and their families, it provides an irreplaceable solace for Judy, at least until she is confined to the

house in order to care for her children. Similarly, Charity revels in the sensuous summer landscape surrounding North Dormer, but the inadequate dwellings of those who live on the Mountain demonstrate that prolonged exposure to the elements can be very cruel indeed. The little brown house where Charity and Lucius meet during their affair epitomizes human characters' tenuous relationship with nature. What might be warm and welcoming in the height of summer becomes inhospitable, to say the least, during the harsh cold of winter. The dual portrayal of nature highlights the difficulty of certain knowledge in both texts. Much like the changing state of nature, whether Charity and Judy are willing or unwilling victims changes throughout the text. Notably, though, Jabez recognizes Judy as a victim even before Judy herself does, and he sees motherhood as the determining factor in that transition.

As well as depicting the sometimes treacherous spirit of nature, Jabez points out what Judy should *not* be doing (having children) while he also observes what she *should* do (immerse herself in nature). He offers an alternative vision of Judy's life in which "“you'd otta be out over the hills a-stalkin' turkeys or a-fetchin' up the caows, or a-ridin' hoss back over the roads up hill an' down dale, or else jes' a-runnin' wild with the res' o' the wild things . . . That's where you'd otta be, Judy. *But I expect you won't never git back there no more*”" (351, emphasis added). Jabez perceives quite clearly that in becoming a mother Judy has crossed a boundary which cannot be undone. Tellingly, it is not until she is pregnant with her second child that Judy compares herself with her sister and realizes the disparate nature of their responses to motherhood, confirming Jabez's earlier assertion that Judy will learn only “when it's too late” (350).

Judy Pippinger is not the only unwilling victim in *Weeds*. Hat Wolf, although not a mother, certainly expresses outrage at the treatment she receives from her husband. Amanda J. Zink contends that “perhaps drawn as a foil for Judith, or perhaps as the embodiment of Kelley’s and Judith’s dreams of relief from child-rearing, Harriet ‘Hat’ Wolf stands outside the maternal prison” (214). However, Hat chafes at many of her husband’s habits, most notably his tendency to take the money she earns by picking the feathers off geese and other painstaking tasks, such that the novel clarifies that Hat’s life has its own set of hardships. Zink argues that “among the female characters in *Weeds*, Hat alone is deeply attracted to the idea of acquiring her own money,” recognizing financial independence as a crucial step towards personal independence (215). Late in the book, Hat finally does obtain her own bank account. Unlike Judy, then, there is the possibility that Hat can take action to change her status as an unwilling victim to some extent. With three children to care for, Judy lacks the time needed for money-making ventures of her own. Although Hat fares better than Judy throughout much of the novel, other unwilling victims demonstrate far more troubling outcomes.

The most radical example of an unwilling victim in *Weeds* is Bessie Maude, a young mother like Judy, who struggles with inherited mental illness and is eventually institutionalized. Initially, Bessie Maude “had been given to fits of destructiveness, when she would break dishes, smash window panes and try to tear up the furniture,” but one day she starts a bonfire and begins throwing household items into the flames before trying to do the same with her youngest child (Kelley 308). In the “chilling conclusion” (Berg 101) to Bessie Maude’s story, the neighbors are comforted by the fact that,

although Bessie Maude has been sent to the “insane asylum,” things would have been worse a few years earlier (Kelley 308). At least now, the neighbors reason, “Ruby, the eldest girl, was eleven and big enough to cook the meals and take care of the baby; and at last Joe would know what it was to have peace in his house, and that was something” (308). Within this moment in *Weeds*, the concept of who is or is not a victim in Bessie Maude’s family constricts very narrowly, not unlike Charity’s inability to recognize Annabel as another possible victim. Although Bessie Maude is the only person victimized by her illness, the entire family has suffered as they have been unable to help Bessie Maude or improve her condition. Perhaps all of them are unwilling victims to varying degrees, Bessie Maude most of all. However, the allocation of sympathy in this moment is startling. The neighbors feel the greatest concern for Joe, and it is only Judy who wonders whether “perhaps Bessie Maude had not been able to draw comfort out of the sunset and the late twitter of birds, and that was why life had gone so hard with her” (308). That is, Judy recognizes the comfort she herself takes in nature as perhaps the only thing preventing her from losing her sanity. Here, Jabez’s opinion that Judy should be out in nature is affirmed by Judy herself and identified as one of the only therapeutic outlets available to *Weeds*’s women. Judy seems to view Bessie Maude on the same spectrum as herself and acknowledges that she also might have responded to life in a similar way to Bessie Maude without any spiritual comfort to sustain her. Ruby, mentioned in *Weeds* only in the sentence cited above, receives not even the designation of a willing or unwilling victim. She is merely a victim without further status or opportunity to respond to her situation, and neither Judy nor the neighbors recognize her

victimhood, both in terms of losing her mother and in assuming the work of a grown woman when many readers would categorize her as still a child herself. Alison Berg notes that “for the tenant women of *Weeds* motherhood not only ages and eventually kills women prematurely but for that reason also drafts young girls into maternal duty . . . [;] under conditions of poverty, each generation of women is worn out before the ‘natural’ reproductive cycle is finished” (101). Ruby’s induction as the new ‘mother’ of the household seems all too natural to the family’s neighbors, even as the causes of many of the women’s desperation (poverty, unending housework, lack of emotional support or creative outlet) is normalized yet again through the assumption that it is only right that Ruby should take over for her mother. The examples of Bessie Maud and Ruby depict not only the deterministic cycle of motherhood but, in fact, a cycle of abjection that marks a key Gothic structure within *Weeds* through which the abject has become commonplace and accepted.

Indeed, motherhood is a crucial component of many of the victims’ lives in these texts. The criticism of *Weeds* focuses quite closely on the mother’s familial and occupational role within the novel and Judy’s struggles to fulfill the impossible role of the ideal mother. However, *Weeds* also offers glimpses into the lives of other kinds of victims, such as Hat Wolf and Ruby discussed above, but also Cissy, a hired woman who works for the stern and stingy Mrs. Pettit. Judy envies Cissy’s ability to save the money she earns working for Mrs. Pettit, yet the text notes that because Cissy works so hard and gets little time off, she does not often have the chance to spend her money on pleasurable activities as “for over twenty years the life of Aunt Eppie’s household had been her life.

She had gone there a timid young orphan girl; and in the unbroken routine of these twenty years had become a middle-aged drudge” (Kelley 63). The tone of the preceding description indicates the paucity of Cissy’s private life, even noting when the Pettits sell some hay cheaply that “Cissy . . . felt deeply concerned at the loss of her master and mistress, considering it in some degree her own” (75). Perhaps Cissy worries that she will no longer have a job because of this loss, but Judith and all the other neighbors take the swindling of the Pettits out of a few dollars as a great joke. Through these brief glimpses into Cissy’s situation, at one point observing that Cissy “had never had as much as a mild flirtation with any man” and has never traveled far from the Pettits’ home, the text suggests that Cissy should consider herself more of a victim than she does (62-63). Although it might seem empowering that Cissy does not view herself as a victim, the depiction of her life indicates that not seeing herself as a victim allows the Pettits to continue to exploit her. As is the case with Ruby, Cissy has little agency over her own life and lacks even the emotional response other victims make to acknowledge their own suffering. Over and over again, *Weeds* confronts its readers with abject characters who have already been discarded as valueless even while they are still contributing members within the community. Gothic naturalism often portrays abject characters and, at times, also documents the process of becoming abject. Although the Gothic is associated with abjection more often than naturalism, Gothic naturalism highlights abjection as one outcome produced by forces such as chance and determinism. In traditional naturalism, examples of abjection such as Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* often prompt feelings of horror in readers but do not always explore the psychological state of abjection to the same

degree as Gothic naturalism. *Summer* and *Weeds* feature the characters' responses to abjection much more prominently. Abject characters like Bessie Maude, Ruby, and Cissy haunt the novel, and their stories echo throughout Judy's. It is this consistent confrontation with abjection which marks *Weeds* as a Gothic naturalist novel.

Luella Pippinger is the rare female character who is not a victim within *Weeds*, although she presents a very different example from those of Miss Hatchard and Dr. Merkle in *Summer*. Luella never marries, lives with her father, and performs the housekeeping duties left vacant after her mother's death and Lizzie May's marriage. The text links Luella, as a girl, with her twin sister Lizzie May, describing them as "good, right-minded, docile little girls, [who] looked down upon Judith from the height of two whole years of seniority and felt it their duty to try to make her as good, right-minded and docile as themselves" (28). Furthermore, Luella and Lizzie May perform their chores "with feminine house-wifely zeal" to reverse the "ravages" inflicted on the house by the family each week (54). Even more telling, following their mother's death and their graduation from school, "things went better with the Pippinger family . . . Little women already, with a natural zest for housekeeping, they [Luella and Lizzie May] polished the milk pan, cleaned the cupboards, churned the butter and washed and rinsed and blued the clothes, all the time clacking cheerfully" (55-56). The language stipulates that the twins are not only "little women" but also True Women who step seamlessly into the role of Mother (56). Unlike later depictions of Judy's housekeeping in the novel, which portray it as grotesque and demeaning, the twins go to battle with the housework quite successfully and even cheerfully. Their submission to the work in some way frees them

from the oppressive aspects which overtake Judy. Luella's and Lizzie May's depiction thus shows willing victimhood does not have to be a tragic state. They seem to relish their self-sacrifice and the family's dependence on their skills. Judy recognizes the Gothic naturalist landscape in which she finds herself while, at the same time, her sisters are determined to tame this landscape through their own righteous womanhood.

Interestingly, however, the twins *do* finish school before they take over care of the house and family. Their father, Bill Pippinger, takes on the housekeeping duties to allow his daughters to attend school. Bill's lack of skill at housekeeping is not the only problem the family faces after Annie Pippinger's death. An even greater problem is that Bill simply does not have time to do *all* of the housework and *all* of his regular farm work. For example, when the children arrive home for supper in the evening, "the untidy kitchen, already in twilight, was usually empty, with Bill choring about the barn or away doing a day's work somewhere in the neighborhood" (54). Bill's attempts to continue his chores on the farm while adding the work of cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and other similar tasks creates dismal results. Unlike Bessie Maude's family, who sacrifice eleven-year-old Ruby in order to procure a housekeeper, Bill sacrifices his own time and energy to allow the twins to finish school. Bill is a willing victim in this situation given his readiness to take on extra work so that his daughters can finish their education. Before the twins take over the housekeeping, Bill "made shift to do the housework as best he could in his slovenly male fashion" (54). Here, readers see gender determinism emerge in the classification of Bill's housework as "slovenly" and somehow essentially "male" (54). *Good* housework then becomes coded as essentially female, even though

Judy's example questions this essentialism. Indeed, Judy, like Bill, is shown to be fundamentally bad at doing housework. While this particular description of Bill succumbs to essentialism, the novel as a whole disregards essentialism to interrogate the division of labor within the nuclear family. For example, Judy is shown to be different from her sisters and similar to her father over and over again. Each time that the novel describes Luella's and Lizzie May's housekeeping prowess, it also records the fact that "Judith was such poor help about the house that the twins soon stopped bothering with her and did the work themselves" (56).⁴⁵ In the end, being a good housekeeper depends less upon gender than upon a certain level of skill, having sufficient time to complete the work, and the ability to give oneself over utterly to the process. While housekeeping often makes victims of its practitioners, *Weeds* once again shows many different responses to this profession as it can be either oppressive or generative depending on the character's perspective. While the sustained engagement with gender determinism marks the novel's naturalism, it is the abject *outcomes* of gender determinism that mark the interjection of the Gothic.

Although early portions of the novel link Luella and Lizzie May, the fact that Luella does not marry or have children differentiates her material circumstances in adulthood from those of Lizzie May (and also from those of Judy). As is the case with Hat, Judy, and Lizzie May, Luella is in charge of all the housework duties. However, she has only one person other than herself for whom to care, and her relationship with Bill,

⁴⁵ Lisa Orr discusses gender trouble within *Weeds* as well as other portrayals of working-class women's bodies. As Orr points out, it is particularly interesting that Judy's gender trouble is raised over and over again but never provides her with the ability to escape the subject position of wife and mother as it is defined in her small community. Indeed, gender trouble in *Weeds* serves only to further Judy's problems compared to the radical potential it holds in many of Alcott's works.

who is portrayed as a loving father, never shows the strains and complaints that dominate Hat's relationship with her husband. Unlike Lizzie May and Judy, Luella has no children for whom to provide or clean up after, making her housekeeping perhaps less maddening than Judy's. Bill certainly is not dependent on Luella in the same way that Judy's three young children need her aid to accomplish even minor tasks, such as getting dressed or feeding themselves. Zink notes that "early in the novel, Judith's 'spinster' sister, Luella, and her mother-in-law, Aunt Mary, come to babysit so Judith can work outside, but as the novel progresses, for no given reason, they quit coming to help" (219). As Zink argues, the possibility of collaboration among the women is quickly abandoned for no clearly explained reason. Ultimately, Judy is left alone and without help to struggle through the housework and childcare.

It may seem strange to spend so much time discussing the tasks of cleaning and caring for a house and family in a critical consideration of Gothic naturalism. However, Judy's emotional response to housekeeping has been closely scrutinized by critics, even to the level of quoting the same passage about housekeeping again and again.

Specifically, the often-quoted passage consists of a lengthy litany which acknowledges the insurmountable number of tasks housekeepers face on a daily basis, such as "diapers [that] must be washed, and grimy little drawers and rompers and stiff overalls and sweaty work shirts and grease-bespattered dresses and kitchen aprons and filthy, sour-smelling towels and socks stinking with the putridity of unwashed feet" (Kelley 195). This depiction of the work of housekeeping clearly links the novel to Gothic naturalist

abjection. Indeed, the novel repeatedly confronts the reader with abjection as it depicts Judy, who

grew more and more shiftless and slatternly about the house. More and more mechanically she dragged through the days. As she hung over the washtub or plunged the dasher up and down in the ancient oaken churn or stood by the stove frying three times a day the endlessly recurring corn cakes, her body moved with the dead automatic rhythm of old habit. Her face was habitually sullen and heavy, her eyes glazed and turned inward or looking out upon vacancy with an abstracted stare. (246)

The physical and emotional state described here should remind the reader of a trance produced by physical exhaustion while it also exemplifies the deadening of Judy's personality and emotions throughout the course of the novel. Judy's emotional response here is quite similar to that of some of the factory workers in *The Portion of Labor* which I discussed briefly in Chapter three. Despite the difference in the kind of physical labor and the urban rather than rural setting, the dread of continuing on and the simultaneous recognition of the *necessity* of continuing on are the same. Kristeva writes about abjection as a state closely tied with that of the maternal. Significantly, she argues that purification rites are used to demarcate what is abject from what is not. Filth is the primal example of the abject which must be purged through purification. Kristeva contends that "the purification rite appears then as that essential ridge, which, prohibiting the filthy object, extracts it from the secular order Because it is excluded as a possible object, asserted to be a non-object of desire, abominated as ab-ject, as abjection,

filth becomes defilement” (65). Within *Weeds*, Judy’s world is dominated by the endless cycle of overcoming the filth generated by herself, the children, and Jerry. As the mother, Judy is designated as the one to combat this filth and is inextricably associated with it. Unlike Lizzie May or even Luella, who are successful in this never-ending battle, Judy routinely struggles to expel this filth and at times gives up and allows the dirt to accumulate for days at a time. Constantly embroiled in the daily drama of washing dishes and preparing food, Judy becomes so associated with the filth that she also becomes abject. Jerrold E. Hogle explains that “all that is abjected is thrown under in another fashion: cast off into a figure or figures criminalized or condemned by people in authority and thus subjected to (again, thrown under) their gaze and the patterns of social normalcy they enforce” (7). Mothers in *Weeds* and *Summer* are just such abject figures that are routinely thrown away by those in authority.

The bare minimum of housework done by Judy is enough to fill the long hours she spends working in the house and to exhaust her physically and emotionally. Not quite one of the monstrous zombies often portrayed in the Gothic, through her abjection Judy nevertheless embodies a similar state in which her physical action has become disconnected from her mind and spirit to such an extent that she experiences many small deaths as she sleepwalks through her life, albeit without the respite from pain that sleep can bring. Although Judy remains an unwilling and resistant victim, the clothes still have to be washed and the corn cakes still have to be fried, demonstrating that the novel’s abjection is vicious because of its unrelenting cyclical nature.

The housekeeping task which finally breaks Judy and causes her to walk out of the house for a period of time is described in terms as grotesque as that seen in any horror text and as revolting as in many a later slasher film. Jerry brings inside a tub of pig guts for Judy to clean and from which to obtain lard. He presents her with “a galvanized iron tub full of steaming pig guts” (Kelley 238). Judy faces “the bluish viscera, bubbling up in innumerable little rounded blobs” while “bloody fragments emerged along with the masses of intestines” and “an unspeakable stench rose from it, mingled with the stale heat of the kitchen and grew every moment denser, more nauseating, more unbearable” (238). The abjection of women such as Judy becomes consistently associated with a grotesque strain of housekeeping that, through its aesthetic presentation and thematic weight, consolidates the novel’s Gothic naturalism. At play is gender determinism (it is clearly only Judy’s task to separate and clean the hog guts), class determinism (the rendered lard will presumably be used for cooking, saving the family valuable money), and horror Gothic. Judy cannot overcome her revulsion to the guts. The smell forces her to exit the room rather than confront it. Notably, Jerry cannot face the guts either. He decides to “‘heave it out back o’ the shed where the hens kin peck it over’” once Judy leaves (239). While housekeeping acts as an art form for willing victims such as Lizzie May, it simultaneously abjects unwilling victims such as Judy or Bessie Maude who are forced to flee the confines of their houses.

As is the case with *Weeds*, *Summer* is most often characterized as naturalist but rarely discussed as a Gothic text. Indeed, the novella signals its naturalism repeatedly. For example, the narration notes that Charity “ought to consider it a privilege that her lot

had been cast in North Dormer,” especially in light of her genetic heredity marking her as inferior in the eyes of the town (Wharton 161). The text foregrounds the influence of chance and also of environment as North Dormer⁴⁶ is compared favorably to the Mountain. Furthermore, determinism seeps into the novella. For example, Charity “felt the uselessness of struggling against the *unseen influences* in Harney’s life” (207, emphasis added), signaling the overwhelming power of determinism, and she later acquiesces “in a fatalistic acceptance of his [Harney’s] will” (248). Even more telling, Charity tells Harney “‘things don’t change at North Dormer: people just get used to them’” (220). The interwoven influences of determinism and environment are portrayed through the mention of the town and the notion that things happen in a certain unchanging way there so that any adaptations or changes must be on the part of people’s resignation to that fact. Even the residents’ adaptations are determined. Once readers begin looking for these signifiers of determinism they surface relentlessly throughout *Summer*. The implementation of the Gothic is much more subtle; however, I would argue it is nonetheless equally important. *Summer* literalizes the Gothic structure of exploring forgotten or unresolved stories in the crumbling building of the Hatchard Memorial Library, “a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years, and where the old ones mouldered undisturbed on the damp shelves” (161).⁴⁷ Clearly, a vast

⁴⁶ Fedorko notes the dual meaning of Dormer, which “suggests not only its lethargy (the French *dormir* meaning ‘to sleep,’ ‘to be stagnant’) but also its confinement as a small appendage to a house’s roof” (71, original emphasis). I would add that the name’s connection to dormer windows provides another liminal space in the text in addition to the many doorways and thresholds noted. Dormer windows are small, confined spaces as Fedorko points out, but windows also open into larger spaces. The tragedy of the town of North Dormer is that it never does open onto or connect with larger, more cosmopolitan spaces and remains confining for its residents.

⁴⁷ North Dormer boasts only one “modest” literary celebrity, Honorious Hatchard, who wrote “a series of papers called ‘The Recluse of Eagle Range,’ [and] enjoyed the acquaintance of Washington Irving” (162).

number of narratives have fallen out of the town's cultural memory, as exemplified by the way reading becomes a painful experience for Charity. Indeed, even though she briefly acquires "a thirst for information" following her first trip outside of North Dormer, after "a month or two . . . she found it easier to take North Dormer as the norm of the universe than to go on reading," a tortured depiction of reading and a confirmation of the statement quoted above which stipulates that the stagnant atmosphere of North Dormer can only be met by accepting that it will never be any different (160). Furthermore, Charity's lack of interest in reading translates to her poor interpretation of circumstances. Even if readers can detect Gothic connections to her story from the beginning (a young orphaned heroine, forbidding and incestuous patriarch, damp and musty library), it is only when Charity reaches the end of her story—the discovery of her pregnancy and eventual marriage to Royall—that she looks around only to find herself caught within a Gothic nightmare.

If Charity and Judy become the living dead in their own stories, bodies who continue moving forward even as their minds and souls are pleading for them to stop, Charity does not realize that she has been turned into a zombie until it is far too late. In addition to Charity's poor interpretive skills, *Summer*'s conclusion demonstrates Charity's mistaken claim that "she needed no one to defend her Nothing now would ever shake her rule in the red house" (176). Later, the novella's final line depicts Royall and Charity as "they drove up to the door of the red house" once more (311). Charity returns this final time not the triumphant mistress of the house but a much more cowed

The reference to Irving connects *Summer* to the American Gothic tradition, and certainly "The Recluse of Eagle Range" sounds like a Gothic title itself.

tenant, or perhaps prisoner. Once Charity and Royall are married, “her heart began to beat with apprehension” at the thought of lying to him about what she had done with the money he instructed her to spend on clothing and which she instead used to pay Dr. Merkle the five dollars owed her, only to be blackmailed out of all forty dollars (310). The nervous Charity, so frightened to lie to (as well as next to) Royall at the novella’s conclusion, seems a completely different figure from the young woman so confident in her own power and who easily lied about her whereabouts in order to meet Harney throughout *Summer*. This drastic change illustrates Charity’s shifting relationship to victimhood while it also demonstrates her profound misreading of her power over Royall. If Charity had known the history of her mother, she might have stood a better chance to interpret her own circumstances differently.

What is more shocking than Charity’s disdain for reading is that she does not know her mother’s story and the specifics of how she herself came to live in North Dormer as a child. Indeed, it is as though Charity’s family history is a ghost story, a scandalous remnant passed on through oral storytelling. Charity does not receive the story directly, only learning of it when she overhears Royall telling Harney. Dianne Chambers calls attention to the way Wharton uses physical space in this scene. Chambers notes that “Wharton’s text physically stages Charity’s positioning outside discourse in a conversation between Harney and Lawyer Royall” (107). Charity is triply distanced from her mother’s story: first because she simply does not know the story, second because of her physical removal from the Mountain and her mother, and third because she must eavesdrop from another room in order to learn the story. Much like an

adult telling ghost stories to frighten young children, perhaps to scare them into submission, Royall's motives in sharing the story with Harney are suspicious. Indeed, Chambers observes that, for Charity, the stories told by Royall and Harney about her family history and about life on the Mountain are the most dangerous of all (106). Royall tells Harney the story in secret (although Charity's story must be the worst-kept secret in town since everyone knows it except her). Royall does not identify the story as Charity's when he relates it to Harney, though surely the connection is made because Charity has already told Harney she comes from the Mountain.⁴⁸

Once Charity begins her affair with Harney, "nothing else mattered, neither the good nor the bad," since Harney "had caught her up and carried her away into a new world, from which, at stated hours, the *ghost* of her came back to perform certain customary acts, but all so thinly and insubstantially that she sometimes wondered that the people she went about among could see her" (Wharton 252, emphasis added, original ellipses). The use of ellipses persists, and even increases, throughout the course of *Summer*. Signaling an inability to communicate something, a fissure within the text's language, the ellipses point to the erasures of certain actions, topics, and even undesirable people from language. Charity's mother's story presents the largest gap missing from the story that also significantly impacts the novella's outcome. The purposeful forgetting of her family history affords Charity the possibility of forging a new story with Harney although, as Chambers points out, this new story does not come to fruition as Charity

⁴⁸ Gary Totten explores Charity's history through the lens of ethnicity, noting that her description as "swarthy" may indicate that Wharton is drawing from stereotypes associated with the Italian immigrants who settled in western Massachusetts at the turn of the twentieth century" (70). Dale Bauer, on the other hand, interprets these same references to mean Charity is of Eastern European descent.

might have hoped. I would argue that these two stories, family history and potential family future, are intimately connected. As classic Gothic narratives exemplify, the forgotten past will thwart its own erasure by returning ever inconveniently to trouble later generations.

Charity's mother, Mary Hyatt, was "a woman of the town from Nettleton"⁴⁹ (266) before settling on the Mountain with Charity's father. When Royall relates Charity's story, her father, too, is a shadowy figure. Recently convicted of manslaughter, the man (no name is given for Charity's father, just as Charity's birth name is never revealed) told Royall "he had a child up there [on the Mountain]—or thought he had—a little girl; and he wanted her brought down and reared like a Christian. I was sorry for the fellow, so I went up and got the child" (194). Although the father is a convicted criminal, prosecuted by Royall no less, he recognizes Royall as "the only man I seen in court that looks as if he'd" rescue a child from the Mountain (194). The man's superficial approval of Royall seems enough to win Royall's cursory admiration, and he agrees to the deal, "a gentleman's agreement between two non-gentleman" (Kassanoff 134). Significantly, the convict's doubt about whether or not Charity is his daughter is never investigated further. However, Charity's mother's introduction is prompted only by Harney's asking about her. Crucially, Royall thinks less of Charity's mother than even her father, noting the mother (he never uses her name) "'was glad enough to have her [Charity] go. She'd have

⁴⁹ Royall intimates that Charity's mother is a prostitute and particularly notes that Charity's mother "followed one of those Mountain fellows up to his place and lived there with him like a heathen," meaning the couple were never married (at least according to his knowledge). Many critics accept Royall's interpretation of Mary Hyatt as a prostitute. However, Royall is far from impartial in this situation, and there is no other evidence given as to Mary's history. Given Royall's later misinterpretation of Charity as a whore, readers would do well to remain skeptical of Royall's account.

given her to anybody. They ain't half human up there. I guess the mother's dead by now, with the life she was leading. Anyhow, I've never heard of her from that day to this'" (Wharton 194). As quickly as Charity's mother is introduced, she is erased again with the supposition that she is dead, due to her choice of lifestyle. This conversation may be one of the few times in the novella that what Royall says is incorrect in a factual sense rather than a moral or metaphorical sense. For, although Charity's mother is dead by the time her daughter seeks to meet her, Mary Hyatt has clearly been living on the Mountain with her other children and relatives for many years after Royall's trip there. Another critical error occurs when Royall labels Charity a whore during the Fourth of July celebrations although she is still a virgin. Through these errors, Wharton draws a critical parallel between Royall's misinterpretations of both mother and daughter. While Royall concludes Mary Hyatt's story incorrectly and tells it only upon request, the story he has told himself about Charity is equally insidious. Getting both stories wrong, Royall serves to erase Mary's story and impedes Charity's understanding of herself and her family history.

Notably, Charity, too, believes her mother has died. In fact, Charity "had never felt any curiosity about it [her early life]: only a sullen reluctance to explore the corner of her memory where certain blurred images lingered" (187). Dale Bauer argues that Charity has a bevy of maternal figures beginning with Mary Hyatt and supplemented by Mrs. Royall, Miss Hatchard, and even Dr. Merkle (29-30). However, "the impossibility of identifying the 'good mother' in the novel leads to Wharton's drama of cultural scapegoating of 'bad mothers,' whose laxity and degenerate behavior were all considered

signs of greater dysgenic decline” (Bauer 30). Before identifying with one of these mothers, Charity first considers what it means to have a mother and what she might be like. It is only Harney’s arrival in town and his relationship with Charity that makes her “absorbingly interesting to herself, and everything that had to do with her past was illuminated by this sudden curiosity” (187). Charity then goes on to imagine her mother

and it filled her with a tremor of surprise to think that some woman who was once young and slight, with quick motions of the blood like hers, had carried her in her breast, and watched her sleeping. She had always thought of her mother as so long dead as to be no more than a nameless pinch of earth; but it now occurred to her that the once-young woman might be alive, and wrinkled and elf-locked like the woman she had sometimes seen in the door of the brown house that Lucius Harney wanted to draw. (187)

Charity assumes, as had Royall, that her mother is dead (and she surmises this even before she hears Royall recount her story to Harney). Charity’s imagination then darts back and forth, thinking of her mother as a young woman, like herself, as a pregnant woman and new mother, and, finally, as an elderly woman at the end of her life in the narrative’s present. Another kind of ghost, Charity’s mother is portrayed as long dead, “no more than a nameless pinch of earth,” in almost the same moment that Charity’s imagination reanimates her in multiple stages of life (187). Charity’s mother is simultaneously a young woman having children and a spectre who is already dead even as her presence lingers. The striking juxtaposition of images of youth, old age, and death

reflects once again the determinism of these novels. Even as Mary's death overtakes stories of her life, images of her as a young mother take up a great deal of space in Charity's imagination. Motherhood itself becomes an overdetermined position as it is commented upon by so many different cultural scripts.

Mary Hyatt and, as I will shortly argue, Annie Pippinger and Annie Blackford are overdetermined women characters and mothers (or, at least, potential future mothers in Annie Blackford's case) whose lives, impacted by gender determinism, can be captured only in these snapshot-like images of them at various stages of their lives. While Mary's hereditary link to Charity as her mother is deployed by Royall several times as proof of Charity's nature, the reader receives no scenes of Mary acting as a mother to Charity. Although motherhood (or the inability to be a mother to Charity) defines Mary Hyatt from Royall's view in particular, there are other deterministic forces which impact the portrayal of Mary Hyatt. The poor living conditions and poverty of the Mountain, coupled with the abhorrence North Dormer directs towards Mountain residents, act as the primary forces of determinism for Mary Hyatt. Although later depictions of Mary after her death are grounded in the body, here she, as is the case with maternal figures in *Weeds*, becomes a ghostly figure who is both present and absent at the same time. Royall's account of Charity's mother, repeated mentions of Charity as an abandoned child brought to live in North Dormer, and the categorization of both Charity and her mother as whores demonstrates how Mary Hyatt presents an inescapable yet nearly invisible presence throughout *Summer*. Indeed, once Royall discovers Charity and Harney's affair, he argues "they all know her mother was a woman from the town of

Nettleton, that followed one of those Mountain fellows up to his place and lived there with him like a heathen. I saw her there sixteen years ago, when I went to bring this child down. I went to save her from the kind of life her mother was leading—but I'd better have left her in the kennel she came from" (266, original ellipses). Royall's summations of Charity's behavior continually revert back to her mother, even as these references point out only the mother's moral degeneracy, her animal rather than human nature, and her death. Charity's heredity as a child from the Mountain and, in particular, as the child of Mary Hyatt overdetermine the treatment she receives from Royall and other North Dormer citizens. Charity's overdetermination because of her heredity is curious since Mary Hyatt is not permitted to be a mother to Charity once she is taken from the Mountain. However, this overdetermination of heredity shows how deeply the town believes that biology is predictive of someone's identity. In the eyes of North Dormer residents, any nurturing Charity might have received in their town will never override her heredity as a child from the Mountain. Therefore Mary Hyatt's story, as a crucial representative of that hereditary influence, is inferred as a significant factor in understanding Charity. However, Jacquelyn Scott observes that

Wharton shows her readers through the connected sexual narratives of Charity, her mother, and the Nettleton prostitute Julia Hawes, who comes from a respectable though poor North Dormer family, that those Royall depicts as "half human" begin in North Dormer, a coalescence that deconstructs the Mountain/North Dormer binary. . . . Royall participates in

Julia's "fall" by being one of her customers, so his account of Charity's origins is truly unreliable. (3)

Yet, despite the degradation, Charity subscribes to this narrative; in fact, so much so that she believes turning to her mother and living on the Mountain will be a viable option for herself and her child. The fact that Charity is shocked by the poverty she encounters in her mother's house and subsequent realization that she and her baby could not thrive on the Mountain show how little Charity has considered her family history and, furthermore, illustrates her continued trust in Royall's account. As is true of many Gothic stories, the gaps in Royall's account such as why Mary allowed Royall to take her child are critical to understanding the story as a whole. The fact that mothers' stories are the ones so often erased points again to the gender determinism of both novels and underscores the abjection of motherhood, as those who "do the dirtywork" (to quote Atwood once more) do not seem to receive credit in Gothic naturalist texts (107).

Given Judith's vehement opposition to and Charity's complicated relationship with victimhood and its explicit ties with maternity, the examples of both protagonists' mothers are critical in assessing their own understanding of themselves and their interpretations of themselves as victims. Fredric Jameson reminds us that "History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention" (1846). History acts as a reality check that insists upon disrupting the narratives and coping mechanisms used as a means of survival in the world. In the cases of Charity and Judy, not enough attention has been paid to the painful narratives of each

woman's family. The use of history as a way to understand emotional pain hearkens also to the use of history within Gothic fiction. The Gothic is the form of the past that still hurts and continues to erupt even into the present. The increasing thematic importance maternal histories take on throughout *Summer* and *Weeds* rivals the characters' ignorance of these same stories such that their impact continues on in subsequent generations.

Although Judith never expresses a self-aware reaction to her own mother's parenting in her mothering practices, the depiction of Annie Pippinger's death not only acts as a major plot point within Judy's childhood but echoes throughout the novel's depictions of motherhood. Although the scholarship on *Weeds* addresses the novel's critique of motherhood and housework in relation to Judy, to Kelley's time at Helicon Hall, an experiment in communal living, and even to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's theories about domestic labor and childcare, no one has yet explored brief moments in which Judy's mother appears and the manner in which she dies. B. W. Capo briefly points out that Annie, like many other women in Scott County, KY, has had "three miscarriages and five live births," marking pregnancy, birth, and mothering as a near-constant cycle in these women's lives from the time they reach sexual maturity until they enter menopause (34). Annie Pippinger's illness and death highlight the naturalist force of chance (it is bad luck that she first contracts the illness and even worse luck that she later dies from it), while also illustrating that a lifetime of willing victimhood does not come without consequences. Annie Pippinger's illness, at first just "a very bad cold," strikes after "she had done a big washing the day before, had gone out warm from working in the hot suds and got chilled hanging out the clothes in the bitter wind. She was hot and feverish from

the cold, her head ached and her chest was tight” (Kelley 40). However, after a day of rest, “she was much better; and the next day she got up and went about her work as usual” (41). Two days later, though, Annie feels worse and continues to deteriorate so that her half-sister Abigail is sent for in order to act as a nurse. Abigail complains that Annie ““don’t never take no care of herse’f; an’ them folks that don’t take care of theirselves makes a heap o’ trouble for others. An’ I declare with all them near growed-up young uns she works jes as hard as if they was still babies. You an’ her has allus babied yer chillum, Bill. They ain’t never been made to learn to work the way they’d otta”” (41). Annie continues to decline until she eventually passes away. The depiction of Annie’s mothering and her death foreshadow much of the novel’s subsequent discourse on mothering. *Weeds* demonstrates very early on that being a good or good enough mother in Annie Pippinger’s community can lead to an early grave.

Annie Pippinger’s illness, notably not a hereditary one, is considered insignificant at first, but the narrator clearly connects Annie’s desire to be a good housekeeper with her catching a cold and becoming sick. She “had gone out warm” from washing clothes and “got chilled” as she hung them on the line in the “bitter wind” (40). Attempting to have the wet clothes dry as quickly as possible, Annie hurries them outdoors and hangs them, presumably without warm clothing to protect herself from the sudden drop in temperature. Written a different way, Annie’s death would be almost laughable. Death by laundry? Surely that lacks subtlety as a manner of death for a housewife? Almost an oblique form of satire, Annie’s death presses at the boundaries of realism to push the text towards naturalism and the Gothic. Naturalism would cast this as another

overdetermination of a character already hemmed in by gender, class, and heredity, to name a few. In portraying the care and effort taken with the laundry, Annie is shown to be the ‘good’ or ‘good enough’ mother who works hard in her physical and emotional care of the family. Yet, the Gothic naturalist environment of *Weeds* quickly demonstrates that her skill in this area does not aid, and even actively works against, her survival. At the same time that Annie’s mothering affirms her success in her role as a True Woman, Abigail’s criticism of Annie and Bill’s parenting betrays the many contradictory cultural discourses folded into notions of motherhood and parenting in general. Motherhood itself becomes Gothic as the novel shows how poorly rewarded Annie is for her dedication.

Surprisingly, Abigail sees Annie Pippinger’s devotion to her housework not as loving and dutiful but as enabling her children to shirk their fair share of chores. Given the fact that Luella and Lizzie May take over housekeeping quite capably after their mother’s death, the validity of Abigail’s criticism remains uncertain. Notably, although Abigail initially questions all of the children’s lack of household work, she quickly reverts to gendered expectations of who should be helping Annie, asking, “what’s all them *gals* here fer, anyway? Can’t they hang aout their mammy’s washin’ when they git home from school?” (42, emphasis added). Abigail’s harshness in the face of her sister’s illness certainly does little to endear her opinions to readers. However, the novel’s willingness to overtly criticize an angelic maternal figure depicts the Cult of True Womanhood as not just ideologically insidious but actually deadly, if adhered to fanatically. Annie’s actions mark her as a willing victim; she even refuses a physician

when she first falls ill because she is worried about the fuss and expense. However, the novel ultimately critiques Annie's sacrifice. Her story plays out like Bessie Maude's in the sense that absent a mother, someone else must sacrifice themselves to perform her duties. Both Bessie Maude and Annie are absent due to different kinds of illness.

Whereas Bessie Maude can find no treatment for her illness, *Weeds* demonstrates that Annie's illness could have been prevented if she had valued her health above completing the laundry. Although Annie sacrifices her health out of love, the struggles Bill and the rest of the family endure after her death show that some sacrifices are futile when they place new burdens on those the victim was trying to help. Annie was just trying to get her laundry done so that the family would have clean clothes and linens. However, her actions are symptomatic of the potentially dangerous intertwining of the ideologies of willing victimhood and angelic maternity. While Annie Pippinger presents the opposite end of the spectrum from Trina and Maria in *McTeague*, the three characters do also have something in common as women who revel in victimhood to a disturbing extent.

Although Trina and Maria enjoy victimhood with a stomach-turning level of pleasure and Annie participates in willing victimhood for what she perceives as the benefit of her children, victimhood provides these women with a status as wives and as a mother that seems otherwise unavailable.

Although all of Judy and Jerry's children are named for their grandparents, it seems no accident that their daughter Annie Blackford is named for Judy's mother rather than Jerry's. Annie Pippinger and Annie Blackford are linked not only through blood and their relationships with Judy but through Judy's concern that Annie, her daughter,

will grow up and live her life in the same pattern as Annie, her mother and Annie Blackford's grandmother. Judy recognizes that her daughter Annie "was a product of the life that had brought her into being" and fears that "that life would claim her to the end," much like it did for Judy's mother (321). Notably, though, Judy considers her daughter's fate quite late in the novel. Still in school when *her* mother dies, Judy does not reflect on her passing in any kind of profound fashion. Moreover, once Judy becomes pregnant (which comes as a surprise because she does not recognize the early symptoms of pregnancy), she does not seem to consider her mother's experience at all. It is only several children and many years later and after she has had a daughter of her own that Judy reflects on motherhood itself and on the specific experiences of her mother, her own experiences, and the probable future experiences of her daughter Annie.

Not only is mothering a key component of victimhood within the novel, but it also illustrates a reproductive and familial structure that Judy identifies as utterly devastating. As Alison Berg describes it, "the conditions of reproduction seem particularly to alienate mother from daughter, for to bear a female child is to produce a self-replicating link in a reproductive chain" (95). Were Judy to die a few years down the road, would her young daughter Annie Blackford be forced to take over responsibility for the household upkeep? Once again, the examples of Annie Pippinger, Bessie Maude, and Ruby arise in Judy's relationship with her own daughter. While Bessie Maude's rebelliousness and illness eventually cause her to be removed from the family home, her relief only means greater suffering will be inflicted on her daughter at a young age much as Annie Pippinger's sacrifice of hanging out the laundry in cold weather only created greater hardships for the

family after her death. Far from blaming these victims, Kelley seeks to depict a destructive cycle born out in generation after generation. Similarly, Judith ponders the cycle of motherhood she has participated in and its continuation in her own daughter. While Judy does not anticipate being taken away, the passing on of various roles from one generation to the next means that Annie will eventually follow Judy to become a wife and mother in her own right. Judy particularly questions the purpose of her suffering if Annie's future consists only of bearing more children and caring for their material and emotional needs until she is too sick or worn out to continue. Judy observes that Annie, even as a young child, "had a puny, colorless, young-old face, drab hair thin and fine, that hung in little straight wisps about her cheeks There was neither depth nor clearness in the little eyes, no play of light and shade, no sparkle of mirth or mischief, no flash of anger, nothing but a dead, even slate color. . . . [;] they held the accumulated patience of centuries" (Kelley 280). Notably, Judy's appearance is usually described with bright and vibrant colors, often noting her dark hair or her decision to make herself a red dress when she is young. Unlike Judy's heredity, that of hearty, pioneer blood, Judy perceives Annie's heredity through her appearance and interprets it as being identical to everyone else's in the community. Annie's heredity is thus uncanny in that it bears no resemblance to Judy's even though the two are mother and daughter. And if Judy's strength and resilience have led her to such exhaustion, what hope is there for Annie? Judy then intimates that Annie's heredity, so drab in its physical manifestation, is also weaker in terms of its strength and ability to thrive in spite of adversity. Earlier, the typical heredity of the community is described as "mostly inbred and undernourished," due to being

rooted in the “backwoods corners of America, where the people have been poor and benighted for several generations and where for as many generations no new blood has entered, where everybody is cousin, first, second, or third, to everybody else for miles around, the children are mostly dull of mind and scrawny of body” (12-13). Judy’s recognition of Annie’s genetic inheritance may also be read as a moment of questioning or even a moment of guilt. How could Judy, imbued with the spirit of the pioneers, have produced such a pale and sickly child? Judy may even blame herself for somehow not passing on her own vitality to Annie.

Perhaps the most chilling of Judy’s thoughts about Annie’s future are her reflections while Annie is sick with pneumonia and possibly on the verge of dying. Judy asks,

Of what use after all that this baby should live? She would live only to endure, to be patient, to work, to suffer; and at last, when she had gone through all these things, to die without ever having lived and without knowing that she had never lived. Judith had seen grow up in the families of the neighbors and among her own kin dozens of just such little girls as this one that had come out of her own body: skimpy little young-old girls, with blank eyes and expressionless faces, who grew into prim, gawky, old-maidish girlhood and passed quickly from that into dull spinsterhood as Luella had done, or to the sordid burdens of too frequent maternity. Little Annie was just such a one. In every way she was a product of the life that had brought her into being, and that life would claim her to the end. (321)

The language of naturalist determinism looms large at the end of Judy's reflections. Annie, rarely seen in the novel, is intensely *overdetermined* by her class, gender, and heredity. Judy questions the value of all her work if her children, particularly Annie, are determined simply to repeat the lives of their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. Judy's reflection also includes the Gothic in its bleak contemplation of her young daughter's possible early death. Annie's story will be erased before it can even begin. Her future self is already ghost-like as Judy describes her as one of the "young-old girls, with blank eyes and expressionless faces" so often seen in Scott County (321). Much like Charity's imaginings about her mother, the images bleed together Annie's youth, maturity, and old age, if in more grotesque fashion. While Charity fuses past and present, Judy chillingly fuses Annie's present and future, highlighting the determinism of Annie's life once more. It is as though Judy can already see Annie as an older woman long before her time, one who is not vibrant but is instead always physically and emotionally spent.

Images of death associated with young women emerge in *Summer* as well. Charity's relationship to death is increasingly complicated as the novel progresses, much like Judith's. However, even in the novel's opening pages, Charity experiences her life in North Dormer as one so unexciting that she feels dead in performing her everyday duties. Arriving at the library, "her prison-house," "every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, [she] sat at her desk under a freckled steel engraving of the deceased author [Honourable Hatchard], and wondered if he felt any deader in his grave than she did in his library" (Wharton 162). Clearly, the library is not only a cultural dead zone but a

spiritual dead zone as well. No one visits the library, no new books are purchased, and Charity feels more dead than alive when she goes there. Significantly, the text notes this is not a passing mood that strikes Charity but an event which occurs each time she visits the library. Unlike Judith, whose emotions and vitality seem to deaden progressively throughout the text, Charity begins as someone with a stifled relationship to her own life, awakens only during her relationship with Harney, and then succumbs to a spiritual death once she marries Royall. The text does not forecast whether the birth of Charity's child or any other kind of intervention might awaken her once again. Examining *Summer* and *Weeds* side by side, it certainly seems that Charity steps into a life much like Judy's by marrying Royall, although it is a life with perhaps greater economic means. While Judy is deadened by the work of caring for multiple children, Charity's mothering and the family dynamic among Charity, Royall, and Harney's baby remains for the reader to imagine, perhaps too bleak to depict in an already grim text.

In contrast to much of *Summer*'s fecund imagery, as soon as Royall discovers Charity and Harney's affair, the text becomes saturated with imagery of decay and death. The room in the brown house becomes "*grey* and indistinct, and an *autumnal* dampness crept up from the hollow below the orchard, laying its *cold* touch on their flushed faces," an ominous description for a novel set in and entitled *Summer* (267, emphases added). Indeed, there are hints of death and decay even in Charity and Harney's first visit to the house. Its walls are "sun-bleached to a ghostly gray" and "the broken gate dangled between its posts" and "the door itself lay rotting in the grass, with an old apple-tree fallen across it" (243). Far from a dream house, their meeting place is not quite haunted

but is closer to the decaying house so often featured in American Gothic fiction than either Charity or Harney care to recognize. Furthermore, when Charity attempts to speak, “the words died in her throat. They sat motionless, in their attitude of confident endearment, as if some strange death had surprised them” (267). Of course the death referenced is that of the pair’s relationship, but while both Charity and Harney go on to marry and begin new lives with their spouses, Charity’s life with Royall does not open up a world alive and vibrant but one of shadows and foreclosed possibilities. Charity and Harney’s final scene in the brown house turns desperately Gothic as “he propped an unhinged shutter against the empty window-frame and put the candle on the table. It threw up a queer shadow on his frowning forehead, and made the smile on his lips a grimace” (267). Passing into the world of the grotesque and uncanny, finally, Charity “felt as if they were being sucked down together into some bottomless abyss” (268). The green world of the Mountain and its outlaw way of life are spoiled by Royall’s entrance and become nightmarish and, ultimately, deadly to the fragile relationship.

Ominously, the language depicting Charity’s marriage to Royall, in turn, is not that of vitality but instead of trance-like lethargy bordering on unconsciousness. Charity, like Judy, is physically too strong to be fatally overcome by her trials, but she nonetheless also suffers a spiritual death. Following her mother’s funeral, “Charity lay on the floor on a mattress, as her dead mother’s body had lain” (294). Charity’s association with both her mother and with death converge as she approximates Mary’s corpse both in terms of where and how she lies on the mattress and in whatever physical resemblance she bears to her mother. In fact, this scene pinpoints Charity’s spiritual death as she resigns herself

to the reality that “in the established order of things as she knew them she saw no place for her individual adventure . . . ,” and she surrenders to Royall’s wishes (281, original ellipses). Note the naturalist emphasis on environment. The “established order of things,” the decaying, Gothic town of North Dormer itself, provides no other options for Charity. Any adaptation will have to come from Charity herself. Later, traveling to Nettleton for their wedding, “Charity felt herself sinking into deeper depths of weariness,” and “she had only a confused sensation of slipping down a smooth irresistible current; and she abandoned herself to the feeling as a refuge from the torment of thought” (303). Furthermore, Fedorko contends that Royall’s relationship with Charity manifests yet another Gothic element, as “the incest threat prevalent in much Gothic fiction and strongly suggested in Wharton’s short stories is redolent in *Summer*, as this description and Royall’s subsequent pressure of the weakened Charity into marriage reveal” (74). Perhaps most disturbingly, Charity “followed Mr. Royall as passively as a child” and struggles to understand the words and gestures of the clergyman during her marriage ceremony (Wharton 302). It is difficult to read these descriptions of Charity’s submitting to exhaustion as a demonstration of agency. Certainly she sacrifices to find an environment wherein the baby’s needs will be met, but Charity seems bereft of any willpower by this stage. Other critics have read Charity’s choice to keep the brooch Harney gives her as an act of resistance. I do not disagree with this, but the brooch offers such little comfort when weighed against a lifetime with Royall that it does not bring much hope for Charity’s future. Further, it was not the jewel she herself selected but one

that Harney picked for her. In accordance with the novella's Gothic naturalism, Charity's spiritual death will not be compensated for or easily reversed.

Another key Gothic naturalist scene occurs on Charity's wedding night, as she and Royall prepare to go up to their hotel room and she stands "as motionless and inert as if she had been one of the tables screwed to the marble floor. All her soul was gathered up into one sick sense of coming doom" (306). Charity's reactions throughout this scene approach a sense of horror as she waits for Royall to join her in bed. Indeed, Charity is far more frightened in these scenes than when she discovers she is pregnant. In the hotel bed, "she lay there trembling with a fear that ran through her veins like ice. 'What have I done? Oh, what have I done?' she whispered, shuddering to her pillow; and pressing her face against it to shut out the pale landscape beyond the window she lay in the darkness straining her ears, and shaking at every footstep that approached" (307, original ellipses). Readers find themselves in classic Gothic terrain with a frightened heroine listening for ominous footsteps and peering into shadows. Yet, the determinism of the narrative only adds to readers' foreboding as we know it is not a supernatural beast whom Charity fears but a human one. Reading this scene as purely Gothic or purely naturalist only captures part of what occurs here. It is the subtle merging of Gothic and naturalist aesthetics that creates the uncanny horror Charity (and many readers) experience. Again, too, a Gothic naturalist interpretation considers a number of different issues instead of isolating the elements that are only Gothic or only naturalist. In addition, this scene also raises the strange nature of agency portrayed again and again in Gothic naturalist texts. Recalling the earlier scene where Charity bars Royall from entering her room (once

occupied by his wife) when he is drunk, in this final bedroom scene Charity (now the wife herself) can no longer bar his admittance. Fashioned by the novel's overwhelming determinism, her agency, if not completely stripped away, is now of a very different kind in her relationship with Royall. Charity is shocked into realizing the consequences of her actions and struggles to form a response or discover a coping mechanism. Unlike Judy, who very clearly understands her relationships with other characters and their power dynamics, Charity only understands how different her interpretations and experiences of the events of *Summer* are from those of all the other characters in the novel's tragic conclusion, after she has learned her own history and seen that the sentiments of Old Home Week do not apply when one's home is on the Mountain.

Just as Charity's pregnancy introduces death in the ending of her relationship and her attempt to meet her mother, Judy draws closer and closer to her own death and to a philosophical understanding of death throughout the text. After several failed abortion and suicide attempts, "in her wasted youth she [Judy] looked more ready for the grave than any of the old duennas about her" (Kelley 291). Judy literally confronts death through her suicide attempt. This physical confrontation prompts more philosophical interrogations of what death means in a world that, for Judy, feels all too dead already. For example, following the death of Bob Crupper in the First World War, Judy "slapped a fly on the wall. It fell mashed and mangled to the floor. It came over her suddenly that he had died like that . . . he had died like the fly. Some great, pitiless engine of war had mashed these things out of him and left only a few bits of stinking flesh. 'What are we all anyway but flies,' she said to herself bitterly" (297). What more perfect image of

humanity as portrayed within Gothic naturalist novels than that of the fly? The fly, much like the case with naturalist characters, is a small (perhaps insignificant) entity subject to the terrifying forces of nature and its environment before its life is easily extinguished by a larger, stronger, or smarter predator. Yet, yoking the fly to grotesque images of “stinking flesh” also brings it into Gothic territory. Furthermore, the move to see Bob’s death as an example of vulnerability and powerlessness applies to each and every character as Judy posits that everyone is a fly, particularly in the Gothic naturalist landscape of *Weeds*; and Judy begins to see that her own story, like Bob’s, like her mother’s, will swiftly be erased.

The continual interjection of death within *Weeds* creates a Gothic thread running throughout the novel. For example, Judy looks at Annie and Jerry as they sleep and feels “their future lives stretched before her dull, drab and dreary, and there was nothing at the end but the grave. . . . when the ghostlike dawn peered into the little window it saw them all three lying stretched out stark and pallid like corpses” (281). Judy’s vision demonstrates that it is not merely Judy herself who feels dead but posits that the whole family walks through an underworld. Only Judy and Jabez openly acknowledge their Gothic outlook. The earlier discussion of Judy’s zombie-like trance as she works on her housekeeping, when viewed in conjunction with this repeated corpse imagery, shows Judy herself to be an animated corpse. Shortly after Judy resigns herself to having more children and resuming the endless cycle of household chores, she learns of Jabez Moorhouse’s death. Following the revelation, “a weight like a great, cold stone settled itself upon her vitals; and as she gazed out over the darkening country it seemed to stretch

endlessly, endlessly, like her future life, through a sad, dead level of unrelieved monotony” (333). Although Judy’s suicide attempt does not succeed, her immersion in the monotony and meaningless repetition of housework acts as its own form of death, for by the novel’s end the strong woman with the pioneers’ spirit introduced at its outset is all but gone.

Although Judy’s living death speaks strongly of the novel’s Gothic nature, the passage quoted above also connects to the feelings of characters in the traditional naturalist canon. The Gothic and naturalistic are, in fact, juxtaposed more and more frequently throughout the course of *Weeds*. While the zombie or corpse imagery heralds the Gothic throughout the text, the novel’s title—*Weeds*— and the references to these undesirable plants heralds the text’s naturalism. Yet, weeds become a resonant concept within *Summer*, too. The OED defines a weed as “a herbaceous plant not valued for use or beauty, growing wild and rank, and regarded as cumbering the ground or hindering the growth of superior vegetation” (“Weed.” Def. 1a). Kelley refers to literal weeds frequently in her descriptions of the natural environment. Yet, as the novel’s title, the status given this concept must be reevaluated. Readers attuned to naturalist key words and concepts will note connections to naturalism within the definition of ‘weed’ itself. In terms of natural selection, weeds seem to be successful in that they can thrive even without much encouragement or in spite of human attempts at eradication. Yet, because they often impede crops of great monetary worth, they are not valued. Furthermore, weeds are undervalued not only because they seem to serve little purpose but because they take up space and resources which could be utilized by more useful and more

beautiful plants. Applying this definition to Judy and other tenant farmers opens up disquieting connections to the eugenics debates of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Indeed, the OED cites nineteenth-century references to ‘weed’ or ‘weedy’ being used as a term to describe the physical build of both horses and people (“Weed.” Def. 5a,5b). However, Kelley shows Judy and other characters as people who desperately crave to be valued but who are not because of the environment in which they find themselves. In the context of *Summer*, surely the residents of the Mountain would similarly be seen as weeds by North Dormer residents. In a scientific introductory account of weeds, Dwight D. Lingenfelter points out that weeds are “plants whose undesirable qualities outweigh their good points, *according to man*” (1, emphasis added). The classification of a plant as a weed is not made by nature, then, but by humans. He lists several defining qualities of weeds, such as “a plant out of place and not intentionally sown,” “a plant growing where it is not wanted,” “a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered,” and “plants that are competitive, persistent, pernicious” (1). The qualities of weeds identified by Lingenfelter point not to a deficiency in the plant itself but, instead, to a deficiency in the environment. Judy’s virtues also remain undiscovered by her community, and, as the text progresses, she seems to be rooted in an environment which does not desire her. Charity presents an interesting case in relation to the metaphor of weeds as she is a transplant to North Dormer who struggles to make her way in this supposedly ‘superior’ environment. Lingenfelter even notes certain benefits to having weeds within an ecosystem in that weeds “are naturally strong competitors,” known for “abundant seed production,” “rapid population establishment,” and

“adaptation for spread” (Lingenfelter 1). These characteristics of weeds map quite closely onto both Judy’s community and that of the Mountain, marking their ability to survive in spite of a hostile environment.

Often weeds are plucked only to be replaced by more growth of the same plant as they can be notoriously difficult to eradicate. In novels concerned with female sexuality, reproduction, and maternity, rapidly growing weeds are an apt metaphor. It reflects Judy’s worry about her daughter Annie living the same life as herself, her mother, and so many others because of their numerous hardships and short lifespans. The cycle of struggle, replication, and endurance is fueled in part by the occlusion of mothers’ stories. Ironically, *Weeds* itself bears this out through the suppression of the chapter Kelley wrote depicting childbirth while the perfunctory treatment of Mary Hyatt’s and Annie Pippinger’s stories, among others, demonstrate this erasure thematically. While the heartiness of weeds allows them to endure, often unwanted, Judy finds this ability to endure a painful trial in and of itself when she would prefer to give in and be released from her life. Endurance does not permit Judy or Charity to change things for the better, but merely to survive.

CONCLUSION

“I’M NOT GOING TO BE A VAMPIRE”: *THE COLDEST GIRL IN COLDTOWN* AND THE PLEASURE OF BAD CHOICES

“There are only bad options. It’s about finding the right one.”—Tony Mendez, *Argo*

“This is the best bad idea we have”—Jack O’Donnell, *Argo*

“Sometimes the only choices you have are bad ones, but you still have to choose.”—The Doctor, *Doctor Who*

“Don’t have a choice. Just like any of us.”—Ellie, *Broadchurch*

“Our actions are our own but fate pushes us.”—Regina, *Once Upon a Time*

“You either choose or you allow others to choose for you.” —Long Susan, *Ripper Street*

“Bewitched” (1926), one of Edith Wharton’s Gothic short stories, is of particular interest as a Gothic naturalist precursor to Holly Black’s *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* (2013). “Bewitched” features Saul Rutledge, accused by his wife of being possessed by a dead woman he previously courted before his marriage. Visibly changed by this supposed bewitching, the man appears drained of his very life force. Without having to conjure visions of fanged creatures wearing capes and lurking in shadows, Wharton’s spiritual vampires illuminate key themes of vampire fiction: illicit sexuality (here, adultery or perhaps even a supernatural liaison depending on one’s interpretation), predation, consumption, and infection. Of course, what the story asks its readers to decide is whether the most predatory creature in the tale is a woman acting from beyond the grave or the cold-blooded Mrs. Rutledge, who sets the story in motion. Wharton’s “Bewitched” demonstrates the serious issues with which vampire fiction can grapple. Holly Black deals with similar themes of gender, agency, and predation through her own vampire fiction. As is the case in Wharton’s short story, Black’s novel *The Coldest Girl*

in Coldtown features women as unnerving predators while it also features a fascinating female heroine who fights against predatory characters.

Popular interest in the Gothic has experienced a marked resurgence recently and, although naturalism is less discussed in relation to popular culture (although I would argue it is not absent from contemporary television dramas at the very least), its impact on literature continues nonetheless. Interestingly, young-adult (YA) literature has been one significant area of publishing within the Gothic revival; in addition, with the darker bent of today's YA fiction, certain texts bear important connections to naturalist literature as well. As part of the recent surge in the popularity of Gothic YA novels, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* manages to rework popular tropes such as a dystopian setting, vampires, and a female savior, while elevating these components through sophisticated discourses of gender and sexuality. Black's heroine, Tana, is exceptional. Through her, Black negotiates the terrain of classic Gothic heroines and fierce young-adult warriors, best exemplified by Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* (2008), another YA text that places a heroine in an environment governed by chance as well as determinism. However, Tana's depiction in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* demonstrates two key components of agency: the obstacles female heroines face and the unconventional methods they use to overcome these obstacles in Gothic naturalist texts. In addition, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*'s often brutal determinism and nuanced portrayal of what it means to make tough choices place it firmly in dialogue with naturalism. Following in the tradition of vampire fiction, it raises questions about monstrosity versus humanity and explores vampirism through tropes used by Wharton as well as countless other authors

such as illicit desire, infection, consumption, predation, and parasitism. While these tropes are established ones within Gothic vampire fiction, certainly issues of consumption and predation are pertinent to naturalism as well. In addition, because Black uses the forces of determinism and chance in explaining vampirism within the novel, traditional naturalist themes reappear in a Gothic naturalist context.

For my purposes, one of the most interesting things about Tana is her ability to make choices when faced with impossible situations which seem to have no positive outcomes. I began this chapter with a number of pop culture epigraphs concerning the issue of making choices and how an individual approaches decision making in order to demonstrate the ongoing preoccupation in literature, as well as in other art forms, with the task of making difficult choices. The first three quotes come from male characters while the final three quotes are from female characters. Interestingly, the quotes by male heroes occur in stories where they go on to triumph over the bad choices or lack of choices that they face. Ellie from *Broadchurch*, on the other hand, does not emerge from her situation with a sense of triumph or heroism. Indeed, within the context of the show, the character's husband is on trial for killing a young boy—in fact, their son's best friend. Similarly, Regina and Long Susan, the second and third female characters quoted, are more often seen as villains (albeit sometimes sympathetic ones) who do not overwhelmingly triumph over the situations they face. While the quotes from male characters retain a sense of hope amid bad situations, Ellie expresses a more nihilistic position as someone who believes she has no choices. Interestingly, she links her current state to that of humanity because her situation is the same as that of “any of us” (“Season

Two”). For her, lacking choices is not a gendered state but merely a human one and one that reflects the loss of free will so often seen in naturalist texts.

Regina, an amalgamation of the evil queens of the fairy tales, acknowledges determinism in her assertion that “fate pushes” people’s actions, even though they must take responsibility for those actions (“Lily”). In other words, even people who have agency are often influenced by external forces that are beyond their control. In effect, Regina articulates the compatibility of free will and determinism, a view that the naturalist critic Ian F. Roberts locates in the work of John Stuart Mill. As I have examined in many of the Gothic naturalist texts discussed, forms of agency can exist within deterministic environments, but agency in these types of environments is highly mediated and the effects of acting as an agent are often volatile and unpredictable. The final epigraph to this conclusion comes from Long Susan, a Victorian-era madam turned into a wealthy philanthropist in *Ripper Street*. She affirms her own agency while noting that refusing to make choices relinquishes power to others, allowing them to “choose for you” instead (“The Peace”). As is the case with many of the Gothic heroines I have examined, Susan acknowledges the difficulty of making choices, but she still values the ability to act as an agent and choose for herself. She endorses agency and making hard choices as the preferable alternative to letting others make decisions for her. These quotes illustrate many of the frameworks of decision making explored in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*. Although I would be hard pressed to argue that the movie or television shows quoted above as epigraphs are Gothic naturalist, the dialogue quoted intersects with discourses of agency that Black artfully expands upon in her novel. In addition,

these quotes illustrate the wide range of pop culture texts exploring questions of determinism and agency, highlighting a renewed interest in naturalist preoccupations across different mediums and genres. In moving from the previous chapter's discussion of *Summer* and *Weeds*, early twentieth-century texts, to *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, an early twenty-first-century text, I want to emphasize that there are a vast number of texts and authors still to be explored through the lens of Gothic naturalism. I hope that the epigraphs quoted above also testify to the unexplored connections Gothic naturalism shares with today's popular culture. Particularly after the recession of 2008, questions of determinism and the ability of one individual to act as a successful agent have resurfaced in ways that connect the present moment to naturalist concerns of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Throughout Black's novel Tana experiences both the hope and frustration contained in the epigraphs to this conclusion, yet she still manages to be successful within the novel's devastating landscape. As a teenage girl battling both supernatural and human predators, Tana's gender and her agency are explored frequently throughout the novel. Judith Halberstam, reflecting on contemporary horror films, notes that "the emergence within contemporary horror of a single female victim/protagonist, specifically a heroine who survives, replaces nineteenth-century Gothic fiction's series of almost indistinguishable female heroine/victims. This lone female figure forces horror to play in the key of gender" (126). Tana often encounters situations in which it appears that her only option is to become a victim. However, even though she does not survive every episode completely unscathed, Tana's experiences as a victim are merely one facet of her character. Black depicts a young woman who can be tough as well as vulnerable

depending on her situation. Interestingly, Tana's experiences as a victim do not prevent her from conceiving of herself as an agent and acting accordingly. Unlike the female characters quoted in the epigraphs, Tana is triumphant despite all the trials and difficult decisions she faces— a refreshing outcome for a Gothic naturalist heroine.

In Coldtown, Tana survives in a place where she frequently lacks the agency to make her own choices. As I have argued throughout this study, Gothic naturalism interrogates the mechanisms of making choices. Similarly, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* presents three frameworks of different kinds of choices that Tana faces. Although young-adult fiction often portrays adolescents who make poor choices and naturalism frequently features adults who make self-destructive choices, Tana attempts to make the best (or, sometimes, merely the *least* negative choice) that she can. More significantly, when faced with *only* negative options, Tana frequently bypasses these choices altogether and discovers an alternative solution. Curiously, Tana also asserts her freedom to occasionally make a bad choice, if that is her desire. I will argue that Tana refuses to accept that she is not free to make her own decisions, even bad ones. Still, presented with only self-destructive choices, Tana ultimately evades destruction through exercising her own will. Tana's example questions the notion that young women lack agency, empowerment, and the ability to make choices, as well as the ability to create their own options.

The Coldest Girl in Coldtown opens with an eerily Gothic scene: Tana wakes up alone in a bathtub the morning after a party with her high school friends, only to discover that everyone at the party, with the exception of her ex-boyfriend Aidan and a strange

boy named Gavriel, has been murdered violently by a group of vampires. Tana lives in a world where vampires are no longer hidden predators but very real threats. Once bitten, a person becomes infected with a virus that results in vampirism. If an infected person resists drinking human blood for eighty-eight days, the incubation period for the virus, they might be able to return to normal human life. However, the infection is so virulent that no one has actually beaten it. Tana understands this first-hand as her mother became infected when Tana was very young. After attacking Tana and trying to drink Tana's blood, her mother was killed by Tana's father. Within the novel, the virus is understood to be so dangerous that, rather than relying on the infected to self-quarantine, the government sets up Coldtowns where infected people and vampires live cut off from the rest of society, unable to leave their Coldtown unless they have a particular token and are infection-free.

Tana, Aidan, and Gavriel manage to escape the murderous vampires and travel to the nearest Coldtown. At this point Aidan is already infected, and they quickly learn that Gavriel actually is a vampire, so Tana is compelled legally to turn them in to a Coldtown. She turns in Gavriel in exchange for one of the coveted markers that provides the only way someone can leave Coldtown. Tana and her companions then enter the necropolis of the quarantined city. Along the way, they meet teen siblings Midnight and Winter, who are also on the way to Coldtown and *actually hope* to turn into vampires. Within Coldtown, Tana faces one impossible choice after another as she fights several vampires and attempts to stay alive, while also developing a romantic relationship with Gavriel. Ultimately, Tana is bitten while fighting Midnight, who *does* become a vampire. Tana

later gives her marker away to save her sister, who runs away to join her in Coldtown. Rather than deciding to succumb to the infection and transform into a vampire, Tana secludes herself in an abandoned building within Coldtown in hopes of beating the infection at the novel's conclusion. Gavriel agrees to stay with her and help her outlast the virus.

While there is sparse academic discussion of Black's work, she is a popular and prolific author of YA and children's literature. She has written two YA series (the *Ironside* and *Curse Workers* trilogies), has co-authored the highly successful *Spiderwick Chronicles* series for elementary-school readers, has authored graphic novels, and is frequently featured in YA anthologies. In addition, her novel for middle-school readers, *Doll Bones*, received a Newberry Honor Medal in 2014. Black first portrayed the world of Coldtown in a 2009 short story also titled "The Coldest Girl in Coldtown."⁵⁰ The short story and novel *do* share very similar endings as well as the mythology surrounding the creation of Coldtowns and the explanation of how vampires have overtaken the human population. The novel was very well-reviewed and was listed as one of the best teen books of that year by the *School Library Journal* and Amazon, among others. *The Horn Book Magazine* observed that "as in previous works . . . Black displays her gift for channeling the dark side, seeming to wake the very shadows around us" (Adams 88). Additionally, according to the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, "Black has already revamped fairies . . . and sorcerers . . . with her innovative style, and she attacks

⁵⁰ Black explains in an interview that after writing the initial short story, "I really felt like there was something there and so I filed away the idea When I got around to doing it, I was going to include more of the characters from the short story [However,] I got the idea for a completely different start for the novel, but I decided to keep the title ("Q & A with Holly Black").

the vampire genre with the same creativity and morbidity that characterize her earlier series. Coldtown is a twisted place, with humans acting with as much depravity and cruelty as the supposed monsters” (Quealy-Gainer 138-39). Black utilizes the superficial trappings of the Gothic (blood, darkness, shadow, and more) to great effect; however, as these reviews testify, she creates depth and dimension within stereotypical Gothic environments through her examination of disturbing characters, an attribute shared not only with the Gothic but with naturalism as well.

Black’s canon often features young-adult protagonists whose everyday lives are problematic and who are thrust into Gothic or supernatural worlds which only heighten their initial struggles. Black also often features female heroines who are rebellious, independent, and have dysfunctional family relationships. Although she consistently uses tropes from fairy tales and the Gothic, Black’s heroines are far different from damsels in distress and are more likely to be frank and assertive, even dangerous, because of the choices they make. Black also typically includes LGBTQ characters whose sexuality is stated in a matter-of-fact way and easily accepted by other characters rather than made controversial. In addition, Black’s work typically includes at least one notable scene of gender trouble.

Her novel *Valiant* (2005) features several of these scenes which defamiliarize stereotypical gender tropes. Part of the *Ironside* series, which features teens entering the worlds of monstrous fairies, *Valiant* focuses on Valerie Russell, who runs away from home and joins a group of homeless teenagers who act as couriers for a troll. At one point, Val watches as a drag queen throws a shoe at a taxi which refuses to stop for her.

Val picks up the shoe, and the drag queen asks Val to put it back on her foot as though she is Cinderella. Rhonda Nicol points out that this scene “is both humorous and pointedly transgressive; the interplay between Val and ‘Cinderella’ underscores the provisional nature of gender as social construct. . . . The scene is, in effect, meta-drag; Val and the drag queen are interrogating gender performance not only through their individual gender displays but also through the script that they enact” (176). Indeed, Val has shaved her head prior to this scene so that she looks more like a boy than a girl as she plays the role of the prince to the drag queen’s Cinderella. Here, then, Cinderella is played by a man dressed as a woman while the prince is played by a woman who looks like a man but identifies as a woman. The scene questions whether the audience should judge each character’s gender by their physical appearance, misleading in both cases, or by understanding how each person identifies their own gender, which takes much more investigation and interaction than a quick glance at someone. Curiously, Black’s defamiliarization of gender is reminiscent of Alcott’s portrayal of gender performance in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Both texts reveal the visual aspect of gender performance to be suspect. Once again, gender trouble emerges as a counterpoint to gender determinism.

Just as my previous chapters examined how gender determinism and gender trouble play a significant role in Gothic naturalism, so, too, does *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* foreground its deconstruction of gender roles and sexuality. Black expands on this example of gender trouble from her earlier work, *Valiant*, in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*. Tana visits a pawn shop simply titled “ODDMENTS & LOST THINGS” in order to purchase supplies after she reaches Coldtown (221, original emphasis).

Valentina, a shop employee, is introduced as a girl who is “tall, with long, tawny hair, like a lion’s mane, loose around her shoulders, and eyes the bright green of bottle glass. Gold was dusted over her cheeks and painted on her eyelids. She was wearing a kimono-style robe, looking as though she’d just gotten up” (221). A second description of Valentina notes that “she had a long, lean body, like a model’s, with large expressive hands. Her nails were painted the same gold that dusted her eyelids” (225). A little while later, Valentina reveals that “‘I wasn’t born a girl’ . . . ‘At least not on the outside’” and explains that she hoped to be turned into a vampire to prevent her body from developing any further as she grew older (228). Little more is said about Valentina’s gender identity throughout the rest of the novel, although she acts as a supporting character throughout the plot and is romantically coupled with a cisgender boy (who already knows her history and why she came to Coldtown) at the novel’s end. The effect on the reader is reminiscent once again of *The Long Fatal Love Chase* and, specifically, Alcott’s descriptions of Madame Montez (who is really Baptiste in disguise). The use of feminine pronouns for both Baptiste and Valentina and their unexceptional physical descriptions give no hint to the readers that there is any kind of gender trouble. However, the crucial difference between Alcott’s use of gender trouble and Black’s is that in *The Long Fatal Love Chase* the discovery that Madame Montez is really Baptiste is meant to shock and perhaps scandalize readers. It creates a surprising plot twist and illustrates the lengths to which Rosamond’s pursuers will go to apprehend her. Although gender and corporeality continue to interest Alcott in *The Long Fatal Love Chase*, Baptiste’s performance (while highly successful) is discarded once his disguise is

revealed. In *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, on the other hand, although the story may be surprising for a moment, Tana quickly accepts Valentina's gender identity without any struggle. Indeed, Black's descriptions of Valentina's body and physical appearance do not mark her as anything other than a teenage girl. Following Valentina's revelation, "for a moment, in her [Tana's] mind, Valentina's features took on a masculine cast. But then Tana blinked and saw only the girl in front of her" (228). It is only once Tana knows Valentina's history that she reexamines Valentina's appearance, but, notably, considering Valentina's features as masculine occurs only as a momentary thought. Unlike *The Long Fatal Love Chase*, Valentina's physical appearance as she is described and initially seen by Tana is an accurate portrayal of her gender identity. While Tana frequently confronts gender determinism in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, Valentina and other characters depict the complexity of gender identity and contradict the hard form of gender determinism seen in canonical novels such as *Maggie* or *The Call of the Wild*. *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* continues, and even advances through its portrayal of a transgender character, the interrogation of the relationship between gender and various forms of determinism significant within the Gothic naturalist texts I have previously discussed.

Reflecting on *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*'s place in the larger Gothic and YA canons, Jennifer Furuyama, writing for the *School Library Journal*, argued that "Twilight fans will enjoy the drama, but its [*The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*'s] fan base need not be limited to those who read paranormal romance. Teens with a yen for dark, futuristic novels, and maybe even a few Ann Rice readers, will find this a refreshing take on

vampire lit. As always, Black's writing is quick paced and thought-provoking. A must-have for any teen collection" (109). Furuyama aptly connects Black's writing not only to YA fiction but, with the reference to Ann Rice, to adult Gothic texts and particularly the vampire novel. Similarly, *Publishers Weekly* noted in a starred review that, "replete with grisly violence, an intriguingly complex take on the mechanics of vampirism, and well-developed and memorable characters, this superior, dread-soaked tale will satisfy vampire addicts of all ages" (91). Although *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* is written primarily for a YA audience, Black's craft as a writer draws her work into conversation with a wide range of fiction.⁵¹ Indeed, Black is particularly well versed in vampire fiction. In fact, Black has written her own retelling of Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire classic *Carmilla* (1872) titled "Milcara," which relates the tale from the vampire's position and casts the supernatural predator as a pre-pubescent, although also immortal, girl.⁵² Black's immersion in classic vampire fiction heightens *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*'s connection to the Gothic, while the predatory relationships of vampire fiction which Black draws upon highlight a pre-existing connection to naturalism. Black writes in the acknowledgements to *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* that "this book is a love letter to all the vampire books I read over and over growing up" (421). She goes on to thank authors of vampire fiction as wide-ranging as Le Fanu, Suzy McKee Charnas, Poppy Z.

⁵¹ The comparison of *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* to *Twilight* is an obvious one given the series' and movies' popularity and influence on YA fiction and pop culture in general. However, it is hard to find two more different heroines than Bella Swan and Tana. In many ways, *Coldest Girl in Cold Town* is the anti-*Twilight* vampire novel which restores vampires to their violent origins rather than cloaking them in sparkles or sanitizing their bloody feedings. While Bella's character has been harshly criticized for her passivity, Tana stubbornly refuses to relinquish agency throughout the novel.

⁵² Black observes in the author's note to this retelling that she cannot be certain when she first read Le Fanu's unusual tale of a female vampire who preys on women. Instead, she writes that "in my memory, *Carmilla* is just always there, a defining piece of my inner vampire mythos" ("Milcara" 135).

Brite, Anne Rice, and Tanith Lee for their novels and the inspiration they provide. Many female authors, including those listed by Black, have long been associated with vampire fiction. Gina Wisker comments that

contemporary women writers, however, have found in the figure of the vampire marvelous potential for radical reappropriation. The status of vampires as cultural indices and metaphors has been revalued by contemporary women vampire-fiction writers, aligning them with a new feminist carnivalesque. They infuse the age-old figure with new life and new potential to comment on what it means to be human. (166)

Black similarly utilizes the world of the vampire to comment on naturalist conundrums such as agency, determinism, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* is one of the most significant contributions to vampire fiction in recent years while it also serves as an example of the ongoing genre of Gothic naturalism. Black's extended engagement with vampire fiction and her many works dealing with faeries and folklore demonstrate Black's authorial investment in numerous different kinds of storytelling. However, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* is the most significant example of Gothic naturalism among Black's work because of its unique combination of Gothic milieu and naturalist investigations of agency and making choices.

A world at risk of being overrun by vampires and the setting of Coldtown itself introduces the notion of agency which is so crucial to Black's novel and also central to so many Gothic naturalist texts. Once you are infected in Tana's world, you initially have the *illusion* of choice as to whether you will become a vampire or try to outlast the

infection. However, as is the case with so many Gothic naturalist texts, this illusion of choice is deceptive because an infected person's desire for blood quickly overpowers self-control. Once again, chance is also a powerful force in this scenario because a certain amount of luck is at play in successfully quarantining an infected person against all human contact while still supplying them with the basic necessities. Indeed, Tana understands this fact better than most having witnessed her mother's unsuccessful attempt to beat the virus which later culminated in her attack on Tana. Defeating the virus is not a matter of will power but, rather, largely depends on luck. The way vampirism is spread and the mechanisms of how the virus develops echo many frameworks of classic naturalist novels. As in the previous texts I have discussed, chance is a crucial force which impacts the chain of events. However, agency in both classic texts and in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* remains slippery—difficult to understand and even harder for individuals to employ. Furthermore, throughout my discussions of Gothic naturalism I have examined many examples where opportunities to act as an agent and make choices are later exposed as overdetermined situations where viable options are, in fact, absent. In terms of making choices, “Old Woman Magoun” may be most similar to *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* in terms of the high stakes choices which are laid out and the false sense of agency felt by Mrs. Magoun. The illusion of agency is just as tempting in Coldtown as it is in other Gothic naturalist texts and, unfortunately, just as treacherous for the characters.

Part of what impinges on Tana's agency is her physical and biological disadvantage in comparison with Coldtown's vampires. The dynamics of predator/prey

relationships runs throughout the novel. Motifs of flesh and ice are continually juxtaposed throughout to contrast the warm-blooded humans with the cold that sets in once someone becomes infected, known as ‘going cold’ in the novel. Another crucial motif is that of blood. Unlike many naturalist texts, where blood becomes an abstract concept related to familial inheritance, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* invokes blood in its most Gothic and tangible sense.⁵³ Much like *The Morgesons*, Black provides blood with several different valences in the novel. There are blood relations such as Tana’s parents and her sister, closest to the classic naturalist sense of blood as heredity. On the other hand, blood can also be either disgusting or sensual, depending upon the contexts of violence, consumption, or eroticism. *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* is a novel soaked through with blood and filled with these various contexts. At one point, Tana realizes that to the vampires she must appear “delicious, like a blood-filled muffin” (Black, *Coldest Girl* 189). Upon entering Coldtown, Tana abruptly falls from the top position in the food chain. Her newfound vulnerability exposes the need for her to make ‘good’ choices if she does not want to end up as a vampire’s meal. It may initially seem that including supernatural creatures such as vampires detracts from any claims to naturalism the novel may have. However, vampirism, the mechanics of how it is contracted, and the ruthlessness of the environment of Coldtown only serve to heighten the novel’s naturalistic qualities, creating an ideal example of the hybrid genre of Gothic naturalism.

There are three frameworks of choice developed throughout *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*. The first framework is that of making the best choice in a bad situation, or

⁵³ Black notes in an interview that “I felt that there wasn’t as much blood in recent [vampire] books as I remembered in older ones. I really wanted there to be more blood, the presence of it, the description of it” in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* (Black, “Q & A”).

making the best bad choice. For example, as Tana attempts to outrun the vampires who killed her friends, she recognizes that she has very few options, noting that “she didn’t have time to make good decisions” (22). However, the narration immediately follows that statement with the rationale that Tana “had to take her chances,” emphasizing that Tana must accept the limitations of her dire situation (22). Black deploys this first framework, making the best bad choices, again and again throughout the novel, emphasizing the already mediated nature of decision making in Coldtown. In other words, not only is it difficult for young adult protagonists to make ‘good’ choices, but in this novel the choices themselves are bad from the start. There are striking parallels between Tana’s situation and many of the protagonists I have discussed. Like Virginie Varens at the conclusion of *V.V.*, Tana must first accept that there are no good options available to her and then try to salvage some form of agency given the limitations she faces.

Tana despairs at the lack of options she has but quickly overcomes that despair to make a choice in order to move forward and hope that what she chooses is good enough to keep her alive. A friend reminds Tana that “you can’t win when someone else makes all the rules” (46). Here again, Black echoes the loss of free will central in canonical naturalism. However, emblematic of Tana’s approach to being in Coldtown, which leaves her little ability to act, “Tana didn’t listen” (46). So although Tana accepts that her choices are very limited, what she does *not* accept is the idea that she loses the ability to make choices or take action. There are pivotal moments throughout the text in which Tana is poised between two possibilities that would create very different trajectories for

the remainder of the novel. In other words, if Tana chooses ‘wrong,’ she could die, she could become infected, she could be captured by a vampire, such that the stakes of making choices and the decision-making process itself are heightened by the environment of Coldtown much as the environments of naturalist and Gothic naturalist novels act as powerful forces upon their characters. As with many Gothic naturalist texts, the stakes for people’s choices are increasingly important. Freeman’s ghost stories about abused young women demonstrate the life or death consequences for people’s choices, and readers can identify similarly dangerous consequences in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*.

Crucially, there is a second framework which Black deploys almost equally frequently in relation to Tana’s use of agency: that of the purposefully bad choice. Tana often makes bad choices or, at least, what appear to be self-destructive ones. These deliberate bad choices still allow Tana to exercise her agency, if in questionable ways. For example, early on when Tana fears being attacked by an infected Aidan, she realizes that “she knew what she *should* do—hit him in the back of the head and hope it knocked him unconscious—but she *couldn’t*” (40, emphasis added). The strangeness of Coldtown is that for much of the novel it is difficult to perceive a clear difference between a so-called ‘good choice’ and a ‘bad choice.’ What initially appear to be bad choices for Tana, such as trusting the vampire Gavriel, actually turn out to be advantageous in the topsy-turvy world of Coldtown. How often does a similar conundrum arise in naturalist texts when a character makes what he or she believes to be an advantageous choice only to find that it instead proves disastrous? For example, *Sister Carrie*’s Hurstwood decides to run away with Carrie (after stealing a large sum of money). Believing this abrupt life

change will be the solution to his problems, Hurstwood instead embarks on a period of sharp decline and bitterness. In Gothic naturalist texts, then, labeling a choice as purely good or bad is a complicated proposition.

Still, some ‘bad choices’ are more clearly self-destructive than others. Tana thinks more than once, “*there’s no way out . . . there’s only what you do before you die,*” allowing her to make difficult choices by not thinking too far into the future but also justifying the self-destructive nature of her choices because she believes they will culminate in her destruction no matter what (385, original emphasis). One of Tana’s most destructive and most pleasurable choices is allowing Gavriel to drink her blood after she has become infected. Tana decides that “*just this once, for a little while, I’m not going to worry and I’m not going to care*” (353, original emphasis). While Tana extensively deliberates over many of her earlier choices, the mechanism of the bad choice necessitates an injunction to stop thinking and choose based on pleasure instead. Tana “didn’t want to explain the recklessness, the pleasure of making the bad choice, the glory of at least this once, picking her own path to damnation” (353). Part of the attraction of the bad choice for Tana is not having to justify it and instead just choosing as she wishes. Tana also drinks Gavriel’s blood and “felt like Persephone in Hades, pomegranate seeds bursting against her teeth” (353). Drinking his blood is dangerous, though, because while Gavriel’s vampire blood does not necessarily hasten Tana’s transformation into a vampire, it will likely make it more difficult for her to resist the urge to drink blood as she attempts to fight off the virus. Like Persephone, Tana may have entered a forbidden realm from which she may not be able to return.

Interestingly, Tana's bad decisions began long before her arrival in Coldtown. In fact, they began in her childhood and relate to her mother's contraction of the vampiric virus. In discussing Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's works, I noted the troubling depiction of relationships between parents or caretakers and the girls for whom they care.

Subsequently, my discussion of *Summer* and *Weeds* pointed out the difficulties faced by women as they become mothers but also examined the generational exchanges between mothers, daughters, and even granddaughters and the ways those exchanges become ghostly or haunting. In *Weeds*, Judy's children's demands are compared to the endlessly draining consumption of the supernatural vampire. Judy's children are "two little greedy vampires working on her incessantly . . . never giving her a moment's peace, bent upon drinking her last drop of blood, tearing out her last shrieking nerve" (208). Here, Judy becomes a Gothic heroine tortured by her children's seemingly insatiable demands.

Surprisingly, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* carries forward this strain of writing focused on mother-child relationships within Gothic naturalism. In *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, the parent-child relationship becomes draining not upon the mother (as is so often depicted) but upon the child. Black uses a series of flashbacks in order to portray an early bad choice of Tana's. Before any of Tana's adventures in Coldtown begin, Tana's mother becomes infected. In order to protect the rest of the family, Tana's father locks his wife in the basement to wait out the virus. Tana's father then has to steel himself against giving in to his wife's pleas for blood as the virus becomes more and more intense, creating an almost insatiable desire in her. However, Tana's father's plan goes awry. As the narrator observes, "it took thirty-four days before Tana broke and promised

her mother that she'd help her get free. It took thirty-seven days before she managed to steal the ring of keys" from her father (15). Tana unlocks the door and only makes it to the bottom of the basement stairs before her mother attacks her. The attack is vivid in Tana's memory, "the endless burn of teeth on her skin . . . like the pincers of some enormous spider" (15-16). Tana attempts to fight back, but "all that had done was make her mother squeeze her more tightly, make the flesh of her inner arm tear, make her blood jet like pumps from a water gun. . . . The doctors told her father that the memory would fade, like the big messy scar on her arm, but neither ever did" (16). The disturbing scene depicts what may be Tana's first self-destructive choice. It is particularly unlucky that Tana is the one who gives in to her Mom, precipitating not only the attack on Tana but also her mother's grotesque death in which she is decapitated by Tana's father. While the draining Tana experiences is physical when her mother attacks, its impact moves well beyond the body. The scar Tana bears from her mother's attack remains and acts as a kind of talisman that Tana touches several times throughout the novel. Tana's guilt and her recognition of the disastrous consequences of this early bad choice echo throughout the rest of her bad and not so bad decisions in Coldtown.

However, Tana's feelings about her mother's death are more complicated than mere guilt. Tana has a recurring dream in which she becomes a vampire. Then, in the dream, her mother asks to be turned into a vampire as well so that the two can be together. In the dream, Tana's father has locked her in the basement after she becomes infected, much as he did his wife when she was bitten in reality. Tana attacks *her father* in the dream and bites him in order to complete her transformation into a vampire.

Expressing a desire to return to a pre-Oedipal state, in Tana's dream she and her mother leave her father and younger sister behind; as vampires they "put on long gowns and went out into the night, mother vampire and child vampire, to hunt and haunt the streets together" (29). The novel shows Tana's desperate attempts to remain human while in Coldtown; yet, curiously, following the recounting of this dream, Tana states "*I don't want to be a vampire* But in her dreams, she kind of did" (29, original emphasis). In the dream world, every wrong choice leads Tana to an eternity shared with her mother where they become powerful supernatural creatures. The horrible scene that was actually played out between Tana, her mother, and her father in the family's basement is twisted in the dream landscape so that *Tana* lashes out at her father and her *mother* sacrifices her humanity to be with Tana as a vampire. The wrong choices are all Tana's; her mother is absolved of guilt and becomes perfect once again in her daughter's eyes.

Black also doles out the information about Tana and her mother in small parcels which are inserted as flashbacks in between the action occurring in the present while the teens make their way to Coldtown. First, readers learn about the mother's infection, imprisonment in the basement, and Tana's memory of the attack. Next, Black includes Tana's recurring dream about becoming a vampire alongside her mother. Finally, the narrator explains how the attack on Tana ended, noting "what really happened in the basement of Tana's house wasn't like any of her happy dreams where she and her mother frolicked together. After she'd gone down the stairs, a monster had attacked her, mad with hunger" (65). It was only later, "when Tana woke up, she found out that it was her father who'd saved her. He'd used a shovel to hack off his wife's head" (66). Similar to

naturalist scenes of horror in *McTeague*, Black invests vampirism and its impact on her characters with great seriousness. As is the case with other Gothic naturalist texts, circumstances far beyond the characters' control radically alter, and even dictate, the trajectory of their lives.

Tana survives her early bad choice to try and free her mother. Notably, Tana's decision is not the worst one made within the novel. Other characters' bad choices represent the extreme of this spectrum of ill-advised decisions such as those of Midnight, who revels in her poisonous bad choices. Some bad choices truly are bad. In particular, Black focuses on young women's choices in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* and in many of her other works. The predator/prey dynamic of much vampire fiction here maps onto Gothic naturalist frameworks of agency. Midnight is fascinated by vampires, documenting her journey to Coldtown through multiple forms of social media and coveting the ability to be turned into a vampire. In fact when Midnight learns that Aidan is infected, Tana notes that "Midnight wasn't listening [any more]. Her mouth was slightly open, fascinated, a mouse in love with a snake" (78). Although Tana recognizes the reality that she is potential vampire prey, she neither relishes that role nor incorporates it as part of her identity. On the other hand, Midnight enjoys being prey, actually hoping that she will be bitten and transformed. She takes pride in being that "blood-filled muffin," while Tana shudders at the thought of being mere prey (189). Much like the spectrum of women who accept or resist victimhood in *Summer* and *Weeds*, the contrast between Tana and Midnight illuminates different ways in which young women approach their own agency. While Tana uses her agency desperately to try

and remain human in Coldtown, Midnight focuses her agency on trying to become a vampire. As the novel progresses, Tana's and Midnight's trajectories play out the results of these choices with, at times, disturbing results. I would argue that Midnight ultimately becomes a victim of her own destructive choices. Unlike some of the willing victims in *Summer* and *Weeds*, Midnight does not make sacrifices for anyone else. Instead, she believes turning into a vampire will solve all her problems. In the end, Midnight's understanding of agency proves to be profoundly flawed as she fails to account for what she must give up to become a vampire. Tana, an unwilling victim, does not escape completely unscathed either. Instead, she chooses to make sacrifices for her sister as do some of the willing victims in *Summer* and *Weeds*. However, Tana weighs her choices much more carefully than does Midnight, and Tana grasps that each of her choices initiates a string of consequences that cannot be fully anticipated.

British novelist Angela Carter, whose fiction engages with similar issues of agency and predatory relationships, illuminates a crucial distinction between flesh and meat in her non-fiction work which highlights the different strategies Tana and Midnight use to employ agency. Carter observes that, "in the English language, we make a fine distinction between flesh, which is usually alive and, typically, human; and meat, which is dead, inert, animal and intended for consumption" (161). Carter contends that "if flesh plus skin equals sensuality, then flesh minus skin equals meat My flesh encounters your taste for meat. So much the worse for me" (162). Carter's theoretical conception of flesh versus meat encapsulates the difference between Tana and Midnight. Tana might concede that the vampires see her as meat, but she does not conceive of herself in that

fashion. Tana preserves herself as flesh, maintaining that she is both alive and still human. On the other hand, Midnight sees herself only as meat. Unfortunately, what Midnight fails to grasp is that in being meat, she becomes both dead and consumable. In wanting to transform into a vampire, Midnight does not consider any of the ramifications of this choice. Once she does become a vampire, Midnight quickly dies trying to attack Tana. Even as the supernatural vampire predator, Midnight cannot defeat Tana's fleshly human potential.

Indeed, Midnight continually abjects herself throughout the narrative. Of course, her real name is not Midnight; she was born Jenny, but she cannot bear to have a mundane name and instead chooses to rename herself upon embarking for Coldtown, choosing Midnight to describe her future vampiric self. As is the case with the rejection of names in *The Morgesons*, Midnight's discomfort with her given name signals a deeper discomfort with her very identity. In explaining abjection, Kristeva notes that "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (10). Unlike *Weeds* and *Summer*, which explore both the physical and psychological impact of abjection, through the figure of Midnight *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* scrutinizes the psychological process of becoming abject. Not only does Midnight abject herself by rejecting everything from her life before Coldtown, but she so abhors herself as a human teenager that she has to find a new way to call her identity into being. Jerrold E. Hogle explores the psychological mechanisms of abjection, arguing

it is this betwixt-and-betweenness [that constitutes abjection] (which can take many other forms, including a person's emergence from a welter of different existential, class, racial and sexual or gendered conditions) that most of us in the West strive to 'throw away' from ourselves as repugnant, and 'throw under' a cultural norm as being outside it, in order to interpret ourselves and be interpreted as having a solid 'identity,' a oneness *to* ourselves instead of an otherness *from* ourselves *in* ourselves. (295, emphases added)

Midnight certainly embodies contradictions in her mundane, or even clichéd, origin as a teenager who feels misunderstood combined with her cold-blooded ability to destroy others. Hogle observes that the abject is made Other by those in power; yet, Midnight in effect chooses to cast herself out of mainstream American society in her desire to be made monstrous in becoming a vampire. She abjects herself before anyone else has the chance to do so. Nevertheless, Midnight's new identity does not yield the fantasy world that she was hoping to discover in Coldtown. Instead, her new identity as 'the vampire Midnight' calls forth a horrific world of violence. Midnight loathes the idea of growing any older than she already is at eighteen and is so desperate to become a vampire that she is willing to allow Tana to die so that Aiden might complete his transformation and then infect Midnight in turn. This attempt to stop aging is contrasted with Valentina's desire, whose wish not to age is rooted in the desire to avoid puberty and who, notably, does not become a vampire. Unfortunately, Midnight gets her wish to be a vampire, but the result is that she kills her twin brother Winter because she is so hungry as a newly transformed

vampire that she loses control and completely drains him of his blood. Although Tana makes bad choices, and recognizes a kind of perverse pleasure in them, Midnight is so ruthlessly individualistic and pleasure-seeking in her choices that she becomes a frightening specter juxtaposed with Tana. Midnight acts as a warning for readers against indulging too frequently in the bad choice and in not considering the ramifications of one's decisions. As is the case with so many naturalist characters, Midnight's decision to become a vampire, which she thought was the best choice for her, proves to be the worst choice she could make.

Finally, Tana operates within a third framework of choice when she enters Coldtown: creating options in situations where there seem to be none. There are many instances which present no choices at all or circumstances in which her actions seem to be determined by others. An example of this occurs shortly after Tana enters Coldtown. Tana is drugged and locked in a room with an infected Aidan, whose craving for blood is increasing exponentially. Tana initially feels that she has no viable options; her only choices are to "kill Aidan or die herself" (Black, *Coldest Girl* 197). Amazingly, Tana creates a third alternative. She uses a shard of a broken bowl and her steel-toed boots to hack into the plaster of one of the walls to create footholds so that she can climb up the wall, jump to a chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and make her way to a skylight to escape. In this example, Tana appears to be in a situation where she is forced to make the worst kind of bad choice, yet she creates an impossible solution to this impossible situation. Black highlights Tana's ability to extract herself from this predicament, as she escapes the situation by climbing up and out of it. Here, Tana is *meant* to be a victim.

She is locked in with Aidan specifically to act as human bait (meat) to complete Aidan's transformation into a vampire. Short of killing Aidan, she initially foresees no way to survive. However, by quickly shifting from victim to agent, Tana's actions demonstrate how she retains agency to make a choice even in this overdetermined situation.

Crucially, however, there are chilling consequences for Tana's acting in her self-interest and creating this unforeseen alternative. When she later returns to the house where Aidan was confined, she faces yet another scene of carnage: namely, that Aidan has fed on two people and that Midnight has effectively killed her brother. So even though Tana creates an option where there was none, the ramifications of her escape are good for Tana but tragic for several other characters. Tana is not at fault for what ultimately occurs but her actions unknowingly set off a deadly series of events. Once again, Tana's situation uncannily echoes that of "Old Woman Magoun." Both women, the grandmother and Black's young protagonist, find their way out of horrible situations by creating an alternative unforeseen by other characters. Yet, the advantages gained are not without significant costs for both characters. In the landscape of Coldtown and in Gothic naturalist texts, no characters are safe from the repercussions of their actions.

So over and over again in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, Tana makes choices. She makes good choices; she makes bad choices. Tana makes choices where there were none, choice, after choice, after choice. Perhaps the most significant choice Tana makes is choosing to resist the virus rather than transform into a vampire. However, Tana quarantines herself with no real certainty about her outcome, only her insistence that "I'm not going to be a vampire" (301). In fact, in one of the novel's final images, the

narration describes a memory of Tana's as "a coin spinning without falling on heads or tails" (419). This concluding image is extremely apt in Tana's case, as she, too, remains suspended in a liminal state between being human and being a supernatural creature. The spinning coin poised between heads or tails is reminiscent of *Sister Carrie*'s Hurstwood deliberating as to whether or not he should take money from a safe. Hurstwood stands next to the safe, "pausing with his hand upon the knob, which might so easily lock it beyond all temptation. Still he paused" (182). This scene emphasizes not only Hurstwood's physical hesitation as he stands next to the safe but also his mental vacillation about what he should do. The narrator explains that "at every first adventure, then, into some untried evil, the mind wavers. The clock of thought ticks out its wish and its denial" (183). Furthermore, Hurstwood "could not bring himself to act definitely . . . [;] he thought constantly that it [taking the money in the safe] would be best, and yet he wavered" (184). Fittingly for a naturalist novel so much about chance and how mundane choices can have far reaching effects, Hurstwood's choice is effectively made for him when the safe's lock clicks closed as he is trying to put *back* the money he has removed from it. Both examples, the coin in *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* and the safe door in *Sister Carrie*, symbolize momentous outcomes which hinge on chance. Furthermore, the imagery used in both cases depends on very ordinary, even banal, situations: whether a door closes or opens and whether a coin falls on heads or tails. The coin imagery further emphasizes the influence of chance on what happens to Tana with its connections to gambling practices and the use of coin tosses to make decisions. Tana's life can go one of two ways, but she really has no way of knowing which result will occur. Much like

Hurstwood, the choice is largely out of Tana's control at the novel's end. She has done everything possible to fight off the virus and prevent herself from drinking human blood during the virus's incubation period, but it still may not be enough to protect her. As is true of many other Gothic naturalist texts, Tana's attempts to act as an agent ultimately leave her in a position where she has no control over how her body reacts to the virus.

The novel concludes with a liminal space and another moment that could pivot in different directions to effect very different outcomes. Tana is still inside Coldtown, but she isolates herself from the rest of the city. Similarly, Tana is not quite human anymore because she has gone cold but has not yet turned into a vampire either. Unlike many other YA series, Black has indicated in interviews no foreseeable plans to return to Coldtown and provide a definitive answer as to whether or not Tana becomes a vampire (Black, "Q &A"). The lack of resolution for this pivotal question begs a rereading of all the many choices Tana has made throughout the novel. In this most crucial of decisions, she strives to make a 'good choice,' but the good choice is also the hardest kind of choice to realize. As I have argued, Tana makes her choices contrary to the many deterministic factors which limit her options. The biomedical determinism of the virus, however, means this decision is not entirely dependent upon Tana's willpower. If anyone can beat the virus, Tana seems to be the likely one. However, Black leaves the ending open to any number of choices and resolutions based on the reader's interpretation of Tana's decisions throughout the entire novel.

When there are only negative options, there are a multitude of responses: denial, resignation, resistance, submission, bargaining, and more. Gothic naturalist protagonists

who overcome negative options have in common the fact that they do not accept other characters' predictions of what they can or cannot achieve. In other words, several of the Gothic naturalist protagonists discussed in this study— such as Cassandra Morgeson, Virginie Varens, and Jean Muir— accept only their own assessment of the choices available to them. For example, Jean Muir's employer threatens her with being ejected into the street and having her schemes exposed unless she leaves voluntarily. Although she is presented with only negative options, Jean identifies a different course of action and finds a way to resolve her situation. Mrs. Magoun, in what I have discussed as a very complicated example of wresting agency from among negative choices, sees beyond Barry's ultimatum, but the consequence of her choice is the death of her beloved granddaughter. Indeed, making choices in Gothic naturalist texts is always a tricky business. A positive outcome is never guaranteed when a character makes a difficult choice; however, a negative outcome is not necessarily avoided by *refusing* to choose either. Charity's marriage to Royall in *Summer*, for example, is not so much a choice as a seemingly inevitable acquiescence; the marriage signifies her *inability* to act rather than a decisive choice that she makes. Either way, though, it does not make the conclusion any more palatable for Charity. In *Weeds*, Judith's choice to be abstinent within her marriage, which she believes will solve the problem of having more children, actually causes her marriage to become so toxic that Judith eventually reverses her choice. Finally, *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown* presents a heroine who fights tenaciously against deterministic forces with mixed results. Although Gothic naturalist texts portray many predicaments in which female agency is vexed, there is no single strategy to resolve these

predicaments. Gothic naturalism features countless situations which require women to make tough choices, and, in the end, they must make a choice and then find a way to live with its consequences, whatever these may be.

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