UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Publishing, Property, and Problematic Heiresses: Representations of Inheritance in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Popular Fiction

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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The Dissertation of Paige Ann Prindle is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, San Diego

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Mark and Chris Sanderson, for teaching me
the power of positive thinking, and for your relentless yet cheerful support,
without which this achievement never would have been possible.

To my husband, Jared, for your quiet patience and unfailing selflessness.
Thank you for encouraging me to get outside, to dream big, and to take chances;
we are undoubtedly on the precipice of our next great adventure.

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the greatest of joy in its completion. I am already awed by your way with words,
and hope that some day you may be as proud of me as I am of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Publishing, Property, and Problematic Heiresses:
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American Women's Popular Fiction

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Nicole Tonkovich, Chair

Publishing, Property, and Problematic Heiresses explores a motif that is prominent in literature across genres, time periods, and national traditions: inheritance. I argue that despite the ubiquity of inheritance in a wide variety of literary production, the unique cultural, legal, economic, and technological changes that swept the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century unsettled traditional implications of inheritance. Positioning my texts within their historical and cultural context, I trace their representations of inheritance to draw out the anxieties that arose in this period as a result of the rise of professional authorship and the rapid growth of the publishing industry;

developing theories of evolution and eugenics; the changing relationship of African Americans to property from slavery through the post-Reconstruction period; and shifting legal definitions of the family and women's relationship to property. Intimately bound up within each of these major cultural shifts were discourses of the family as a mode of social organization and determinant of individual identity. Consequently, I argue that representations of inheritance in these texts reveal and then struggle with the conflicts that emerged in this period around the intersection of race, class, gender, power, and modes of authorship, especially as these conflicts were manifested in the heteronormative, patriarchal family structure. I analyze a collection of popular serial fiction written by E.D.E.N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, Metta Victor, Anna Katharine Green, and Pauline Hopkins, focusing on their strategic applications of the devices of the gothic, domestic detective fiction, and racial uplift as they intersect with discourses of inheritance. The social dynamism of serial fiction and the familiar formulas of popular genres articulate the characteristics of a broadly shared culture and the concerns of an imagined community of readers. Women writers in this period were defined by a unique and gendered relationship to work, property, and the dictates of authorship and publication. Thus, I argue that representations of inheritance in popular serial fiction written by women in the second half of the nineteenth century cohere as a unique subset of a long literary tradition of inheritance, and were used by them as a complex tool of social critique.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1863, the same year that Louisa May Alcott published three of her earliest anonymous sensation stories in the tenuously reputable *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Paper* in an effort to earn money to support herself and her entire family,[1] Emily Dickinson also put pen to paper and also wrote from within the walls of her father's home. However, Dickinson wrote her lines on a single piece of paper, later to be hand-sewn by herself into a one-of-a-kind volume of her own poems (now known as fascicle thirty-seven), with the potential never to be seen by the eyes of another living soul:

> Publication – is the Auction
> Of the Mind of Man –
> Poverty – be justifying
> For so foul a thing
>
> Possibly – but We – would rather
> From Our Garret go
> White – Unto the White Creator –
> Than invest – Our Snow –
>
> Thought belong to Him who gave it –
> Then – to Him Who bear
> Its Corporeal illustration – Sell
> The Royal Air –
>
> In the Parcel – Be the Merchant

[1] Alcott biographer Madeline Stern describes *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* thus: "The flagship of the Leslie line was *Frank Leslie's Illustrated newspaper*, launched in 1855. That weekly reported every cause célèbre from murders to executions, from revolutions to prizefights, from assassinations to scandals. And it did so graphically, running woodcuts or huge double-page engravings depicting the bloody battle scenes of the Civil War, volcanoes, earthquakes, and disasters domestic and foreign. The *Illustrated Newspaper* also offered serial stories that spiced domestic tranquility with a touch of violence" (xvi).

Of the Heavenly Grace –
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price –

J709 c. 1863

Dickinson's poem associates writing with the divine and publication with the profane, intimating that even poverty cannot justify the sale of the embodiment of the "Human Spirit," which is itself the worldly expression of "the White Creator." And, holding true to that belief, Dickinson wrote poetry for decades and allowed only a handful of her nearly two thousand poems to be published, let alone publicly acknowledged. On the other hand, Alcott's embrace of the literary marketplace, however conflicted her emotions about this may have been, exemplifies the very real and very necessary economic relief that writing and publication offered many women in the nineteenth century.[2] The contrast between the texts, publication history, and professional careers (or lack thereof) of Louisa May Alcott and Emily Dickinson, women writers who are presently two of the most widely recognizable female literary figures of the nineteenth century, illustrates a striking difference in circumstances—if not in the initial means of production, then in the subsequent modes of circulation, constructions of authorship, and economic consequences that their writing engendered.[3] Alcott and Dickinson

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[2] See Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, eds. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott* (1989) for a look inside the personal struggles Alcott often endured as she suffered from overwork, exhaustion, and a distaste of fame despite her love of writing and the economic support it brought her and her family.

[3] In fact, Alcott was awarded a one hundred dollar prize for her 1863 story, "Pauline's Passion and Punishment," published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. She also noted in her journals that she was paid forty dollars for her 1863 story "A Whisper in the Dark," and thirty-nine dollars for "A Pair of Eyes; or, Modern Magic," both published in the same year in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

shared similar lives in many ways: they were the unmarried daughters of intellectual fathers; they were familiar with many of the most prominent thinkers and writers of their time, who came and went from the parlors of their parents' homes; they lived most or all of their lives in the culturally fertile and politically active state of Massachusetts; and they were creative and prolific writers who found an important emotional and psychic outlet in the very act of writing.[4]

However, Alcott and Dickinson were also different in many important ways. While nearly all of Dickinson's approximately eighteen hundred poems were not even known to exist until they were discovered after her death, Alcott's journals meticulously record the web of business relationships and financial returns that the publication of her stories created. While both Alcott and Dickinson were white women who came from "respectable" families, the professional failures or successes of their fathers greatly influenced the economic situation into which they were born and subsequently placed into a position of poverty or prosperity. Indeed, it was because of their race and class position that women such as Alcott and Dickinson faced a limited set of options for appropriate public activities or employment.[5] Dickinson's father was

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[4] Interestingly, Alcott and Dickinson were also born two years apart, and died two years apart—both at the age of fifty-five.

[5] As Richard Brodhead explains in his own exploration of the economic circumstances of Alcott's choice to write as a form of work, "When Alcott came of working age, the available jobs through which she could discharge this complex obligation were the work forms marked as suitable for women in her time, the careers that extended women's domestic labors of homemaking and nurture out beyond the home" (75-76). Of course, even though "Alcott grew up in a family (as she put it) 'poor as rats,'" (75), the avenues that were open to her to remedy this poverty were nonetheless delimited by her particular race and class positions. Susan Coultrap-McQuin argues in *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* that by mid-century professional writing was, in general, an acceptable activity for middle-class white women to engage in, as long as what they wrote and

a solid member of the academic community and an active participant in state and national politics, enabling his family to live free from want, in a position of material comfort and security, and with fairly unlimited access to education and opportunity. Alcott's father, on the other hand, famously drove his family to struggle through poverty thanks to his commitment to life as a (poorly paid) philosopher and his experimentation with communal and transcendentalist projects. As Richard Brodhead puts it in *Cultures of Letters*, "Aloctt inherited the dependence of her family on dependents like herself with the particular family she was born into" (75); Brodhead aptly takes up the motif of inheritance here to signify a web of relations that intertwines economics and the family—a motif whose significance and many meanings will be explored shortly. Because they remained unmarried their entire lives, neither Alcott nor Dickinson had a husband who would take the place of their father and become responsible for their financial support. It was in part because of their very different family situations, and the economic differences those constructed, that the trajectories of Alcott and Dickinson as women writers distinctly diverge.

As Betsy Erkkila argues in "Emily Dickinson and Class," as "the privileged daughter of the town squire" (2) Dickinson was financially able to live the kind of life that has become her legend, eventually withdrawing from the public eye to live as a recluse who secretly wrote poetry and interacted with other people almost entirely

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the nature of their business relationships were considered "respectable" or "appropriate" (11-12; 15-17).

through written correspondence alone.[6] Specifically, Erkkila argues that "Within the domestic economy of the Dickinson household, as in the larger political economy of nineteenth-century America, Dickinson was the 'lady' and the intellectual whose leisure, freedom, and space 'to think' were made possible by the manual labor and proletarianization of others" (3). On the other hand, Alcott lived a life that pushed her to write not only for art or pleasure, but out of bare economic necessity, and that pushed her and her writing directly into the public eye and the marketplace. This contrast between Dickinson and Alcott, made even more complex because of the very similarities that they shared, raises questions about the intersection of race, class, gender, and the family with authorship, publication, and economics. In what ways did the different socially constructed identities and positions of women writers influence and shape the content and concerns of their texts? How did the race and class differences of women writers impact their approach to and experiences with the literary marketplace? What social, cultural, and political concerns emerge as significant, recurring themes in texts written by women in this time? What particular literary devices are used by women writers to engage with these concerns? In what ways are these concerns approached similarly by these writers, and in what ways differently, and why might this be? Professional authorship and publication became a means for many women to access the psychic and material benefits of creative labor,

[6] Erkkila's analysis supports this claim, as she also positions the nature of Dickinson's constructed "legend" within the motivating and enabling factors of her class position: "Although Dickinson's acts of self-enclosure were at least in part a means of protecting her artistic creation, they were also class acts, manifesting her desire to define herself from the potentially polluting incursions of the democratic multitude" (7).

while actively engaging with some of the most important issues of their day. As my analysis in the following chapters shows, the position from which women wrote often impacted the content of their work as well as the circumstances of its publication. This survey of popular literature written by five American women in the second half of the nineteenth century reveals a common concern with the intersection of gender, the family, economics, and opportunity, while the contours of these concerns shift according to circumstances of race and class. Despite the many differences among the identities and experiences of these women writers, and the different approaches they took to their work, this study argues that representations of inheritance are a common pattern in these texts, emerging as a distinctive motif used as a means to reflect and engage with this cluster of concerns that unsettled the American nation by mid-century.[7]

Inheritance can take on different forms and manifest itself in a variety of theoretical discourses, all of which are useful for exposing prejudices, hierarchies, and priorities in systems of labor, economics, and class as they affect and are affected by the family, the community, the legal system, the government, science, medicine, and

[7] For example, at the age of seventeen Alcott wrote what is thought to be her first novel, *The Inheritance* (1849, 1997), although it was never published in her lifetime. From this early age, Alcott began to ponder the implications and powerful consequences of material and familial inheritance, particularly on young, unwed women who are often made vulnerable because of difficult family situations. Alcott returned to this topic in her writing throughout her life, developing the theme of inheritance as a recurring plot device in her texts, particularly her short sensation stories. These stories are generally characterized by their representation of power struggles, deception, and conflict between the genders and within the family. Material inheritance in these texts is both a source of opportunity and a weapon of oppression; association with a family lineage and the inheritance of a family name are conduits to stability and security. These patterns are also shared features in the texts of many of Alcott's contemporaries.

psychology. While many critics have explored inheritance as a specific motif in literature, a recently published collection of essays, *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance* (2007), explores inheritance in a particularly wide variety of its possible manifestations, inspiring the depth and breadth of the considerations of inheritance in this study.[8] As the collection's editor, Allan Hepburn, explains in his Introduction,

> these essays examine novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as documents in which inheritance variously signifies national belonging, literary affiliation, class identity, heredity, and kinship. . . . inheritances are cultural as well as material. . . . "Inheritance" in this volume means, in the first instance, personal bequests of property and estates, but that meaning expands to include the inheritance of national traditions, the conscious choice of literary ancestors, and the nature of dispossession and disinheritance. (3)

In his essay "Heredity and Disinheritance in Joyce's *Portrait*," included in the *Troubled Legacies* collection, Bradley D. Clissold argues that

> The word "inheritance" refers broadly to a variety of transmissions—including material, biological, aesthetic, cultural, and psychological—that pass, consciously and unconsciously, from a predecessor to a designated successor . . . The etymological root of words like "heredity," "inherit," and "heir," as well as their connection to cognates such as "adhere" and "inherent," reveal how the vocabulary of heredity has been—often unwittingly—appropriated by and incorporated into various political, scientific, legal, and aesthetic discourses. (191-92)

Thus, the critics in the *Troubled Legacies* collection argue that inheritance is a malleable motif that has the possibility to be manifest in both tangible and intangible forms. It is a concept that is unique in its potential to signify the interrelated and

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[8] Collection editor Allan Hepburn claims that *Troubled Legacies*, published in 2007, is unique among existing scholarship in the nature of its essays' approaches to analyzing literary representations of inheritance: "Although scholarship on the entanglement of money and narrative exists, no single critical book surveys the continuity between inheritance and narrative. Other scholars have taken up inheritance as a trope in detailed readings of single authors" (3).

interactive experiences of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation in the past, present, and future. It is also unique in its pervasive and nearly unconscious influence on such a wide variety of relationships, identities, experiences, and discourses.

In following the model of inquiry offered by the authors in the *Troubled Legacies* collection, I explore inheritance here in a wide variety of its possible uses and meanings. In particular, there are five main representations of inheritance that form the basis of analysis in each chapter. These are inheritance as money and other forms of real property; inheritance as family lineage, name, and ancestry; inheritance as a bodily identity that is the physical manifestation of heritage; inheritance as morals, traditions, and beliefs that are passed down within a family or community; and inheritance as forms of cultural capital such as education and freedom. My analysis of these different forms of inheritance in the texts that I have chosen reveals that material and metaphorical inheritance are intimately connected and can influence each other in complex ways. For example, in Chapter Two I argue that the material objects that fill the family home are a means of making visible a family's social status, a material manifestation of the wealth that will constitute the future inheritance of a family's heirs, and signify the lineage and ancestry of a family to themselves and to others. Or, for example, the immoral acquisition of property can degrade a family's public legacy for future generations. This is seen, for example, in the troubles that haunt the Pyncheon family as a result of their aristocratic ancestor's abuse of the laborer Matthew Maule in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, or the

immoral exploitation of slave labor that haunts the decaying plantation home in Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter*, which is explored in Chapter Three.

While I focus on American literature in this study, most existing literary criticism on the use of representations of inheritance focuses on British literature. This includes a number of book-length studies that focus on the role of inherited property in Jane Austen's novels in particular, as well as a recent collection of essays exploring "the representation of inheritance in British and Irish fiction" in general (Hepburn 3). For example, Alistair M. Duckworth argues in his early, influential study of Austen's novels, *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971), that

> The situation of the Dashwood family at the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* reflects the sense of inherited security that is the birthright of the self in Jane Austen's world. Initially, existence is enclosed and the estate into which an individual is born provides him with a little world of harmony and peace. As he lives at the center of his property, so he belongs to a family which is surrounded by other families and has been "for many generations" settled in its place. He comes to consciousness in a community that is corporate and structured in all areas. . . . Soon, however, the self in Jane Austen's world loses its birthright, the initial security is withdrawn and in its place a very different world appears. . . . At a deeper level, however, the degradation that threatens Jane Austen's heroines has implications beyond the social, implications that are metaphysical or theological in nature. Isolated from a stable and inherited "estate," an individual suffers more than loss of station; he is, more importantly, excluded from his "grounds" of being and action. (2-4)

Duckworth's analysis exemplifies the many double meanings that lie behind words such as "estate" and "grounds," and the ways that property can be so intertwined with identity that the two can become interchangeable. It also illustrates the many different kinds of things that can be inherited, including property, security, and identity; in this case, the inheritance of property offers an individual a secure identity because it validates and legitimizes a connection to a recognized family lineage. As Duckworth

argues, this logic is depicted as a "birthright" in Austen's novels, and threats to and the restoration of this birthright constitutes the plot trajectory in many of her texts. As we see in Duckworth's analysis, property and a society's relation to it is key to the origins of the inheritance plot in particular and motifs of inheritance in general becoming a significant concern in literature.

Jo Alyson Parker, another critic who has studied inheritance as a significant motif in British literature, uses the term "inheritance plot" in her analysis, and offers a clear definition of the term as she uses it. Like Duckworth, Parker also focuses on Austen's work in *The Author's Inheritance: Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and the Establishment of the Novel*. Parker identifies a similar trajectory in the novels that she analyzes by Fielding and Austen, arguing that

> Although appearing in various guises, the inheritance plot in the novels that I examine is roughly similar: at the outset the protagonist, deprived of his or her rightful inheritance, must embark on a quest for security and position; by the end, he or she has been revealed or recognized as the proper heir and has come into wealth—or, at least, an elevation in social position. (11)

Parker uses the term "inheritance plot" here, identifying a pattern that she and others have traced back through Western literary traditions to early fairy tales: "Although deriving from an older archetype (the fairy tale), the inheritance plot grafts itself onto a realistic exposition of everyday occurrences. Yet it retains vestiges of its fairy-tale origins in that, invariably in these novels, genteel birth will out—as clearly as it does when the princess feels the pea" (11). The so-called "inheritance plot" as Parker describes it is not unique to British literary traditions, however, but was also taken up by American writers and revised to reflect their own unique social, political, and

historical conditions. Thus, I use the term inheritance plot throughout this study in ways that are both similar to and different from Parker's definition. Typically, threats to the transmission of material inheritance are used as devices to instigate conflict and draw out positive or negative character traits, often delving more deeply into problems associated with metaphorical forms of inheritance at the same time. However, the resolution of the conflict in the texts that I explore may not necessarily lie in the traditional "proper" settlement or distribution of the inheritance. While these texts loosely follow the particular inheritance plot that Parker outlines, they also use an inheritance plot not to restore, but to question, rightful belonging and to criticize the inequalities that are often perpetuated by traditional hierarchies of social position.

Nonetheless, in much of the nineteenth-century American literature that uses inheritance as a dominant motif or plot device, the specter of England and its concerns with heritage and property is often still present. This is seen in frequent representations—and oftentimes criticism—of aristocratic pretensions that regulate the purity of inherited bloodlines and the unbroken transmission of inherited property. However, the link between England and the United States in these texts is often characterized by a conflict between modes of aristocracy and republicanism or democracy. This is a theme, for example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (in humorous jabs taken at the "First Families of Virginia" or F.F.V., a performance of American aristocracy), Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, and the majority of Louisa May Alcott's sensation stories. An author like Henry James, while still considered part of an American literary tradition,

nonetheless has very strong associations with English and European culture, taking up the conflict between the Old and the New worlds as a major theme in his works, including *The Portrait of a Lady*. Alcott's first novel, *The Inheritance*, is set in England and uses characters with European legacies; almost all of her sensation stories are set in England among the aristocracy, with sympathetic outsider figures who often pose threats to this closed system of inherited privilege. By contrast, socially-conscious writers such as Pauline Hopkins often praised England as a more benevolent nation as a technique of criticizing the hypocrisy of the United States as a nation that supported slavery, racism, and injustice while simultaneously espousing the ideals of equality and individual freedom.

As the still relatively young American nation strove to define itself in rapidly changing times, political, legal, and cultural thought sought to define a unique "Americanness" in this period. This included, in part, an effort to break away from practices and institutions that were associated with England's traditions of monarchy and aristocracy, to be replaced instead with republican ideals of individual freedom and meritocracy. Significantly, legal historian Michael Grossberg traces this shift in changing approaches of American family law to property rights and inheritance:

> As a foundation for domestic governance, common-law thinking undermined traditionalism and increased the pressure for a more individualistic, private family law. It both ratified ongoing changes and initiated new ones. The nature of this reorientation is visible in Chancellor James Kent's description of the republican rejection of the old English policy of entailing land: "Entailments are necessary in monarchical governments, as a protection to the power and influence of the landed aristocracy; but such a policy has no application to republican establishments, where wealth does not form a permanent distinction, and under which every individual of every family has his equal rights, and is

> equally invited by the genius of the institutions, to depend upon his own merit and exertions." (17)

This line of reasoning poses serious questions and complications to all of the various ways of thinking about inheritance, and establishes the nineteenth century as a unique period in American history within which to explore representations of inheritance. As the nation became increasingly characterized by industrial production and capitalist consumption, a deep conflict emerged between inherited wealth versus self-made wealth, nepotistic versus deserving opportunity, and predetermined versus malleable identities. Thus, in a society that became increasingly critical of the "property-conscious English view by which a heartless monetary interest in maintaining established lines of descent overruled compassion and common sense" (Grossberg 204), new ways to think about inheritance were needed.

Because of the long lineage of the inheritance plot, stretching back as it does through Western literary traditions to early fairy tales, representations of inheritance were an established part of a shared language and culture of readers and writers by the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, the inheritance plot in specific or motifs of inheritance in general could easily be revised to engage with concerns that were particularly relevant to the period, and would be easily recognizable and relatable to readers.[9] Representations of inheritance, particularly inheritance in turmoil, in doubt, or as the object of struggle or conflict, are particularly ubiquitous in this period because of the sweeping social changes and upheavals that characterize the second half of the nineteenth century, many of which touched material and metaphorical forms of

[9] As is discussed later in this Introduction, these are also typical characteristics of popular fiction in general.

inheritance in some way. While tropes of inheritance have been commonplace in literature for centuries, the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States saw a number of significant social changes that altered the nature of inheritance in nearly every one of its possible manifestations. This includes, for example, laws that changed the relationships between women and property, and laws that began to define the contours of the family and relationships among its members to an unprecedented extent; a rapidly increasing influx of immigrants that unsettled hierarchies of class and ethnicity and that contributed, in part, to the rise to prominence of pseudoscientific theories such as eugenics that attempted to locate inferior and superior identities in inherited/able physical traits; and the progression from the slave system to the Civil War to the Reconstruction period, which drastically altered the relationship of an entire population of African Americans to socially constructed definitions of identity, property, and family, and the rights and privileges associated therewith. Representations of inheritance in general, and the inheritance plot in particular, were deployed by writers in this period to reflect and critique the conflicts that were unique to this culture of great social change.

When considered in its historical context, each form of inheritance is seen to take on significance and meanings that are unique to the legal, social, and cultural conditions of the nineteenth century. The burgeoning publishing industry itself, which rapidly expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century to unprecedented speed and reach, became embroiled in inheritance disputes as new legal regulations of copyrights became a source of concern and conflict. With increasing numbers of women earning money as professional writers, the intersection among gender,

marriage, the family, and property rights became a new battleground in the publishing industry. For example, E.D.E.N. Southworth's estranged husband fought to take ownership of her copyrights, attempting to benefit from her financial success despite his dubious character and utter lack of involvement with her work. Alcott's copyrights became the inheritance that she was able to pass down to her family; she went so far as to legally adopt her nephew in order to ensure that control of her copyrights would remain within her family and be handled in the future according to her wishes. Thus, in Alcott's case, inheritance issues influenced the subtle restructuring of her own family lines. Furthermore, as the publishing industry continued to grow and spread, bringing diverse regions and readers together, creating a shared national culture, and expanding the compendium of American literature, modes of authorship and choices of genre became ways of partaking in and establishing a literary heritage or textual inheritance. Pauline Hopkins, for example, drew on discourses of inheritance as a method of positioning her racial uplift stories within a tradition of writing by African American authors, including slave narratives and early African American novels.

Indeed, the second half of the nineteenth century was a particularly significant and fraught time in the nation's history because of the tensions surrounding the slave system that eventually erupted into the Civil War. As I discuss in depth in Chapter Three, motifs of inheritance are particularly important in nineteenth-century African American literature because of the ways that slavery violently destroyed and perverted the relationship of slaves to property, stable family structures, legal marriage, traceable lineage, and cultural traditions. In the Reconstruction period, social constructions of the color line such as the one-drop rule continued to impose artificial

racial hierarchies by supposedly determining racial identity through biological forms of inheritance. Despite the abolition of slavery, the Jim Crow laws and Black Codes that dominated life in the South during the Reconstruction period found new ways to deny African Americans their rights to property, education, the franchise, and other forms of cultural capital that are consequential in shaping the social and economic opportunities of future generations. Material and metaphorical forms of inheritance are thus integral to the African American experience in the nineteenth century, and are therefore an integral component of this literary tradition.

Following the abolition of slavery, efforts to perpetuate increasingly threatened constructions of racial superiority sought ways to define racial difference that would establish boundaries between the Self and the Other. For example, the so-called one-drop rule mentioned above, which dictated that any person known (or claimed) to have a single drop of black blood in their veins was to be defined only as black, drew on emerging scientific and pseudoscientific discourses of identity that gained popularity in the second half of the century. The publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871 had an enormous impact on a diverse range of thought and practices in this period. As Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche argue in their Introduction to *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940*,

> Attitudes and values began to change in the United States as notions of struggle and competition in the survival of the fittest became a way of perceiving life and human relationships. For example, adaptation to environmental and hereditary forces challenged free will and the efficacy of prayer; scientific determinism supplemented (or even supplanted) God as the reason for all things; and people in the wealthy and educated classes applied the paradigm of evolution to history, literature, imperialism, racial

> and class policies, gender issues and birth control, eugenic ideology, and to the belief in individual as well as phylogenic progress (or regression). (11)

In fact, as Cuddy and Roche argue, "Darwin's ideas, in both accurate and distorted forms, became part of popular culture" (11). By the end of the century, the questions and challenges that were raised by Darwin's theories of evolution were taken to the extreme in the literary genre of naturalism,

> "a theory in literature emphasizing the role of heredity and environment upon human life and character development. . . . Individual characters were seen as helpless products of heredity and environment, motivated by strong instinctual drives from within, and harassed by social and economic pressures from without." (qtd. in Cuddy and Roche 26)

Similarly, Darwin's half-cousin, Francis Galton, drew on Darwin's evolutionary theories in his early formulation of the theory of eugenics in 1883, a theory that proposed human intervention in the processes of evolution in order to selectively reproduce more "desirable" hereditary human traits while, conversely, breeding out those that are considered to be less desirable (Cuddy and Roche 11). This theory would eventually be taken to its extreme in the early twentieth century in Nazi Germany (Cuddy and Roche 12), a clear indication that the consequences of a society's conception and treatment of heritage and bodily inheritance can and have been severe; the most coherently organized origins of this history are rooted in late-nineteenth century thought.

As these examples of evolution and eugenics suggest, inheritance is a concept that is perhaps most often associated with blood ties and familial relationships. The nineteenth century is a unique period in the development of the family as an institution that is defined and regulated by the law. As the legal system continued to evolve in

this period, it became increasingly involved in the affairs of the family, with conflicts over monetary inheritance being settled in new ways. Women were also granted a certain amount of increasing autonomy and power in their relationship to property by mid-century with the passage of the 1848 Married Women's Property Act.[10] Furthermore, as notions about who and what defined the construct of the family shifted, inheritance was used as a tool to delineate boundaries and belonging. For example, Michael Grossberg's exploration of changing bastardy laws in the nineteenth century illustrates that entitlement to inheritance was a key signifier of family belonging. Grossberg argues that legal restrictions on the rights of children deemed to be bastards (born to unmarried parents or of an adulterous relationship) eased in the nineteenth century, a shift in values and practices that was felt tangibly in the increasing right of "bastards" to successfully lay claim to a share of the inheritance of one or both of their parents; to do so implied that these "bastard" children were legally legitimated as rightful members of the family:

> If a bastard could not gain entrance to the father's family, then the child dwelt in a kind of legal purgatory, "as if he were dead and his relatives had never existed." The illegitimate child's only "rights" were to support from the poor-law authorities, and to the customary practice of being left in the care of its mother for its first years of life. In a fundamental legal departure, republican bastardy law lessened these disabilities by creating a new legal household and binding it together with inheritance rights. (207)

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[10] Nonetheless, Joyce Warren argues that by mid-century, "The discourse that most effectively restricted all women, regardless of race or class, was the law, not only the law of racial slavery but also the law with respect to free women" (45). She goes on to note the intersection among gender, the family, and the law that was responsible for restrictions on women, including legal treatments of inheritance: "The legal discourse defining women as economically dependent derived from the doctrine of marital coverture. A married woman was 'covered' by her husband; legally she did not have a separate identity" (45); "Married women were limited not only in terms of their legal identity in court but also by the inheritance laws" (46).

As Grossberg's analysis of changing bastardy laws suggests, inheritance is closely associated with the family (so closely associated, in fact, that inheritance could actually define the family), which came to hold a sacred position within the social order in dominant ideology in the nineteenth century. For example, the family was thought to be responsible for the creation of upright individuals and model citizens, and the teaching of proper moral behaviors and virtuous beliefs constituted a form of inheritance to be passed down to children from their parents through each successive generation. As Grossberg argues, this perspective was unique to the nineteenth century because of a series of cultural shifts that changed the way people thought about childhood and the relationship between parents and their children:

> During the nineteenth century, children came to be seen more explicitly than ever as vulnerable, malleable charges with a special innocence and with particular needs, talents, and characters. Consequently, authoritarian child rearing and hierarchical relations succumbed to greater permissiveness, intimacy, and character building. . . . Though other institutions such as the common school and the church shared its duties, molding the nation's youth into virtuous republicans and competent burghers became more clearly the primary responsibility of the family. (8)

Thus, the heteronormative family unit is imagined as the source of inheritances both metaphorical and material: of money, property, character, biological and genetic identity, as well as morals and traditions that are passed down through each successive generation of future heirs. Because in nineteenth century discourses the family was thought to be a microcosm of not only the wider community but the nation as a whole, the importance and implications of inheritance expand out to affect not only the individual and the family, but entire societies and broad ideological constructions.

The Inheritance Plot and the Question of Subversion: The Lizzie Borden Murder Case

Because inheritance in nearly all of its manifestations is so closely linked to literal and metaphorical family concerns, it is a particularly useful device for narratives that reflect or critique conflicts and power struggles in the family circle. In particular, inheritance can be a source of conflict that is linked to the roles and expectations that order the hierarchical heteronormative family structure, particularly women's powerlessness and inequality in a patriarchal family system (which is itself a microcosm of a patriarchal social structure), and reveals the economic basis of marriage. Inheritance is most often rendered in fiction in its material forms—money, land, and other forms of real property that when collected together make up the estate—and is commonly distilled into the object of the patriarch's will. The figures of the heir and heiress are thus often the protagonists in stories that explore material inheritance. Inheritance of an estate may be the most common use of inheritance as a plot device because, as each chapter's analysis argues, property, wealth, class, social status, and power are inextricably connected; indeed, each defines, depends on, and perpetuates the other. However, a consideration of the other possible manifestations of inheritance reveals that metaphorical inheritance is also constantly at play in these stories.[11] As has been noted, biological and physical traits are treated as inheritable markers of identity and were taken up in the second half of the nineteenth century as scientific or pseudoscientific means of defining race and class; this in turn defined and limited relations to property, wealth, social status, and power. Furthermore,

[11] As I argue most significantly in Chapter Three, the positive and negative effects of metaphorical forms of inheritance are just as tangible as the inheritance of actual material property.

inherited/able morals, beliefs, and traditions were thought to determine individual and collective character, as well as the fate of future generations. Middle-class superiority was often associated with and justified by an ostensible moral superiority, and threats to both of these ideologies were increasingly countered by discourses of bodily inheritance that drew boundaries and delineated differences along race and class lines. Finally, when freedom, education, and other forms of cultural capital are also understood to be inherited/able, the common thread that runs through my analysis becomes the link between inheritance and power—the power to access or limit opportunity, to obtain or deny security and stability, and to define oneself and others.

As this link between inheritance and power suggests, the consequences of material or metaphorical inheritance can range from the liberating to the devastating. On one hand, access to the inheritance of wealth, property, and heritage can offer comfort, security, opportunity, social and economic power, a sense of continuity, a verifiable past, and legitimacy. However, for these very same reasons, inheritance can also be the cause of crime, greed, manipulation, deception, theft, violence, murder, punishment, and control (i.e. the threat of disinheritance).[12] On one level, these types of negative consequences associated with material inheritance reflect economic tensions and inequalities that often result in desperation. Tracing the different relationships of characters in a text to representations of inheritance often draws out the material, emotional, and social inequalities that are perpetuated by race, class, and gender differences. Also because of the link between inheritance and power, literary

[12] As will be discussed later in this Introduction, representations of inheritance are thus nicely suited for gothic narratives and detective fiction.

motifs of inheritance have the potential to be deployed with both conservative and subversive intents and effects, depending on a text's treatment of hierarchies of power. For example, in conservative renderings of the inheritance plot, the rightful lines of transmission are restored despite the inside or outside forces that threaten to disrupt them. As a result, inequality and exploitation are often naturalized or rewarded. Or, in subversive renderings of the inheritance plot, the lines of transmission may be revealed to be predicated on (and perpetuating) unjust inequalities, or exploited as a tool of oppression. Subversive renderings of the inheritance plot may also establish a sense of sympathy for characters who fight back against the forces that threaten to destroy their lives by controlling their access to inheritance—such as the orphaned heroine Capitola Black who outsmarts her evil guardian in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*.

Perhaps the most famously subversive inheritance story in the nineteenth century comes from the columns of newspapers such as *The New York Times*, rather than the pages of a sensation novel, although it's often hard to tell the difference in this case.[13] The Lizzie Borden murder case of 1892, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One, exemplifies the extremes that some people may be driven to by the promise or denial of inheritance.[14] The unmarried daughter of a wealthy but

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[13] This similarity between newspaper articles and sensation stories is indicative of the active interplay and frequent permeable boundaries among these types of texts in this period and the similar popular genres and devices that they often deployed.

[14] The brutal murders of Lizzie Borden's father and stepmother in 1892 lives on as one of the most fascinating, well-known, and written-about crimes in American history. At a time when newspapers were increasingly popular, widespread, and easily accessible, the story of the crimes and the trial that followed became big news, creating a shared experience among people living in different regions of the country. In the nineteenth century, real-life murder

miserly father, Lizzie was accused of brutally murdering her father and stepmother with a hatchet in the sanctity of their Fall River, Massachusetts home in the middle of the day. Newspaper accounts of the murder fully exploited the shocking contrast between the tranquility of the home and the brutality of the murders, as an article published in the local *Fall River Herald* the day of the crime (and titled "Shocking Crime. A Venerable Citizen and His Aged Wife Hacked to Pieces in Their Home") illustrates:

> A HERALD reporter entered the house, and a terrible sight met his view. On the lounge in the cosy [sic] sitting room on the first floor of the building lay Andrew J. Borden, dead. His face presented a sickening sight. Over the left temple a wound six by four had been made as it [sic] the head had been pounded with the dull edge of an axe. The left eye bad been dug out and a cut extended the length of the nose. The face was hacked to pieces and the blood had covered the man's shirt and soaked into his clothing. Everything about the room was in order, and there were no signs of a scuffle of any kind. Upstairs in a neat chamber in the northwest corner of the house, another terrible sight met the view. On the floor between the bed and the dressing case lay Mrs. Borden, stretched full length, one arm extended and her face resting upon it. Over the left temple the skull was fractured and no less than seven wounds were found about the head. ("Newspaper Accounts")

As only one example of many sensational renderings of the details of the crime, the language in this newspaper's treatment of the Borden murders exemplifies the

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narratives were a popular and cheap commodity for sale to readers; likewise, detective fiction, which often centered on murders in domestic spaces or among family members or loved ones, was firmly established as a wildly popular genre by the end of the century. As Catherine Ross Nickerson notes, "There are also more imaginative treatments of the Borden case in fiction, poetry, drama, dance, opera, and film" ("Deftness of Her Sex" 261). The Borden home in Massachusetts has been made into a bed and breakfast, where guests can sleep in the same room where Lizzie's stepmother was murdered, in the bed that her body was found laying next to on the floor. The appeal and fascination of these crimes certainly has not waned, even more than a hundred years later; indeed, in its retellings and reconstructions, the Borden murder case has become part of a shared culture and history. In this way, the conflicts at the heart of the case, including the monetary motive for murder within the family circle, have become legend and live on into the twenty-first century.

language of uncanny horror that often permeated stories of violence and conflict within the family or the home—the gruesome, gory details of the mutilation of a father and mother are distinctly contrasted with the familiar details of the cozy middle-class family home, and thus made all the more disturbing. This aesthetic is a characteristic often associated with gothic narratives, and is played on to an extreme in sensation stories. The details given of the crime—the particular setting of the room, the placement of the bodies, the behavior of the witnesses—also echo the detective narratives that had become familiar by this time, and that called out to readers to participate in the process of discovery as armchair detectives.

Throwing into question the ideals of genteel womanhood and family love that were held so sacred in this period, the most troubling, but most logical, suspect for the murders was Lizzie, and the most likely motive for the murders was Lizzie's resentment over her father's withholding of money and property that she felt were her rightful inheritance. As Catherine Ross Nickerson argues, "As in many families, in the Borden household disputes over money were conflated with struggles for power" ("Deftness of Her Sex" 272). With understated, and perhaps at the time unrealized, significance, the *Fall River Herald* article goes on to detail the wealth of Mr. Borden while also obliquely alluding to his miserliness:

> Andrew J. Borden was born in this city 69 years ago. By perseverance and industry he accumulated a fortune. A short time since he boasted that he had yet to spend his first foolish dollar. Mr. Borden was married twice. His second wife was the daughter of Oliver Gray and was born on Rodman street. He had two children by his first wife, Emma and Elizabeth. The former is out of town on a visit and has not yet learned of the tragedy. Mr. Borden was at the time of his death president of the Union saving's bank and director in the Durfee bank, Globe yarn, Merchants and Troy mill. He was interested in several big real estate

deals, and was a very wealthy man. ("Newspaper Accounts")

As the daughter of a wealthy, well-known, respected figure in Fall River society, Lizzie had to live up to certain expectations that dictated the kinds of behavior that were considered acceptable for her father's daughter. Thus, her own identity was intimately bound up with her father's identity, and her opportunities in life were actually limited because of her class status.[15] The Borden murders and the subsequent public spectacle of Lizzie's trial, with its innocent verdict, bring together building nineteenth-century discourses on gender, class, criminality, economics, family relationships, and the domestic sphere, culminating in a turn-of-the-century collision that was both horrifying and fascinating, and that challenged and threatened to undermine deeply rooted beliefs and values. Despite advancements achieved by this time by the women's movement, and improvements in women's place in society in general, the connection between womanhood and criminality, or at the least impropriety and deviousness, remained an unsettling fear; despite women's increasing ability to own and control their own property and to access economic independence, the relationship between women and property retained grotesque and terrifying possibilities in the popular imagination.

[15] Similarly, this influence of the intersection of social class and the family on opportunity and conflict, alluded to in the juxtaposition of Emily Dickinson and Louisa May Alcott in the beginning of this Introduction, is explored in the domestic detective novels of Metta Victor and Anna Katharine Green in Chapter Two.

Women Writing Inheritance: Gender, Authorship, and Periodical Publishing

As the Lizzie Borden murder case so vividly, though rather morbidly, illustrates, women in the nineteenth century had a different relationship to property than men did, which was a result of both laws and social practices that defined and limited this relationship. Women in this period also had a different relationship to labor, or "work," and opportunities for and access to authorship and publication. In particular, women writers who produced popular literature for the serial marketplace found that their creative production became a commodity that could be exchanged for monetary compensation, like other forms of labor or real property. The stories that they wrote about conflicts around money and property, which threatened or compromised women because of hierarchies of gender and power, often echo the unique issues that complicated women's real-life experiences with material and metaphorical inheritance in this period. These stories also often adopted and appropriated the sensational language and motifs of the period's popular literature and genres (which themselves often made frequent use of inheritance as a significant plot device), at times constructing alternative dimensions to typical sensation plots that either placed female characters as victims in peril or cast them as wicked or fallen women. Thus, popular literature produced by women at this time constitutes a unique category in studies of inheritance as an important cultural phenomenon and literary motif, and deserves close exploration.

Although they have had to slowly work their way back into the public's consciousness, women writers were in fact responsible for producing some of the most popular and widely read literature in the nineteenth century. This includes, for

example, E.D.E.N. Southworth's serial novel *The Hidden Hand* (serialized three times beginning in 1859, and first published as a book in 1888); Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (first published serially in 1851, and then in book form in 1852); Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850); and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (published in two parts in 1868 and 1869, and then collected as a single volume in 1888).[16] As Susan Coultrap-McQuin argues in *Doing Literary Business*, "women authors were very popular and prominent in the nineteenth century, particularly during and after the 1850s. Statistics clearly reveal their increasing visibility as the nineteenth century passed. . . . By 1872 women wrote nearly three-quarters of all of the novels published" (2). However, despite the prominence of women writers in this period and the volume of literature they produced, public awareness of the existence of these women and the availability of their texts fell considerably in the twentieth century. The decision to focus the majority of this study on women writers is part of a conscious choice to continue the efforts of so many recent literary critics to reorient our vision of the history of American literary production and to rethink the terms with which value is assigned to that literature. As the content of the first half of this Introduction suggests, this also includes an effort to position these texts within the cultural and historical context in which they were written in order to more fully understand the unique conditions that influenced their content, production, and publication.

[16] As this short list of examples suggests, some of the most popular nineteenth-century texts—particularly those written by women—were first published serially, rather than as stand-alone novels. It also illustrates that literature in this period was a constantly shifting entity. The significance of this is explored further below.

This study focuses on five American women writers who took up authorship as a mode of economic production, creative expression, and political agitation in the second half of the nineteenth century: E.D.E.N. Southworth (1819-1899), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), Metta Victor (1831-1885), Anna Katharine Green (1846-1935), and Pauline Hopkins (1859-1930).[17] While they generally had successful careers and were influential public figures in their own time, each woman has nonetheless received serious critical attention and inclusion in classroom lesson plans only in the last few decades. According to Coultrap-McQuin, Southworth "was among the most popular, if not *the* most popular novelist of the nineteenth century" (51). Alcott is an intriguing writer to consider in the framework of popular fiction, because while she has long been thought of as "popular" as a synonym for "famous" and "widely-read," due to the great initial and continued success of *Little Women*, it has not been long that she has also been recognized as the author of many serialized sensation stories. Alcott's sensation stories make use of the popular themes and devices that are commonly associated with "lowbrow" fiction, and that were often published in story papers that were also regarded as "popular" as a synonym for "lowbrow," or lacking a certain respectability. Thus, to consider Alcott as a writer of "popular" fiction is to consider her in terms that are less traditional or conservative than much criticism may

[17] While the five writers that are the focus of this study are all women, this is nonetheless not an attempt to perpetuate the logic of "separate spheres" merely by favoring works by women. In fact, this study does not just focus solely on women writers, but instead often considers their work alongside that written by men in the same period. In this way, this study draws on the work of post-separate spheres criticism, such as that proposed by Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher.

have done in the past. The chapter on Southworth and Alcott reads their use of inheritance particularly through the lens of gender.

Richard Brodhead includes Metta Victor's name in his list of just a handful of the "hundreds of writers whose names have been lost to memory" (82), but this forgetting of Victor and her work is steadily being undone. To study Metta Victor's work is to study the work of a woman who was not only a prolific producer for the dime novel publishing powerhouse of Beadle and Adams, but also the mother of nine children. As the author of hundreds of novels published by Beadle and Adams, the editor of both *Beadle's Home* and *Beadle's Monthly*, and the wife of Orville Victor, Beadle and Adams's editor, "it seems fair to say that she built the Beadle empire of publications with [Orville]" (Nickerson, Introduction 2). A study of popular fiction from the nineteenth century wouldn't be complete without a consideration of the full-length detective novel, a genre that originated in this period and is often cited as beginning with Victor's novel *The Dead Letter* (1866). Anna Katharine Green is often referred to as the "Mother of Detective Fiction," with her detective novels originating some of the defining features of the genre. Both women wrote detective novels that explore crime within the middle-class domestic sphere and family circle; while the chapter on Victor and Green focuses in large part on the intersection between inheritance and class in the detective genre, it is not just the middle- and upper-classes that are considered here. Although the domestic detective novel is typically, in fact by definition, concerned with all of the trappings and behaviors and relationships of the homes and families of the more privileged classes, this study finds the spaces and roles and relationships of the novels' more marginalized, working-class characters to offer

as fruitful and perhaps more nuanced a line of inquiry. While Green is typically thought of as a more socially conservative woman than her counterparts in this study, her novel *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) nonetheless reveals some of the class-based anxieties that fermented in this period.

As an active member of the African American intellectual community and a notable race writer and activist, Pauline Hopkins stands out in this group of writers as a racialized woman and as an openly and very actively politicized woman. However, like the other writers in this study, Hopkins was also a member of the middle class, was educated, and considered herself a woman of culture and letters; as Lois Brown argues, "Pauline Hopkins began to assiduously cultivate the public image of herself as the product of a steady, respectable, middle-class family as the twentieth century began" (16). Like Southworth, Alcott, Victor, and Green, Hopkins also wrote popular fiction, but she intentionally adopted and adapted popular genres and devices in her stories as a political tactic. As the sometime editor of the *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins was intimately involved in a project that sought "how to capitalize on the United States literary marketplace to achieve racial goals," which Gene Andrew Jarrett argues "marked a decided, postbellum turn of black intellectual discourse away from the abolitionist rhetoric found in antebellum periodicals" (208). While Hopkins was born into a fairly middle-class family and received an education, the legacy of slavery and energetic involvement in race politics were a personal part of her family's history, and are topics that permeate her writing.[18] In fact, race relations, and the history of

[18] See Lois Brown's recently published biography of Hopkins, *Pauline Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution*, for a detailed reconstruction of the lives of several

slavery, inequality, and injustice, are integral to all of her texts, both fiction and nonfiction. Thus, Chapter Three reads Hopkins's use of representations of inheritance particularly through the lens of race.

As I explore in Chapter Three, Pauline Hopkins recognized the power of popular literature to reach and influence a large number of readers, and made use of its broad appeal by writing popular stories that would not only entertain, but also educate her readers, effectively moving them to take progressive social and political action in their own lives and communities. Joanne Dobson's treatment of Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* in her Introduction to the only version of the novel now available in print reveals the very real, tangible power that popular culture has to shape and change social practices:

> After its first publication as a book in 1888, *The Hidden Hand* was in print well into the twentieth century. In addition, the dramatized version played to crowds in major cities across America. Even in London, which Southworth visited at the time of the initial publication of *The Hidden Hand*, she found Capitola to be the rage; boats and race horses were named after Cap and fashionable women wore "Capitola" hats.
>
> By mining the popular mood and presenting an attractive and previously unarticulated alternative for the contemporary representation of women, Southworth inevitably influenced imaginative possibilities for gender definition. As much as if she had been a woman's rights activist, she was therefore influential in changing the possibilities of reality for women. A figment of public as well as private fantasy, Capitola represents a figure emergent in the popular imagination, one that was to eventuate as a component of the American flapper of the 1920s and strongly influence the image of the modern self-sufficient woman. (xl-xli)

Dobson's analysis exemplifies the importance of considering a text within its historical context, illustrating that a very real and dynamic reciprocal relationship

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generations of Hopkins's ancestors; much of the information that Brown provides dramatically revises assumptions that have informed Hopkins scholarship for years.

exists as an exchange or dialogue between a text and its readers. As Jane Tompkins argues in *Sensational Designs*, "a novel's impact on the culture at large depends not on its escape from the formulaic and derivative, but on its tapping into a storehouse of commonly held assumptions, reproducing what is already there in a typical and familiar form" (xvi). Calling her work "a redefinition of literature and literary study," Tompkins argues that she "sees literary texts not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order" (xi). Tompkins's historical and cultural approach to literary analysis characterizes and informs my own approach to the popular texts and genres that are the focus of this study.

Story papers or periodicals such as the *Colored American Magazine* (1900-1906), which Hopkins edited for a time and in which she published most of her work, are viscerally connected to the social and cultural milieu from which they are produced and in which they are consumed. As Jim Price and Susan Belasco Smith argue in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, "inexpensive and widely available copies of printed texts profoundly changed the profession of authorship and the nature of readership. The periodical—far more than the book—was a social text, involving complex relationships among writers, readers, editors, publishers, printers and distributors" (3). As publishing technologies and transportation methods developed rapidly around the 1840s, inexpensive, widely available literature proliferated and circulated at an unprecedented extent. The dialogue between reader and writer is particularly dynamic in the case of the serial novel, because a writer can often gauge the responses of their readers to each

installment and take the hopes and expectations of readers into account as they make successive plot developments. As time passes with the writing and publication of each installment, public and private events have the potential to influence the character and content of each installment and the final outcome of the story. As the quote from Price and Smith suggests, the dynamic and complex publication context of periodicals also applies to authorship—those who wrote for and published in a variety of forums may have experienced and conceived a very fluid and multi-faceted notion of the contours and possibilities of "author" as an identity and "authorship" as a career. Critics such as Richard Brodhead, Mary Kelley, Kenneth Price and Susan Belasco Smith, and Nicole Tonkovich all argue that the forum and format of the periodical is key to the development of authorship as an economically viable profession, and that this development is especially strongly linked to the conditions of production and distribution that were unique to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

In fact, women writers often found that serial publication in particular offered distinct economic and practical advantages, including an environment of consistent and steady publication schedules that in turn offered consistent and steady paychecks. This type of deadline-driven labor may have been a practical fit for a woman who was not only writing as a means of earning money, but also laboring to support (in all senses of the word) her children, husband, household, and extended family. The ease with which a skilled writer could turn out plot-driven sensation stories, thanks to the familiar formulas of sensation fiction, gave a multi-tasking woman writer a productive framework within which to produce a copious amount of work in a short amount of time. Many of the texts that I consider were published in story papers, and many of

them were published serially. Louisa May Alcott's sensation stories were published in story papers, particularly in the *Flag of Our Union* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Likewise, after having a few of her early stories published in the abolitionist *National Era*, E.D.E.N. Southworth worked under exclusive contract for decades writing serialized stories for Robert Bonner's very popular and widely circulated story paper, the *New York Ledger*.[19] Although "T.B. Peterson remained Southworth's American book publisher until her death, printing almost all of her books and periodically issuing them in uniform editions of gilt on morocco cloth," (Coultrap-McQuin 57), most of her novels were nonetheless first published serially, and were undeniably shaped by the unique circumstances of writing for a serial format and market. The *Colored American Magazine* at times strove to manipulate the genre types and narrative forms of the popular story papers (see Hopkins's use of the detective story in *Hagar's Daughter*, for example) while also aimed to attain the higher level of cultural respectability associated with the more "highbrow" periodicals such as the *Atlantic Monthly*. Metta Victor's copious popular novels (including her two domestic detective novels) were published in the format of dime novels by Beadle and Adams, while Anna Katharine Green's detective novels were published and marketed as slightly more permanent and respectable hard-bound books, which

[19] Robert Bonner is also well known for securing famous columnist "Fanny Fern" as a regular and exclusive contributor to the *Ledger*.

characterized a sort of literary middle-ground, or what Richard Brodhead calls "the domestic or middlebrow world of letters" (79).[20]

Popular literature has long been thought of as "artistically inferior" (Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 13), which in turn is often meant to suggest that popular literature is somehow less valuable as an object of critical inquiry and less significant as a mode of cultural production. However, Jane Tompkins argues that the boundaries that have been constructed to distinguish between "high" and "low" literature are products of particular historical circumstances and values rather than reflections of unchanging abstract truths. The variety of formats in which texts by Southworth and Green were published, for example, illustrates the constantly shifting nature of literary categories and distinctions, as Tompkins argues (190). Richard Brodhead details the emergence and eventual stratification of a roughly three-tiered literary hierarchy that was worked out throughout the second half of the century:

> By the 1870s the *Atlantic* had established itself as the premier organ of literary high culture in America, projecting a selection of writing organized around high-cultural literary values to an audience centered in the upper social orders . . . It helped institutionalize the nonpopular "high" culture that came to exist "above" the domestic or middlebrow world of letters in the later nineteenth century just as the new story-papers of the 1850s helped organize the "low" one that came to exist "below" it. (79)

The texts in this study generally fall into the "low" culture category, as Brodhead calls it, which typically includes works published in story papers such as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* or in dime novels such as those published by Beadle and

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[20] As Catherine Ross Nickerson explains, "Green's work was published in hardcover by such firms as Putnam's, Bobbs-Merrill, and Dodd, Mead; only two of the novels were issued in serial form in magazines before publication as single volumes" (*Web of Iniquity* 64). These two novels were serialized in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1903 and 1905.

Adams. Yet there is a certain permeability or instability to this "low" culture designation as it applies to the texts in this study; as has been noted, Green's domestic detective novels, the first of which closely resembles Victor's first domestic detective novel, were typically published in a more "genteel" format than the domestic detective dime novels of Victor (Maida 1; Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 64). The ability of a writer and editor such as Pauline Hopkins to contribute to a periodical magazine that strove to emulate the respectability and artistry of the *Atlantic Monthly* while simultaneously drawing on the devices of popular literature also embodies the permeability of boundaries between high and low culture. Hopkins's authorial strategies also provide an example of what Brodhead argues is the ability of writers to make conscious, strategic choices in the modes of authorship they constructed for themselves.

Inheritance in Popular Genres: Modes of Social Critique

Popular literature can be defined in many ways, including great marketplace success, widespread consumption by a mainstream audience, and the application of familiar and accessible formulas and devices. These formulas and devices, often divided and defined as belonging to a variety of genres from melodrama to sensation to gothic, typically sought to enthrall and entertain readers while eliciting heightened responses somewhat disassociated from "reality." However, despite the possibly pejorative connotations of "popular" literature, many critics argue that popular genres in fact have the "potential for social criticism" (Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 16). Representations of inheritance and variations on the inheritance plot are staples of many of these popular genres, including gothic and detective fiction, two genres that

are often cited by critics as being closely related, with detective fiction emerging out of the gothic genre. The gothic and detective genres are characterized by peril, danger, violence, deception, threats to vulnerable women, the dark secrets of families, and the terror of and eventual revelation of the hidden or the unknown.[21] Due to their preoccupations with property—whether it be gloomy, terrifying castles or a stolen will or family jewels—both of these genres are particularly well suited to adaptations of the inheritance plot or to the use of motifs of inheritance as significant plot devices. As Carol Margaret Davidson argues in "A Battle of Wills: Solving *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,"

> From the inception of the gothic in 1764 with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, its driving theme has been inheritance in both its material and its moral dimensions. The succinctly and specifically identified principal message of that novella, articulated by Walpole himself, that "the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the sons to the third and fourth generations" (5), directly connects the notion of sin with the usurpation of "legitimate" power and property. Thus does the gothic, in its engagement with the theme of "contested inheritance," take up the vexed question of the relationship between ethics and economics. The joint issues of inheritance and disinheritance are likewise central to the "female gothic" wherein eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women, legally regarded as the property of their husbands in what is repeatedly intimated to be the peculiar institution of marriage, explore the notion of a

[21] Interestingly, both genres are also subject to much critical debate concerning what truly constitutes and defines "the gothic" genre or "the detective" genre. I explore this issue in Chapter Two as it concerns the early detective novels written by American women in this period, agreeing with Catherine Ross Nickerson's identification of these texts as belonging to the "domestic detective" genre. The link between the American and British gothic traditions, the nature of which is often contested by scholars, is an example of the "haunting" of British influence on representations of inheritance that was discussed earlier in this Introduction. For example, Justin Edwards argues that "[Leslie] Fiedler refuses to recognize that the British gothic tropes of questionable primogeniture, pure bloodlines, and transgressive sexualities return to haunt the American tradition with a vengeance" (xvii).

> familial moral legacy and battle against threats of financial disinheritance. (137-38)[22]

Implicit within Davidson's characterization of the gothic's concern with inheritance are the particular problems of family, genealogy, and identity that also constitute the focus of this study, and which other critics have also identified as defining features of the gothic. Southworth and Alcott both use gothic devices in their sensational narratives as a means to create an aesthetic of danger and perverse manipulation, but also to emphasize the link among gender, power, and property.[23]

Not surprisingly, considering the close ties between the gothic and detective genres, these particular problems are also associated with detective fiction, particularly an early subset of the genre that Catherine Ross Nickerson identifies as domestic detective fiction. Like the gothic, detective fiction registers social anxieties that stem from crime, deviance, and "the policing of cultural norms" (Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 4), and the domestic detective novel in particular accomplishes this by a suggestive blending of the "female gothic" with the conventions of the domestic novel (13-14). As Nickerson argues, "the tradition of deploying the gothic mode as social criticism was continued by the domestic detective novel tradition from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth century" (*Web of Iniquity* 18). The focus on

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[22] Note that Walpole's description of his novella's "message' is strikingly similar to Hawthorne's description of the moral in his *The House of the Seven Gables*, a novel that draws heavily on the gothic tradition in its treatment of the Pyncheon family mansion and the terrible unease and illness that haunt the remaining family members.

[23] In *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, Theresa Goddu argues that "The female gothic . . . has as much to do with economic concerns as with gender . . . the gothic heroine embodies the very thing she is supposed to hide: the marketplace" (95). In making this argument, Goddu considers Alcott's authorial identity and experiences in the marketplace alongside those of Nathaniel Hawthorne, using Alcott's novella "Behind a Mask" as a case in point, a text that is also explored here in Chapter One.

crime and violence within the family circle and the sanctity of the home in these texts provided material that was loaded with provocative implications, and inheritance acts here as not only a formulaic device signaling a piece of genre fiction, but also a repository for a multitude of the anxieties and conflicts that drive the action in the novels. Victor's fiction tends to blend more sensational and gothic devices with detective elements, illustrating the combination of genres that characterize popular fiction in this period, and exemplifying the mixed qualities of the detective novel in this early stage of its development. Green, on the other hand, uses the domestic setting while also approaching the problem of detection from a perspective that is less sensational and more similar to the processes of reasoning that began with Edgar Allan Poe and then were developed by Arthur Conan Doyle.[24] However, although Victor and Green fill in an historically amnesic void between Poe and Doyle, they are still rarely considered in scholarly schemas of the history and development of the detective genre. This may be due in part to the heavily domestic and generically diverse nature of their novels, or to the dominance of the masculinist hardboiled detective tradition, but as I argue in Chapter Two, these qualities actually add to the nuance and significance of both the detective genre in general and nineteenth-century women's writing in particular.

Hopkins also makes use of both gothic and detective devices in *Hagar's Daughter*, which is partially indicative of her efforts to make use of popular formulas

[24] Interestingly, Nickerson cites Alcott's 1865 sensation story "V.V., or Plots and Counterplots" as containing "the first appearance of a detective in American women's letters," gesturing to an even more entangled relationship among the women writers in this study (*Web of Iniquity* 23).

that would be familiar and entertaining to her readers. Critics such as Justin Edwards and Teresa Goddu have argued that race and the history of slavery in the United States haunt both the nation's literature and the nation itself, and is in turn manifested in gothic discourses and narrative devices. Hopkins's use of the gothic in *Hagar's Daughter* is both indicative of her tapping into the language of mainstream or popular literature and representative of the link that both Edwards and Goddu establish between the American gothic and the reality, history, and politics of race and slavery in the United States. At the same time, critics such as Stephen Soitos have made much of the detective elements in this text as an example of an African American writer "using detective fiction to present African American social and political viewpoints and worldviews" (27). In her recent and incredibly thorough biography *Pauline Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution* (2008), Lois Brown also argues that Hopkins's use of the detective genre is evidence of her character as "an avid reader and astute observer of American literary culture," and argues that in addition to functioning as a complex literary and political device, the detective elements in *Hagar's Daughter* served a practical purpose for the *Colored American Magazine*. As Brown argues, "Her ambitious effort of detective fiction also met the demand for serialized fiction and allowed her to alleviate, to some degree, the pressing financial needs of the *Colored American Magazine*" (363). Brown also places *Hagar's Daughter* within the emergence of what she calls "the relatively recent American feminist literary tradition of domestic detective fiction," echoing Catherine Ross Nickerson's work; significantly Brown specifically aligns Hopkins with Victor, Green,

Alcott, and Southworth here, echoing connections that are further expanded on in this study.

While I also agree that Hopkins uses her fiction as a political call to action, my focus on her use of tropes of inheritance in *Hagar's Daughter* draws this argument out into a broader arena than a focus on gothic devices or the detective genre alone would allow here. Brown takes issue with critics who point to "The significant counterplots in *Hagar's Daughter* . . . to suggest that the novel is 'ultimately only partly a detective story' that uses 'detective motifs' " because "Such assertions threaten Hopkins's place in the overwhelmingly white canon of women's domestic detective fiction and the incursions that Hopkins made into the field" (363). However, I would argue that her use of the inheritance plot is not only a much stronger and more significant element of her novel as a whole, but also a more useful means of complicating an even more strongly white- and male-identified tradition of writing due to the adaptability and prominence of the inheritance plot in both the lowbrow and highbrow fiction of her time. While acknowledging the function of the many different popular modes she adapts in her fiction, I focus on Hopkins's positioning of her text within a tradition of African American writing and experience through her use of tropes of inheritance. In turn, I argue that Hopkins's involvement with the racial uplift movement at the turn of the century is reflected in her concern with the temporal and generational implications of inheritance as they illuminate the past and have the power to shape the future. Tropes of inheritance are commonly found in the discourses of race men and women and in the texts of uplift writers, as well as in the traditions of African American slave narratives, autobiographies, and fiction. Indeed, as Gene Andrew Jarrett argues in

"Racial Uplift and the Politics of African American Fiction," racial uplift ideology is characterized in part by a focus on "the historical connection between racial inheritance and financial inheritance" (207), a link that is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

"Highbrow" Versus "Lowbrow": Inheritance As a Shared Language and Common Concern

While the focus of this study is on popular fiction written by American women in the second half of the nineteenth century, it also argues that representations of inheritance are a point of similarity among texts variously identified as "high," "middlebrow," or "low" literature written by both men and women in this period. My goal here is, in part, to help break down the barriers of value and difference that suggest that these types of literature cannot and should not be analyzed alongside one another. As Catherine Ross Nickerson argues in her study of nineteenth-century domestic detective fiction written by women,

> any in-depth study of popular writing requires examination of the relations of "high" and "low" cultural products, because, as the work of several scholars over the last decade has shown, members of the elite and powerful classes consumed many low or popular forms of entertainment with gusto, and high and low genres influenced and shaped each other to a remarkable extent. (*Web of Iniquity* xii)

Likewise, Richard Brodhead's reconstruction of the circumstances of the eventual stratification of "modes of authorship" into a roughly tertiary hierarchy also encourages the reading of a variety of texts and authors alongside one another. As he argues,

> late nineteenth-century literary cultures typically studied in isolation from one another came into existence together, through a unified process of cultural development. . . . at the moment of their joint emergence, writers were not in any necessary way aligned with one or another of these distinct cultures but faced an array of literary possibilities and had several publics and several modes of authorship equally available to them. (80)

Thus, the outlines of a more dynamic field of literary interaction and interchange in this period become apparent, and can be seen to emerge from a brief consideration of some of the most canonical and "highbrow" texts now associated with the second half of the nineteenth century.

For example, Edgar Allan Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," first published in 1839 in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine,* is often cited as an archetypical example of the nineteenth-century American gothic tale. The uncanny connection between the members of the Usher family—particularly Roderick Usher—and the House of Usher (meaning, in this case, the literal house) is one aspect of the gothic nature of this tale. This strange sympathy between person and property, which eventually results in their simultaneous destruction, is linked in part to a dark history of inheritance in the Usher family. "Usher" is marked by a concern with the horrors of devious inheritances, which are manifested in property, physicality, identity, and madness. Not the least of these devious inheritances in the tale is the unbroken lineage of the Usher family, which, "all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words . . . the entire family lay in the direct line of descent" (Poe 318). This is a clear implication of incest, which, according to Hepburn, "becomes the novelistic mark of improper inheritances" (9). The unusual character, even going so far as madness, of the members of the Usher family, and the unusual,

decaying opulence of the Usher house are reflected in and by one another, with the house and the family merging into a single identity:

> It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (Poe 318-19)

There is the suggestion of a critique of aristocratic purity and wealth in the degraded physical and mental states of the Ushers that are a result of the family's inbreeding and thus tightly regulated transmission of inheritance, and by extension in the grotesque ruin and terrifying destruction of the presumably once grand and extravagant family mansion and surrounding estate. Furthermore, the "imprisonment" of Madeline Usher in the family home—taken to the extreme in her live entombment at the hands of her brother—and her final, fatal act of rebellion—clawing her way out of her grave and bringing death to her would-be murderer—can be read to enact the horror of women's position of powerlessness in this patriarchal, aristocratic, and grotesquely degraded system of inheritance. A figure like Southworth's famously feisty Capitola Black in *The Hidden Hand* confronts this problem, exposes the machinery of oppression typically hidden behind the gothic veil of terrors, and constructs possibilities for a form of women's empowerment within this patriarchal system of inheritance.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (one of F.O. Matthiessen's famous five—male—writers of the "American Renaissance") also works with gothic devices that associate

inheritance and property with peril, madness, and disease in his 1851 novel *The House of the Seven Gables*. Many critics have noted the similarities between Hawthorne's description of the House of the Seven Gables and Poe's description of the House of Usher, and often cite Hawthorne and Poe as writers of a more "highbrow" form of the gothic. For example, Hawthorne begins his novel by describing the House, writing that, "The aspect of the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance" (5). Poe also opens his tale with his narrator's first impressions of the House of Usher, as he gazes upon "the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees" (317) in language that echoes his first impression of Roderick: "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous luster of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face" (321). Like the Usher family in Poe's tale, the breakdown of the aristocratic Pyncheon family in Hawthorne's novel is located in many different aspects of the novel and its characters, but is strongly symbolized by the trope of family lineage and the "gothic" decay of the house itself. The suggestion that the Pyncheon family has held so tightly to the purity of its lineage implies that the supposed purity of its bloodline is partially responsible for the mental instability (bordering on insanity) and physical decay of its members, as well as their inability to keep up with the technological and social progress and development of the world outside the confines of their home. This suggests not only an anxiety around

incest, but a more significant undermining of discourses of blood purity. As Holgrave, the daguerreotypist and "wild reformer," tells Phoebe Pyncheon,

> To plant a family! This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors. Human blood, in order to keep its freshness, should run in hidden streams, as the water of an aqueduct is conveyed in subterranean pipes . . . forgive me, Phoebe; but I cannot think of you as one of them—in their brief New England pedigree, there has been time enough to infect them all with one kind of lunacy or another! (Hawthorne 132)

Holgrave's ideas of familial regeneration and renewal express a stark contrast to the grip that ancestry and the past have had on the Pyncheon family. Like Pauline Hopkins would do nearly fifty years later in *Hagar's Daughter*, exploring the possible future consequences that may come from each generation's inheritance of the moral misdeeds or material and spiritual sufferings of their ancestors past, Hawthorne uses a strongly generational plotline to plumb the implications of inheritance. In his preface to the novel, Hawthorne informs his reader of what he calls the author's "moral,"

> the truth, namely, that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind—or indeed, any one man—of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms. (3-4)

As Gillian Brown argues, Hawthorne's text is framed by an inheritance plot, and like the texts explored in this study, inheritance is represented here as "an endowment both economic and moral" ("Hawthorne" 107). Despite the few similarities between Poe's tale and Hawthorne's novel, Brown's argument that "woman's beneficial influence on

inheritance [in *Seven Gables*] removes heirs and heiresses from the Gothic scenarios of imperilment by their property" (108) offers a more fully realized vision of the imperilment and possible retribution of a female character like Madeline Usher. Brown goes on to argue that

> For Hawthorne, inheritance seems in its ill effects to produce conditions resembling female vulnerability to male will; conversely, property also appears decontaminated of this potential by female influence like Phoebe's. While his alliance of woman with property does not necessarily bespeak an endorsement of women's property rights, Hawthorne's reversal of the horrific plot of inheritance through the beneficial plot of domesticity attributes to woman the symbolic function of redeeming property, removing its affiliations with the past so that property can be safely heritable, and so that women as well as men can securely inherit it. (110)

In this perspective, only the democratic goodness of a true woman, married to the democratic self-made man, can end the destructive lineage of elitism, greed, and deception of the elitist aristocracy that has heretofore defined the "purity" of the Pyncheon family line. The character of Holgrave, the mysterious daguerreotypist and practitioner of mesmerism, is arguably representative of the trope of the self-made democratic man.[25] Phoebe, the country cousin and domestic goddess, literally

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[25] Interestingly, as a counter to Roderick Usher, Hawthorne's character of Holgrave can be read to represent the increasingly popular figure of the "self-made man," an example of a person who is unbeholden to the dictates of inheritance or the past in determining his identity: "Holgrave, as he told Phoebe, somewhat proudly, could not boast of his origin, unless as being exceedingly humble, nor of his education, except that it had been the scantiest possible, and obtained by a few winter-months' attendance at a district-school. Left early to his own guidance, he had begun to be self-dependent while yet a boy; and it was a condition aptly suited to his natural force of will" (Hawthorne 125). We are given a rather unrealistic and slightly bemused, if not slightly mocking, long list of the many different occupations that Holgrave has taken up and abandoned, from country-schoolmaster to political-editor to dentist to public lecturer on Mesmerism, all involving tireless international travels (125-26). Yet in spite of all of his adventures and his many identities, Holgrave argues that he possesses an "essential" and unchanging/able identity that he believes to be all his own: "But what was most remarkable, and perhaps showed a more than common poise in the young man, was the

embodies the possibility of domestic redemption through her sunny disposition, country-style simplicity, purified labor, and charmed knack for domestic chores. Their marriage brings together these tropes and establishes a new lineage of the heteronormative family that will propagate principles of democracy and will bring new life to the nation. However, although it seems that the final union between Holgrave and Phoebe at the novel's end marks the end of the pathology of the aristocratic family and the new beginning of the democratic family, T. Walker Herbert argues in *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family* that this domestic ideology being endorsed by the novel is in fact one that is subtly framed as founded on deception and bound to perpetuate power inequalities and manipulation. As Herbert argues,

> Does one read the anxious rhetoric of Holgrave's lovemaking without being subliminally aware that the judge's bank stock, insurance shares, railroad holdings, and extensive real estate are all riding on the outcome? (102); the social meaning of this marriage between self-made man and domestic angel necessarily includes his assuming control of her property without her understanding of what has taken place. (103)

This suggests that although many read Hawthorne's ending as an optimistic one, casting what Hawthorne had hoped would be a ray of sunshine over an otherwise often gloomy text, the newly democratic, heteronormative family structure may itself

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fact, that, amid all these personal vicissitudes, he had never lost his identity. . . . he had never violated the innermost man, but had carried his conscience along with him" (126). Holgrave's self-possessiveness seems to remove him from the many systems of inheritance that order and dictate the lives of others around him, although by the novel's end he will in fact enter into this system by virtue of his marriage to Phoebe Pyncheon, who brings with her to the marriage access to the inheritance of the Pyncheon estate. This marriage arguably offers a less than satisfying resolution to the "horrific plot of inheritance" that has plagued the novel.

propagate a new system of oppression and a new system of gender roles, lineage, and inheritance that is once again predicated on the transfer of property and, thus, power.

Despite the prominence of inheritance in now-famous and highly regarded texts such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and *The House of the Seven Gables*, the use of inheritance as a plot device is often considered to be a hallmark of "hackneyed" (read: popular, and then read: feminized) fiction, as Richard Adams suggests in his work on Henry James:

> Most readers treat the novel like calisthenics or a children's game, "an exercise in skipping," complains Henry James in "The Art of Fiction." Because they have grown accustomed to eventful narratives, these readers expect a " 'good' " story to go tripping from one dramatic scene to the next. Sated and fatigued with "incident and movement," they want to see "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks." As this list implies, a single device, versatile if hackneyed, is preferred by compliant novelists for its capacity to create narrative drama, moral certainty, and monetary rewards. . . . An amiable literary device, the rescued testament metes out monetary justice to the deserving and a moral comeuppance to the unworthy. (463)

As was noted earlier in this Introduction, inheritance is most commonly troped in literature in its material forms, with money, land, houses, and other forms of real property often distilled into the single object of the patriarch's will. According to James, the use of the "rescued testament" and the rightful transmission of inheritance are devices that should automatically signal a deficiency in both the narrative and the reader (for mindlessly partaking in "an exercise in skipping," rather than, apparently, embarking on a more meaningful or difficult journey in the act of "reading"). The work of the chapters that follow is to play devil's advocate to James's criticism, to question whether these generic, "hackneyed" devices might not have in fact been used

at times to more meaningful ends. Ultimately, this question is answered in the affirmative.

While Henry James criticized mindless and formulaic uses of inheritance or the device of the rescued testament in popular fiction, he does use these plot elements in ways that, despite their heightened aestheticism and intensely wrought construction, are similar to their function in texts such as Alcott's sensation stories, for example. James's 1881 novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (first published serially in *Macmillan's Magazine* from 1880-81) uses inheritance as a means of meditating on the consequences of wealth and social positioning on individual freedom, identity, and marriage—particularly as they affect women. As in all of the primary texts considered in this study, the influence of gender and class on opportunity and power are especially important, and the consequences of inheritance have the ability to be either liberating or devastating. The tragedy of Isabel Archer's "ruined" life is set into motion by her unexpected inheritance of part of her uncle's fortune (a sort of social experiment in fact orchestrated by her well-intentioned if somewhat reckless cousin), an event that offers her the means and entitlement to experience the larger life that she desires. Soon after learning of her inheritance of seventy thousand pounds, "She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty" (James 238). As Isabel's aunt, Mrs. Touchett, explains to her,

> Now, of course, you're completely your own mistress and are as free as the bird on the bough. I don't mean you were not so before, but you're at present on a different footing—property erects a kind of barrier. You can do a great many things if you're rich which would be severely criticized if you were poor. You can go and come, you can travel alone, you can have your own establishment. (234)

However, Isabel's new identity as not only an intelligent, beautiful, and engaging unmarried young woman, but also a wealthy unmarried young woman, also places her in a position of vulnerability and possible ruin. Despite her initial illusions to the contrary, Isabel's marriage is eventually revealed as not only a loveless one, but a hateful one—a mercenary marriage made not on behalf of the wife in this case, but the husband. As Isabel comes to realize that her marriage has in fact been carefully orchestrated by Madame Merle—contrary to Isabel's conviction that she has married as the exemplar of sorts of her power to make decisions motivated by nothing but her own conscious choice—she also realizes that it was that gift of her uncle's inheritance that effectively, as Madame Merle cruelly reveals to her, " 'imparted to you that extra luster which was required to make you a brilliant match' " (580). The bitter irony of the novel is that rather than being in fact a "brilliant match," Isabel's marriage has been the cause of her deep and inescapable unhappiness; rather than being the conduit to her freedom, Isabel's inherited wealth has locked her in a "cage" (358). Similar to the treatments of class, gender, and economics in the renderings of inheritance in the texts explored in this study, this motif in James's novel is the ruthless instigator of conflict and power struggles, and is a deeply conflicted avenue to success, happiness, or stability.

Also similar to the texts in this study, *The Portrait of a Lady* is permeated by the world of materiality and "domestic" spaces. The realist novels of the so-called Gilded Age often represent a highly wrought world of opulence and aristocratic exclusivity—including those who are not part of, and often long to obtain entrée into, this world. As Cuddy and Roche argue, "The confrontations between inherited wealth—with the putatively superior qualities inherent in that birth—and the newly-emerging middle class, and between the middle and lower classes permeate the writing of realist writers like Henry James and William Dean Howells" (23). Isabel's strong attraction to material objects points to their value as tangible representations of a family's lineage, to be passed down through the generations as a means of signifying a family's ideological stability and social significance: "She envied the security of valuable 'pieces' which change by no hair's breadth, only grow in value, while their owners lose inch by inch youth, happiness, beauty" (James 590). In Isabel's worldview, while human physicality and mutability make people fallible, objects, on the other hand, are imbued with the power to remain fixed, and thus transcend imperfection and time. At one point, inspired by the somewhat imposing and frigid antiquity of the Osmond's old Italian dwelling, the failed suitor of Isabel's stepdaughter momentarily imagines a scenario straight from the pages of popular gothic fiction (of the feminized type typically associated with women writers):[26]

[26] See Anna Sonser, *A Passion for Consumption: The Gothic Novel in America*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green SU Popular P, 2001 for a discussion of the association of women writers with what is typically considered a feminized, popular, inferior form of the gothic (such as that written by Alcott and Harriet Jacobs) versus the highbrow, canonical gothic written by male authors such as Poe, Hawthorne, and James.

> It had local colour [sic] enough, and though he knew less about architecture than about Limoges enamels he could see that the proportions of the windows and even the details of the cornice had quite the grand air. But Rosier was haunted by the conviction that at picturesque periods young girls had been shut up there to keep them from their true loves, and then, under the threat of being thrown in to convents, had been forced into unholy marriages. (382)

Despite the subtle, amused affectation of this statement, even when read in the context of a somewhat tongue-in-cheek depiction of Rosier's tightly wound and emotionally strained disposition as an unrequited suitor, disdained for his genteel "poverty" by his lover's father (Isabel's husband, Osmond), there are nonetheless dark truths to be found in Rosier's "haunting" fear. For indeed, Osmond has committed these exact crimes against his young daughter, Pansy, sending her to a convent with the unspoken understanding that she has no power to leave, in order to ensure that she never grows independently-minded enough to accept any marriage other than one that her father strategically constructs for her—that is, for his own benefit, not hers. Thus, while the precise language, psychological complexity, and careful aesthetic construction of *The Portrait of a Lady* differ generically from the dramatic effusions of high-flung popular fiction (see, for example, Alcott's 1863 sensation story "A Whisper in the Dark," which expands upon a somewhat similar plotline to the scenario briefly imagined by Rosier), the circumstances and consequences of women's imperilment in these texts are nonetheless similar.

Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (published serially in the *Century Magazine* between 1893 and 1894, and then in book form in 1894) explores many of the same fallacies and contradictions inherent in the social construction and inheritance of race

as Pauline Hopkins does in *Hagar's Daughter*, although Twain approaches these problems with his own characteristic wit and irony and a fair share of textual mess. As Hopkins does in her serial novel, Twain uses the trope of the stolen inheritance to set his plot into motion, instigating conflict, theft, and murder; also like Hopkins, Twain toys with the detective genre as a means of helping a somewhat complicated plot along. Many critics also read *Pudd'nhead* as a gothic text, making use of "the gothic discourses of ambiguous racial difference, familial bloodlines, primogeniture, class divisions, and personal identity" (Edwards xxvii). In using the generic devices associated with detective fiction and the gothic, Twain—again like Hopkins—goes on to delve much deeper into more theoretical and complicated manifestations of inheritance. Taking the question of "nature versus nurture" as his central theme, Twain ponders the source of identity—is identity inherited, or is it socially constructed? Are morals and principles inherited, or are they taught by the circumstances of an individual's environment? And vice versa—is a lack of morality an inborn, inherited trait, or can an individual be shaped by their environment, as well as determine their own behavior and beliefs? Written as a response to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a Supreme Court case that was ruled on in 1896 but begun in 1892, Twain humorously tears apart the one-drop rule with his heroine Roxy, satirizing artificial constructions of "whiteness" or "blackness" as absurd. However, the text is also complicated by suggestions that the deviousness of its mixed-race protagonist, Thomas à Becket, is somehow connected to his "essential" nature, vacillating between locating his deviousness in his aristocratic upbringing and the black blood in his veins.[27] Similarly,

[27] Thomas à Becket is an example of a popular character type in nineteenth-century

Twain's interest in, and inclusion of, the new technology of fingerprinting, while an apt device in what is arguably a tangentially "detective" novel, circles back around and locates a fixed, readable identity on the body (although not necessarily connected to race *per se*).[28]

The brief analyses of each of these four texts written by canonical, male, mid- to late-nineteenth-century American writers—each one, besides *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, considered among their "great" texts—illustrate that representations of inheritance are widespread throughout the literature of this time. But more than this, they illustrate that representations of inheritance were used by authors of a variety of identities and backgrounds, in a variety of genres and across hierarchies that are not natural, but constructed, and thus natural*ized*. It also suggests that these very different writers located a similar utility and suggestiveness in tropes of inheritance that made them useful for engaging with social concerns and conflicts that seemed important to and representative of their time. The vastly different literary legacies that have been attributed to Poe, Hawthorne, James, and Twain versus Southworth, Alcott, Victor, Green, and Hopkins in the last century are not necessarily indicative of their positions within the literary marketplace, the consciousness of readers, and the cultural currents

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American literature, the degenerate aristocrat. This character type is often used to criticize privilege based on ancestry, title, and inherited wealth, which runs counter to the "American" ideals of individual opportunity and merit. As was discussed earlier in this Introduction, this conflict between aristocracy and democracy (or meritocracy) is also a feature shared by many texts from this period that focus on the problem of inheritance in general.

[28] Like eugenics or theories of criminality, this is another example of the nineteenth-century scientific discourses of race and identity that sought to locate race, character, and identity in biology, bodily markers, or genetic inheritance.

of their own time period. As Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy note in their Introduction to Alcott's novel *The Inheritance*,

> It is estimated that [Alcott] earned approximately $103,375 on her book publications alone during the period 1868 to 1886, not including royalties from European sales. By comparison, Henry James's royalties from book sales, both in America and abroad, amounted to $58,503 during the same eighteen-year period. Herman Melville, on the other hand, earned only $10,444.33 from all book sales during his lifetime. (vii-viii)

Thus, while writers such as James and Melville have long been entrenched in the American literary canon, they were not necessarily "popular" or "successful" in their own times. As I argued earlier, there is much to be learned from the social dynamism of a historical period's popular culture. Perhaps most importantly, the obvious differences of gender and genre implied by the different legacies of these writers support Jane Tompkins's argument that "a literary reputation could never be anything but a political matter. . . . works that have attained the status of classic, and are therefore believed to embody universal values, are in fact embodying only the interests of whatever parties or factions are responsible for maintaining them in their preeminent position" (4). Thus, this dissertation works to add a motif for analysis—representations of inheritance—to criticism that works to rethink and explore more deeply the position and importance of women writers to the history of nineteenth-century American literature.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter Two, "Earning the Family Fortune: E.D.E.N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, and the Gothic Economies of the Inheritance Plot," I explore the

relationship among inheritance, the gendered middle-class family structure, and possibilities for women's access to economic independence. I begin by using the gothicized language and imagery of the Lizzie Borden murder case, which was driven by narratives of inheritance and familial conflict, as a way to establish the violence and horror often associated with the interplay of gender, power, and opportunity within the realm of the family. I then explore a parallel narrative: the relationships of E.D.E.N. Southworth and Louisa May Alcott to gendered structures of power in the marketplace and publishing world, as both women worked as professional writers to support themselves and their families. In my textual analysis, I argue that in her best-selling serial novel, *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth uses the inheritance plot in tandem with a parody of gothic conventions to expose male power, greed, and violence, particularly as they resonate in the practices, institutions, and representatives of the law. Alcott's many sensation stories make significant use of typical gothic devices in their heightened and dramatic exploration of deception, power struggles, and familial and marital relationships in turmoil; many of these sensation stories are also driven by the problem of inheritance. I argue that in Alcott's "conservative" as well as her "subversive" inheritance stories, she exposes the alternative economy perpetuated by the inheritance plot, hidden within the supposedly private confines of the domestic sphere. This is an economy in which women circulate among men as commodities and which exposes the reality of economic need and struggle experienced by many women while denying women their full potential to truly earn their independence.

I explore the inheritance plot as a characteristic device in murder narratives and discourses of crime, particularly in the domestic detective novels of Metta Victor

and Anna Katherine Green (*The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*, respectively), in Chapter Three, "The Threat of the Insider/Outsider: Inheritance and Middle-Class Anxiety in Domestic Detective Fiction." In these texts, inheritance is most often figured in its material form, often narratively distilled into the single, all-important object of the will of a family patriarch. Violent struggles for access to the wealth, security, and power associated with this inheritance drive the conflict in domestic detective fiction. Inheritance is also figured in these texts as physical, hereditary characteristics that are written onto the body and that are used as clues to determine class, ethnicity, and criminality (all of which are intertwined here). I argue that the inheritance plot in these two novels is used to manifest and then displace middle-class anxieties about growing immigrant and working-class populations, as well as burgeoning and encroaching urban spaces, all of which threaten to undermine the fictive distinction between the so-called "public" and "private" spheres that sustain ethnic and classist hierarchies. These texts use working-class Irish characters and the figure of the "social climber" as criminalized suspects to suggest that the eruption of crime within the family circle or the space of the home is linked to a threatening outside figure or "other," rather than a breakdown within the sanctified ideologies of the middle-class family and domestic sphere themselves. Finally, I argue that the inherently conservative nature of the nineteenth-century domestic detective genre, with its reliance on a harmonious final resolution, subsumes the subversive potential of the intersection of representations of inheritance with representations of class conflict.

I explore the inheritance plot as seen through the lens of race in Chapter Four, "Pauline Hopkins: The Problem of Inheritance and Discourses of Racial Uplift," contextualizing Hopkins's literary techniques within discourses of racial uplift and the tradition of early African American novels and slave narratives. I argue that the inheritance plot is a particularly effective device for Hopkins's politics of racial uplift because of its temporal duality—that is, the inheritance plot both looks backward to the past as well as forward to the future, techniques that allow Hopkins to draw attention to the injustices of the past while simultaneously working for future progress in the African American community and the nation. In an exploration of Hopkins's use of the inheritance plot in her serial novel *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*, I argue that Hopkins explores the implications of three main representations of inheritance: material, physical, and metaphorical. My argument concludes that Hopkins privileges the inheritance of upstanding moral characteristics and righteousness instead of the inheritance of material wealth or fixed racial identity, a problem that positions her text well within the period's debates around racial uplift. Hopkins thus argues that only through cultivating and teaching moral goodness in future generations can racism and injustice finally be overcome, establishing the significance of the effects of cultural inheritance on the overall community (as a means of racial uplift) rather than on the individual alone.

Thus, while the authors considered in this study come from diverse backgrounds, wrote across genres, and published in a variety of forums and formats, this exploration of a selection of their texts reveals that these authors nonetheless share a common concern with inheritance as a rich literary motif and a powerful social

construct. The focus of each chapter reveals that inheritance takes on many different forms in these texts, ranging from material manifestations to metaphorical representations; for example, inheritance can variously signify (and be signified by) property, ancestry, family name, blood, genetics, (in)sanity, physicality, race, class, character, traditions, morals, cultural capital, opportunity, and individual, communal, and national identity. Furthermore, and as I note in the Conclusion, inheritance in these texts also gestures to international and transnational identities and connections, a move that greatly expands the scope of inheritance as an historically located discourse and a possible political strategy. Yet in each case, the meaning and significance of inheritance in these texts is connected to real social issues and changes that are unique to the second half of the nineteenth century. Most significantly, inheritance is inextricably connected to the shifting nature and definitions of the family, which is the fundamental link between each chapter's analysis; the gendered hierarchies of power that are traditionally associated with the heteronormative family structure are alternately contested and reinscribed by discourses of inheritance in this period, a dynamic interchange that is also characteristic of the texts in this study.

In fact, E.D.E.N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, Metta Victor, Anna Katharine Green, and Pauline Hopkins experienced a wide range of familial and marital relationships in their own lives, from the contented to the conflicted, from the traditional to the atypical. Their identities as women—particularly situated as they were according to their individual circumstances of race and class—and their subject positions as daughters, wives, mothers, and unmarried women resonate in and complicate their works. Furthermore, as women writing popular fiction and publishing

in the serial marketplace, they took up representations of inheritance in their texts to engage with the economic, generic, and gendered concerns of their labor, commodification, and textual production; they also used representations of inheritance in their texts to reflect and critique the race, class, and gender struggles and inequalities that percolated and often erupted in society around them. This exploration of the significance of representations of inheritance in the works of Southworth, Alcott, Victor, Green, and Hopkins ultimately argues that more than simply writing formulaic stories for fleeting entertainment, these five women writers made significant incursions into the most pressing social problems of their time, and thus made enriching contributions to the growing legacy of nineteenth-century American women writers.

CHAPTER TWO

Earning the Family Fortune: E.D.E.N. Southworth, Louisa May Alcott, and the Gothic Economies of the Inheritance Plot

Prologue: Lizzie's Motive

Q. [District Attorney Hosea Knowlton] Have you any idea how much your father was worth?
A. [Lizzie Borden] No sir.
Q. Have you ever heard him say?
A. No sir.
Q. Have you ever formed any opinion [?]
A. No sir.
Q. Do you know something about his real estate?
A. About what?
Q. His real estate?
A. I know what real estate he owned, part of it; I don't know whether I know it all or not.
……
Q. Did he ever mention the subject of will to you?
A. He did not.
Q. He never told you that he had made a will, or had not?
A. No sir.
Q. Did he have a marriage settlement with your stepmother that you knew of?
A. I never knew of any.
……
Q. Had your stepmother any property?
A. I don't know, only that she had half the house that belonged to her father.
Q. Where was that?
A. On Fourth Street.
Q. Who lives in it?
A. Her half-sister.
Q. Any other property beside that you know of?
A. I don't know.
Q. Did you ever know of any?
A. No sir.
Q. Did you understand that she was worth anything more than that?
A. I never knew.
Q. Did you ever have any trouble with your stepmother?
A. No sir.

Lizzie Borden's inquisition was held by Fall River District Attorney Hosea Knowlton over August 9-11 1892, five days after the murders of her father and stepmother, and resulted in Lizzie's arrest on charges of murder. Borden's inquisition was by turns tedious, contradictory, and contentious. From the beginning of the inquest, the implication of a financial motive for the murders lingered over the bulk of Lizzie's testimony and inflected nearly all of Knowlton's subsequent questions. After quickly dispensing with the basic legal formalities of establishing Borden's name, age, and place of residence, Knowlton launched immediately into a line of questioning that centered around Lizzie's knowledge of her father's financial status at the time of his death. The issues at the heart of these questions are implicitly related to Lizzie's possible motive for murder—her desire to inherit her father's fortune by thwarting an unfavorable will that he may have had and her rumored hatred for her stepmother, who may have in fact been first in line to inherit the bulk of the Borden family fortune. Although we may never know the true extent of Lizzie's knowledge of her father's finances, her answers to Knowlton's questions were certainly evasive and must not have done much to deflect suspicion from her. Throughout the three days of questioning, Knowlton often pressed Lizzie to answer his questions clearly and directly, even seemingly becoming frustrated with her inability or unwillingness to fully and candidly participate in the process. Despite the possible significance of Lizzie's answers and behavior at her inquest, as Paul Dennis Hoffman explains, "The testimony given by Lizzie at the inquest was the only formal statement she ever made about the deaths of Andrew and Abby Borden, and those statements were not allowed

into evidence at her trial" (38-39).[1] Furthermore, although the monetary motive for murder seemed possible and plausible to investigators, attorneys, and commentators, "no one alluded to those intangible things a woman with enough money might buy: independence, self-determination, a larger life" (A. Jones 219). However, those intangible things in fact resonate strongly in the story of Lizzie Borden as well as so many other nineteenth-century women.

For to raise the possibility that Lizzie Borden may have murdered her father and stepmother in order to inherit Andrew Borden's sizeable estate (which had been mostly unavailable to Lizzie because of her father's tight control on his money) necessarily brings into relief the social and material conditions and restrictions that defined the parameters of life for an unmarried, middle-class white woman from the mid- to late nineteenth century. As Ann Jones notes, although by the 1890s much progress had been made in widening the spheres of possibility for women's work and public involvement, the Borden case illustrates that traditional expectations and limitations nonetheless often remained influential when it came to gendered middle-class propriety (211). Although Lizzie's father demanded that his family live well below their means, she was nonetheless defined and identified as a member of Fall River's middle class and came from a family with a long and respectable history in the town, which also meant that Lizzie's own respectability was associated directly with her domestic role as her father's daughter. Certainly the fact that she had yet to marry

[1] Despite the fact that Lizzie's statements from her inquest were not included in her trial, the basic issues that were raised in the District Attorney's questions remained at the heart of the case's trajectory in the courtroom as well as remained present in public discussions of the case, Lizzie's guilt or innocence, and the Borden's private lives. This includes the possible financial motive for the murder and the state of Lizzie and her sister Emma's relationship with their father and stepmother.

by the age of thirty-two (her age at the time of the murders) would have marked her within public perception as a "spinster."[2] Because of her class status, Lizzie's prospects for life outside her father's home were limited to charitable work, women's groups, and church-related activities. Access to money, which would have in turn provided Lizzie with access to the markers and mechanisms of a richer (literally and figuratively) social life, was thus essentially limited to that which her father provided for her—to be a working woman was not an option for a Borden woman. To marry would have transferred her domestic responsibilities, as well as the source of her financial security, from her father to her husband; yet, as Catherine Ross Nickerson argues, Lizzie's circumscribed social universe (a probable consequence of her father's reported miserliness) may have made her marriage prospects somewhat bleak and unlikely:

> As middle-class women, [Lizzie and her sister Emma's] main chance at social standing was married motherhood, but their father's refusal to take his rightful residential place in the stratified society of Fall River, with its attendant refusal to fund the courtship rituals of dinner parties and dances, must have undermined their marriageability. Had Emma and Lizzie been sons, they would have been able to enter their father's businesses, taking some corner of his empire to make their own fortunes. As it was, the only way their father's money could come to them was in the form of gifts, including the ultimate gift of inheritance. As daughters, they had no way to earn the family money or the freedom it stood for; as the daughters of a miser, they could not enjoy the wealth that he had accrued. ("Deftness of Her Sex" 275)

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[2] According to Mary Kelley, "The spinster was a forlorn, alternately ignored and disparaged figure in a society that was at a loss as to how to deal with her except to tuck her away in the home of her parents or siblings" (*Private Woman* 34). Louisa May Alcott's resolute commitment to and embrace of her own spinsterhood, discussed later in this chapter, complicates this typical characterization of the spinster figure. The star of Anna Katharine Green's novel *That Affair Next Door*, the famous spinster detective Mrs. Butterworth, also further complicates the typical spinster figure.

Nickerson thus draws attention to the connection between the gendered roles of the middle-class family structure and access to economic independence. This is a connection whose consequences for women were influenced both by the immediate context and character of their own family relationships as well as a broader system of social and legal requirements that held the ultimate power to define the quality and possibilities of women's lives. It is also significant that freedom for many women was often articulated in terms of access to money—whether as a product of their own work or through "the ultimate gift of inheritance" (Nickerson, "Deftness of Her Sex" 275).

Lizzie Borden lives on in the popular imagination as one as one of the most notoriously problematic heiresses of her time, and she is emblematic of a widespread, deeply rooted cultural narrative: in aligning women's struggles for independence and financial security with the gendered expectations and distribution of power within the family structure, the sensationalized story of the Borden murders draws on and continues a long tradition of the connection between inheritance (representative of economic power, protection, and independence) and deception, crime, and violence.[3] In popular constructions of Lizzie's guilt, which was never in fact proven, the Borden family inheritance functions as the most powerful symbol of gendered power struggles within the domestic sphere because it is typically deemed the most logical explanation for a crisis that otherwise seems inexplicable. By virtue of legal precedent and social

[3] Incidents of crime or violence referred to here in association with access to inheritance are both actual and ideological. This study is concerned with the moments in which and methods by which the actual and ideological inextricably inform one another and become blurred in popular cultural narratives (such as the "legend" of Lizzie Borden) and popular fiction (such as Pauline Hopkins's short story "Talma Gordon," which draws on the story of the Borden murders and was published in the *Colored American Magazine* in 1900.)

construct, the channels through which a woman in the nineteenth century stood capable of inheriting property of any kind were much more complicated than they would be for her male counterpart, and her opportunities for doing so were much more rare. As Joyce Warren explains, "legal constraints prevented married women from owning property, making legal contracts, or appearing as independent litigants in court. Moreover, legal restrictions on a widow's inheritance, combined with the cultural predisposition of fathers to leave their money to sons rather than to daughters, gave widowed and single women little or no capital" (13-14).[4] Thus, the inheritance plot in this period was adapted to and functioned within a cultural and legal milieu that was rife with conflict and struggle, making it a particularly apt device for mirroring or critiquing broader social and gender issues.

As it was retold in local and national newspapers and in popular folklore, the story of the Borden murders easily took on many of the characteristic elements of popular sensation stories.[5] The story particularly resonates with the conventions of the gothic, with one of the genre's familiar tropes being the unprotected, vulnerable

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[4] The following is one of the examples that Warren gives of the ways that the law functioned to "defin[e] women as dependent" in particular regards to inheritance: "when a woman's husband died, she could not gain full rights to the property he owned—not even to the house in which she lived. She inherited only one-third of it, and her children inherited the remainder in equal parts. If one of her adult children wanted his inheritance immediately, he could . . . force the sale of the property, dispossessing his mother and sometimes even minor children who were still at home" (46).

[5] See the Introduction for further discussion of the interplay among newspapers, periodical literature, and popular genres. Lisa Duggan also discusses the connection between the rise in newspaper reporting and circulation in the late nineteenth century and the culture of sensation and scandal in *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. For further discussion of the function of domestic space in narratives of crime and deception within the family, see Chapter Two's discussion of the domestic detective fiction of Anna Katherine Green and Metta Victoria Fuller Victor.

female threatened by seemingly inexplicable or supernatural forces (though often revealed to be patriarchal in origin) within a perversely inverted and frightening domestic sphere. As Kate Ellis explains, "The strand of popular culture we call the Gothic novel can be distinguished by the presence of houses in which people are locked in and locked out. They are concerned with violence done to familial bonds that is frequently directed against women" (3). This is exemplified nicely by the resolutely un-modern Borden family home (it lacked running water upstairs, and did not have a toilet, electric lights, or gas from the city lines), which stood in many ways as the physical embodiment of the family's values and inner conflicts. In popular narratives of the Borden story, the dark inversion of the domestic sphere that frames the Borden home as a site of hidden horrors functions as the typical gothic element that Ellis describes: its locked doors between rooms silently enacting family members' estrangement and dislike of one another; its narrow frame literally and figuratively confining the household's unmarried women to suffocating interior spaces and the limiting horizons of daily domestic life; and the lure of the family's inheritance offering the vulnerable female her only possibility of escape and protection, yet forever out of reach or undermined by the evil intent or villainous designs of others.

These familiar gothic tropes, and the use of the inheritance plot, take on a new significance when read in sensational works written by women for popular periodicals. As Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith argue, "The periodical—far more than the book—was a social text, involving complex relationships among writers, readers, editors, publishers, printers, and distributors" (3). Thus, when interpreting tropes of inheritance in periodical texts as they intersect with gender, genre, and authorship, a

number of problems are brought into relief. These include questions of guardianship and access to domestic, familial, economic, and social power, which can also be articulated within a broader thematic framework that brings into conversation the negotiation of economic power; the exercise of contracts (both economic and marital); positions of power and vulnerability; and gender norms and social and economic possibilities.[6] In these stories, those females who are unprotected must find access to all of these things through marriage and entitlement to property and inheritance, and are threatened by various forces; these threats are typically motivated by greed, jealousy, forbidden or unconventional passion, and the abuse of power. The gothic trope of the unprotected female in these stories is often rendered vulnerable because she is an orphan or divorced or abandoned woman, somehow single and alone and without the benefit of family stability and name and guaranteed access to economic and social stability.

Significantly, women writers had to negotiate similar threats in the form of editors, reviewers, critics, and the reading public. Yet they had to negotiate economic contracts not just in the form of marriage but in the form of business agreements with editors and publishers, as well as in dealings with their own copyrights. E.D.E.N. Southworth and Louisa May Alcott, like so many other women of their time, found themselves in similar straits as the heroines in the gothic stories that they wrote—struggling without the aid of family stability and, consequently, without access to

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[6] Recent work on the intersection between law and literature by scholars such as Joyce Warren and Melissa Homestead illustrates the critical possibilities that such thematic connections suggest. See Joyce Warren, *Women, Money, and the Law*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2005 and Melissa J. Homestead, *American Women Authors and Literary Property, 1822-1869*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

economic stability. However, as women who had no family inheritance to hope, wait, or fight (or kill) for, professional women writers such as Southworth and Alcott had to turn to forms of self-supporting work in order to earn their own fortunes. Southworth achieved a successful writing career and maintained a comfortable acceptance with her identity as a professional woman writing popular stories in part by occupying traditional gender roles and using them to her benefit, while also encouraging a gendered relationship with her "gentleman publisher," which she herself described in terms that echoed a marriage.[7] As women writers producing popular literature for the serial marketplace, Southworth and Alcott's creative production and writing abilities are strongly associated with the features of property and commodities that could be exchanged for much-needed monetary compensation.

The vulnerability of women under this kind of patriarchal economy becomes apparent, and is written into Southworth and Alcott's own experiences as professional women writers as well as into the stories that they wrote and turned into commodities to support themselves as the men in their lives were unable to do. Both Southworth and Alcott wrote for economic reasons, to make enough money to support themselves and to take care of their families. Although they came to occupy positions of economic power through the success of their work, Southworth and Alcott nonetheless remained vulnerable in particular ways because of their gendered positions as women. The money that Southworth earned from writing became for a number of years a source of vulnerability in her life as her deadbeat husband, who had deserted her, applied again

[7] As Susan Coultrap-McQuin notes, "the author even promised, echoing a marriage ceremony, to 'write and *write well* for the Ledger [sic] as long as we both live" (72).

and again to receive the rights and royalties from her copyrights. In Alcott's case, this fortune was used to support her family and became the inheritance that she herself passed down to her own heirs.

While Alcott and Southworth earned their freedom and independence through their work as professional writers, their popular stories that are examined in this chapter focus not on heroines who work for money and freedom, but on the problem of inheritance in determining and complicating the heroines' access to money and freedom instead. In doing so, they employ formulaic plot elements of popular fiction in ways that can actually be read to undermine patriarchal power structures and critique gender inequality. In her serial novel *The Hidden Hand*, published serially three times in the *New York Ledger* in 1859, 1868, and 1883, and then in its first book edition in 1888 (and often claimed to be the most popular novel of the nineteenth century), Southworth uses the inheritance plot in tandem with the gothic to expose male power, greed, and violence, particularly as they resonate in the practices, institutions, and representatives of the law. Alcott's rendering of the inheritance plot in the modes favored by the popular serial market remains in constant tension and contradiction throughout her sensation stories, a possible consequence of her deep identification with work as a core value of the economically independent woman. The plots of Alcott's inheritance stories all argue in their own ways that the transfer of and entitlement to inheritance functions as an alternative economy that maintains women as subordinate to the structures of power that demand their exclusion from legitimate participation in the market economy and their circulation among men as their guardians and determiners of their destinies. In reading the works and careers of

Southworth and Alcott together, we can see two professional women writers, who were contemporaries, dealing with many similar issues in their personal lives, careers, and creative production, yet reacting to and framing them in very different ways. As Lizzie Borden would do so expertly during her trial in 1892, Southworth and Alcott learned, over the courses of their careers, to negotiate the gendered institutions of the family, the legal system, and the marketplace in order to protect and provide a better life for themselves. These struggles resonate in and are articulated through their unique renderings of the inheritance plot.

Informing Inheritance: Gender, Authorship, and Literary Property

In what can be seen as a natural extension of the conditions and conflicts in their own lives, Southworth's serial novel *The Hidden Hand* and Alcott's serial sensation stories make significant use of the inheritance plot as a central device. Both women use the trope of inheritance to articulate the tensions and conflicts inherent in the intersection between the gendered family structure and the lack of self-supporting economic opportunities available to women. The problem of inheritance in the works of Southworth and Alcott takes on a different significance when read in the context of each woman's construction of themselves as a professional woman writer, their relationships to their work, and their places in the literary marketplace. Alcott's thrillers and Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* were published over loosely coinciding decades: Alcott's known thrillers span the years 1863-1870; as has been noted, Southworth's text was serialized three different times, in the years 1859, 1868, and 1883, before its first book edition was published in 1888. Evidence shows that Alcott

was well aware of Southworth's character as an author and the types of texts that she was famous for writing: as Richard Brodhead notes, Alcott makes a thinly veiled reference to Southworth in the section of *Little Women* where Jo is involved in writing her own sensation stories. As she tests the waters of the sensation story publishing market, Jo reflects on the career of "Mrs. S.L.A.N.G. Northbury, Alcott's rendition of the staple producer for the *New York Ledger*, Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, [who] is known to 'make a good living out of such stories' " (Brodhead 99). Many critics speculate that Alcott chose to write her sensation stories either anonymously or pseudonymously because she was uncomfortable with the content of her stories and/or the reputations of the publications that ran them. Yet she was also aware of Southworth as an example of a professional woman writer who wrote similar types of stories with great success and without necessarily bringing shame upon herself as a middle-class woman. It is possible that Southworth was able to accept this role because she so deeply identified with her publisher, Robert Bonner, and thus experienced her work as an author within the framework of a gendered family relationship.[8] Despite Southworth's combination of fame, success, and continued respectability, Alcott nonetheless must have envisioned her own relationship to these sensation stories, her career as a writer, and her identity as a woman much differently, as evidenced by her refusal to allow her publishers to attach her name to her sensation

[8] For more on the history and character of Southworth's relationship with Bonner, see Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.

stories although she knew she would be able to earn more money from them that way.[9] For a writer who was so strongly motivated by economic need, this choice is significant in its conscious intentionality.

Women writers like Southworth and Alcott found themselves negotiating the often conflicting needs of finding support, respectability, and protection while exercising individuality, independence, and unconventional gender roles all at the same time. [10] Southworth was able to publicly and personally balance her writing of sensation stories with her moral convictions and "fairly conventional feminine values" (Coultrap-McQuin 63). Alcott found the balance between economic stability and middle-class respectability publicly in the publication and wild popularity of *Little Women*, and privately in the economic stability her anonymous and pseudonymous sensation stories provided her early in her career.[11] The lives and achievements of Southworth and Alcott both complicate scenarios such as that posed by Catherine

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[9] As is discussed more thoroughly in the Introduction, serial publication was an attractive means of work for many professional writers thanks to the regular publication and payment schedules it offered, as well as the established structures that formula fiction provided a writer to work within.

[10] This problem in fact sets the stage for a series of comical yet bitingly revealing scenes early in Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*. The story's heroine, the young Capitola Black, is taken in by the New York City police for committing the crime of cross-dressing, which she did out of desperation and common sense. Cap knew that taking on the identity of a man would enable her to have access to money-making and self-sustaining activities that would enable her to provide for and protect herself. And yet this behavior is marked as deviant and socially unacceptable—to the extent that it is labeled criminal. Thus, Southworth simultaneously comments on the lack of opportunities for women because of gender biases and the cultural stigmas and punishment that women risk should they attempt to provide for themselves by subverting traditional gender roles.

[11] As Alcott's personal letters and journals show, the early publishing successes of her thrillers, and the economic rewards that they offered, helped encourage her to pursue writing as a lifelong career, even though her later works paid her exponentially more in profits and she eventually abandoned the sensational style.

Ross Nickerson when discussing the limited possibilities available to middle-class women such as Lizzie Borden; they far exceeded the expectation that their "main chance at social standing was married motherhood" ("Deftness of Her Sex" 275). While they both found themselves to be struggling through poverty and the difficulties of finding suitable work, they were also able to maintain their genteel identities. Alcott embraced her identity as an unmarried woman early on; her resolute commitment to and embrace of her own spinsterhood complicates the typical characterization of the spinster figure. As she declares at twenty-seven years old, soon after her older sister Anna's wedding, "Saw [Anna] in her nest, where she and her mate live like a pair of turtle doves. Very sweet and pretty, but I'd rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe" (Myerson, *Journals* 99). Her involvement in many social movements (such as abolition and women's rights) and with many respected and well-known philosophers, writers, reformers, and activists afforded Alcott her own social standing in her native Massachusetts; like Southworth's international fame following the initial serialization of *The Hidden Hand*, Alcott also gained a significant measure of celebrity with the success of *Little Women*.

E.D.E.N. Southworth's experiences as a woman writer have been well documented by literary critics such as Joann Dobson, Mary Kelley, and Susan Coultrap-McQuin. Although Southworth was born into a fairly financially stable family, the death of her father soon changed their circumstances forever. As Dobson explains, "Although her mother's family had been wealthy and her father seemed to have had quite a profitable business at one time, Emma was initiated by his death into the rigors of financial hardship that would plague her for many years. The family of

women—the young mother, the grandmother, and the two girls—were left unsupported in an era that offered no employment for middle-class women" (xv). Thus, despite her class status, at a young age Southworth was initiated into the world of need and work. As a grown woman, the fruits of her labor as a successful writer were eventually turned into economically valuable property to be sought after by her deadbeat husband in the form of her copyrights. Many critics have particularly noted the character of Southworth's relationship with her publisher Robert Bonner and the strong influence he had on her life both professionally and personally:

> Southworth seems to have found her relationship with Bonner especially satisfying because it replicated in certain ways the attitudes and behaviors she thought were appropriate for honorable relationships between men and women. In a number of ways, Bonner's generosity as a publisher and friend placed him in a "male" role in her family's life. (Coultrap-McQuin 71)

This relationship exemplifies Southworth's willingness to negotiate and manage her identity as a professional woman within the gendered structures of the patriarchal family. Likewise, in *The Hidden Hand*, she does not necessarily undermine or do away with this type of family structure, but rather denounces injustices committed against women by valorizing a unique form of womanhood that combines both female independence and assertiveness with a female-centered sense of moral rightness and superiority.[12]

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[12] Susan Coultrap-McQuin's reading of Southworth's character and career further supports these claims; as she explains, "Just as Southworth felt her financial motives were compatible with her feminine views, she claimed that she wrote to please others as well as to promote moral good—goals that were also consistent with her views of herself and her womanhood. . . . in her novels, right always triumphed over wrong" (60).

Alcott, on the other hand, turned typical nineteenth-century gender roles all around and upside down in order to gain economic independence for herself and her family, although she never truly existed independent of her family and their needs and relationships. Her earnings from constant, "taxing," lifelong literary output were used to support her family throughout her life, eventually transforming her into what Madeline Stern calls the Alcott's "paterfamilias," in effect casting her as the more typically "male" head of the household.[13] Her role in the Alcott family was unusually fluid; Louisa often took on the role of the head of the household much more distinctly and usefully than her father ever did. A typical entry in Louisa's journal reads, "Mother busy with boarders and sewing. Father doing as well as a philosopher can in a money loving world" (Myerson, *Journals* 71); twelve years later, she writes: "Soon fell to work on some stories for things were, as I expected, behind hand when the money-maker was away" (152). Alcott was a woman driven by many things: her strong emotions and moods; her conflicted desire to both fulfill an expectation of selflessness and moral goodness while also being strongly influenced by her own temper and moodiness; her love for and attachment to her family; her urges to vent her emotions and passions in creative outlets and activity; and her determination to support her family economically. These motivations would stay with her to varying degrees throughout her life, with her role as the Alcott family breadwinner becoming more and more pronounced as she aged. Significantly, her intellectual property was eventually designated as the literal inheritance that she passed down to her family

[13] In her journals, Alcott also alternately characterized herself later in life as a mother, father, daughter, son, and sister at different times to different people.

upon her death; soon before she died, Alcott legally adopted her adult nephew as her own son so that he could inherit her copyrights and thus insure that he could maintain control of them at her death.[14] Richard Brodhead positions Alcott's drive to work within her cultural context, explaining that as

> A person whose early world was rich in occasions for resentment and despair, Alcott inhabited a High Victorian culture that proposed work as the spiritually privileged therapy for personal unhappiness. Culturally situated as she was, her search for a meaningful life led her to embrace work as the ground for her moral self-validation; and within the little culture of her family this valuing of her work received a further boost. (75)

Thus, Alcott's life experiences forged a powerful connection between economics, work, and the family that was not necessarily predicated on a rigidly gendered family structure.

E.D.E.N. Southworth and *The Hidden Hand*: Gothic Properties and Guardianship

E.D.E.N. Southworth's hugely popular mid-nineteenth century serial story *The Hidden Hand* uses the inheritance plot to parody the law, as embodied in its actual institutions, practitioners, and arbiters, in surprising tandem with the story's munificent and lively use of gothic, romantic, and sentimental devices.[15] The supposed "rationality" of the law may initially seem to work in stark contrast to the fantastical and sensational gothic tradition, yet presumed differences between the two are consistently shown by the text to be false. *The Hidden Hand* both disarms the power

[14] From editor's notes to the *Journals*: "LMA legally adopted John, who changed his name to John Sewall Pratt Alcott, in June 1887 so that he could assume her copyrights. She also gave him and Fred $25,000 apiece" (325).

[15] *The Hidden Hand* embodies "the law" in the form of powerful, male-controlled institutions such as the courts, both civilian and military, and their representatives, including judges, recorders, and justices of the peace, as well as prisons and the police.

of the gothic over the imagination and the female body, revealing the machinations of male power that truly lie behind the veil of gothic mystery and terror, and exposes the fallible nature of this male power through a humorous critique of the legal system's ineffectual and biased arbiters and institutions. The gothic terrors that threaten vulnerable women, the law, and the exercise of male power are exposed as intertwined through the text's use of the inheritance plot in each of its complicated strands. While the text is rife with haunted houses, disguised villains, kidnapped young girls, and spectral madwomen, the psychic power of these traditional gothic devices is consistently undermined by their explanation as products of male greed and violence motivated by the promise of inheritance, the threat of its denial, or its usurpation by a woman. And yet, although the guilty and their crimes are exposed, they are not successfully brought to justice through the available avenues of the constantly present legal system (although such a resolution is attempted time and time again throughout the story). Each time the law is turned to as a mediator or arbiter of justice, it is exposed as bumbling, nonsensical, and useless in protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty. Rather than acting as a counter or resolution to the sensationalized moments of danger in the text, the legal system is shown to be capable (and guilty) of putting women in as much risk of deprivation, isolation, dependence, and misery as literally being locked in an attic by an evil man bent upon dominance and destruction. Southworth's text thus uses popular genres and the socially dynamic text of the serial periodical story to mount a critique of existing and evolving legal practices in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly the increasing power given to judges to make decisions in family matters, and their often deleterious affects on the

lives of women.[16] Ultimately, *The Hidden Hand* calls the claim that "law settles everything" seriously into question.[17]

A number of Southworth's serial novels take up the issue of women's inequality and powerlessness at the hands of a patriarchal legal system, with her stories *Ishmael* (1863-64) and its sequel *Self-Raised* (1863-64) in particular receiving current attention from critics for their detailed and involved legal plots.[18] For example, in her analysis of both *Ishmael* and *Self-Raised*, Linda MacDonald claims that "Southworth encouraged women to familiarize themselves with contemporary legal practice, and her novels provide a laywoman's legal manual. This education was

[16] While some women began to enter legal practice by mid-century, it is important to remember that the legal system, in all of its various manifestations, was nonetheless at this time basically defined and controlled by men—from male police officers to male judges, juries, and legislators. Furthermore, as Joyce Warren argues, "The discourse that most effectively restricted all women, regardless of race or class, was the law, not only the law of racial slavery but also the law with respect to free women" (45). Thus, it is altogether fitting that the law should be the subject of women's works that seek to critique the very restriction of women.

[17] This quote is taken from a moment in the story after Capitola's honor and chastity have been publicly, yet falsely, called into question by the villain Craven Le Noir. Despite her pleading for protection and retribution, Capitola's "cousin" refuses to call Le Noir out or to take any immediate, heroic action in the romantic tradition. Rather, he assures her (quite lazily), " 'dueling is obsolete; scenes are passé; law settles everything' " (364). Yet this claim—made, significantly, by a man—reads as ironic and empty in light of what Capitola has to go through in order to refute Le Noir's claims and regain her dignity. The law in fact does nothing to help her in this case.

[18] The drama in Southworth's 1863 novel *The Fatal Marriage* also turns in important respects on the power of the law to define and regulate marriage, divorce, and crime. Women in this novel are often depicted as consulting legal texts and documents in order to educate themselves regarding their subject status and their options for justice and retribution. The legally produced object of the marriage certificate also plays a significant role in the text in these regards.

necessary if women were to combat legal injustice" (121).[19] Interestingly, Southworth takes on the same issues of gender and inequality four years earlier in *The Hidden Hand*, including the criticism of the legal system's treatment of women and family-related issues, but with a much different application of genre. She also draws the legal system in much less detail here than in *Ishmael* and *Self-Raised*—this text can hardly be described as "a laywoman's legal manual"—but she nonetheless manages to foreground it as a central force in determining the identities and destinies of women. It is in fact Southworth's use of sensational genre devices such as the gothic that draws out her criticism of the legal system in *The Hidden Hand*, making it key to the novel's plot and moral lessons. At a key moment in the story, in which an orphaned girl will be placed in the hands of a wicked guardian thanks to the misguided and seemingly disinterested decision of a judge, Southworth's own authorial voice interjects, revealing that her tactics in this story will be much different from those that she will use four years later in *Ishmael*, for example. Rather than provide her readers with "a laywoman's legal manual," Southworth instead assures her reader that all of those legal details will be left out of this particular story when she writes, "And now, reader, I will not trouble you with a detailed account of this trial" (252). This assurance, however, is deceiving, as Southworth not only proceeds to sketch the courtroom scene in enough detail to get her point across, but actually makes the details of the trial very significant to the plot although she makes it seem as if they are not. As Laura

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[19] Also see Laura Korobkin, *Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998 and Catherine Ross Nickerson's chapter " 'The Eye of Suspicion': The Erotics of Detection in *The Dead Letter*" in *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 29-46.

Korobkin claims, by the time *The Hidden Hand* was written Southworth in fact possessed a "sophistication about the working of public institutions in general and the narrative structure of trial process in particular" (5), suggesting that her assurance to her readers in this scene is self-consciously ironic as well as playfully deceiving.

Joyce Warren also links another one of Southworth's novels, *The Deserted Wife* (1849), to the law by drawing a connection between its use of realism and the form and function of legal narratives. Warren explores this text in her chapter "Economics and the American Renaissance Woman," a chapter in which she focuses on the "realism" of a group of nineteenth-century women writers' texts as a significant form in relation to their focus on women's economic and legal struggles:

> Like legal narratives, where a lawyer's persuasiveness depends upon his/her ability to situate a client's story within the context of a familiar frame of reference (one that the jury will find "believable"), the fictional texts' verisimilitude depends upon the reader's familiarity with the rhetorical structure used and the situations portrayed. . . . The descriptions in these novels chronicled recognizable events and actions, particularly for women readers. (77)

This is another example of particular types of generic conventions being used to enter into an exploration of the significance of legal constructs and mechanisms in women's lives. And yet, similar to MacDonald's characterization of *Ishmael* and *Self-Raised*, Warren's description of *The Deserted Wife* is much different from most of *The Hidden Hand* in terms of form and genre, as *The Hidden Hand* often employs the fantastic, far-reaching, thrilling conventions of gothic and adventure fiction in tandem with scenes of domestic sentimentalism. Warren's connection between the law and particular types of fiction depends on establishing a similarity between their narrative devices and rhetorical functions; thus, fictional "realism" seems to be a logical fit for

her discussion of the legal system.[20] However, this raises the question of what kind of an effect a story like *The Hidden Hand* may have had on its readers, and how that effect was achieved, if instead of identifying with believable, recognizable, familiar events from everyday life, readers were caught up in a series of unbelievable coincidences, incredible plot twists, and unlikely character feats. More specifically, what happens when this popular literature of sensation plays out many of its most important conflicts and resolutions within shadowy rooms, criminals' hideaways, raging storms, *and* the spaces and discourses of the legal system?

Southworth's treatment of the gothic in *The Hidden Hand* is often in the form of affectionate parody, in which she employs the genre's conventions in a self-consciously heightened, yet often humorous way. In *The Female Gothic*, Juliann Fleenor describes the rich and well-known parody of gothic conventions in Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*; the attention that Fleenor draws to the relationship between parody and the gothic is a useful point of entry for thinking about their role in Southworth's text. As she explains, "Catherine's adolescent confusion illustrates that *Northanger Abbey* must be read within the context of the earlier Gothics. Austen pierces the terror and reveals it to be one caused by human disorder and not the

[20] Laura Korobkin's analysis of *Ishmael* also emphasizes the significance of narrative in the courtroom, and thus also establishes a link between the law and fiction, but rather than realism she focuses on the triumph and emerging centrality of sentimentality over other genres used in legal narratives: "Significantly, Southworth represents Ishmael's courtroom contest as a battle among genres. His victory is the triumph of engaging sentimentality over cold logic, Romantic pathos, and farcical humor, of a fresh new form over genres that have lost their effectiveness" (5-6); "Though it is often associated with female authors and female readers, in the nineteenth century courtroom sentimentality was often the rhetorical tool of choice for male lawyers who, like Southworth's Ishmael, argued their cases to all-male juries and judges. If novelists use sentimentality to elicit deeply emotional, personal responses from readers, lawyers use it to elicit the same kind of responses from jurors" (6).

Supernatural" (5). Fleenor also uses George Levine's definition of the literary parody to expand on the ways that it is particularly suited to the mode of the gothic because of its revelation of the forces that lie behind seemingly supernatural events:

> "The literary parody . . . functions to destroy conceptions of society that imply anything but natural forces, or the forces of specifically human nature, determines the direction of our lives. It also implies that what is mistakenly taken as the intrusion of supernatural or demonic energies into society is really humanly created disorder. The natural state of society is 'ordered'; when it seems disordered, that is the result of personal excess and falseness." (qtd. in Fleenor 5)

This particular definition of the literary parody in its relation to the gothic is especially useful in identifying and reading Southworth's mode of critiquing gender relations, identity, and patriarchal power in *The Hidden Hand*. She uses the text's moments of fear, danger, and suspense to expose the very things that Levine names as "personal excess and falseness"—the greed and selfishness of men and the violence that is perpetrated against women as a result. The wry humor with which Southworth often treats these scenes is at the heart of the text's worldview, as seen through the eyes of its heroine, Capitola Black. Capitola's sense of humor is based on her confidence, but it is also a defense mechanism that she can employ at will to help her fight through difficult circumstances and gain the upper hand over the men who try to dominate, tame, or oppress her. Thus, the result of Southworth's parody of the gothic, as with her use of humor throughout the novel, is to undermine traditional power structures and critique gender inequality.

For example, the obligatory gothic device of the "haunted house" in *The Hidden Hand* is demystified as it "moves" from place to place depending on where the living, breathing woman who is actually locked in the house is moved to in order to

keep her hidden. The imprisoned woman's discovery would not only debunk unfounded fears of a supernatural presence, but would also reveal a litany of very real crimes—including kidnapping, murder, and false imprisonment—and indict the guilty. Thus, it becomes clear to the reader that there really is no "ghost" haunting these houses, it is just Capitola's mother who has been locked in the attic and moves around at night; the traces of light and movement that the townspeople see and attribute to a ghost are in fact the signs of her fleshly existence and traumatic imprisonment. The fact that Capitola's mother is neither a ghost nor a madwoman exemplifies Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's claim that "The distinction between male and female images of imprisonment is—and always has been—a distinction between, on the one hand, that which is both metaphysical and metaphorical, and on the other hand, that which is social and actual" (86); indeed, for women mounting challenges to the imprisoning ideologies of dominant domesticity, the "house" is always a site of horrors.[21] The fate of Capitola's mother teaches the reader that the clues or messages that point to "social and actual" crimes or violence cannot be properly interpreted when the imagination is under the sway of the gothic—she had no hope of rescue as

[21] See for example Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story "The Yellow Wallpaper." The female narrator begins the story by describing the house that she has been confined to in order to receive treatments for her "nervous condition": "It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer. A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!" (1). She also says, "It makes me think of English places that you read about . . . There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years" (2). In self-consciously drawing on the language and imagery of the house in the gothic and romantic traditions, the narrator thus reveals even more starkly the very real implements of imprisonment that have been used to torture her and other strong-willed, creative, independent minded women like her in the name of medical interventions. This is seen most tellingly in her room's barred windows and "rings and things in the walls" that she imagines were there for the sake and playthings of children in earlier times, but are in fact used for much more sinister purposes.

long as the townspeople were too terrified to come close to the "haunted house," and her captors knew this and manipulated this fear to their advantage. Thus, the haunted house is revealed as an artificial construct that has exercised power over the consciousness through the breeding of a fear that consequently discourages any investigation or involvement that might in fact free the imprisoned woman. By eventually denying the oppression of fear, and refusing to play her expected role in a predetermined, patriarchal narrative that obscures the truths of violence and greed, the heretofore submissive character Clara Day empowers herself and is finally able to claim the financial assets and security that are truly hers when she moves back into her family's (supposedly haunted) estate:

> It was reported by numbers of gardeners and farmers, who passed that road on their way to early market, that a perfect witches' sabbath had been held in that empty house all night! That lights had appeared flitting from room to room; that strange, weird faces had looked out from the windows; and wild screams had pierced the air!
>
> The next day when this report reached the ears of Clara, and she was asked by Doctor Williams whether she would not be afraid to live there, she laughed gaily and bade him try her.
>
> Cap who had come over to take leave of Clara, joined her in her merriment, declared that she, for her part, doted on ghosts and that after Herbert Greyson's departure, she should come and visit Clara and help her to entertain the specters. (Southworth 334-35)

By laughing in the face of fear or danger, Clara and Capitola empty the symbolic haunted house of its psychic power, and thus also literally deny the power of men to determine their destinies and control their assets.

This male control over women and their (financial) freedom, however, is not just exercised through manipulations of fear and through artificial constructions of supernatural events—the law itself is also implicated in similar crimes. As our first

introduction to one of the official vessels endowed with the responsibility of transmitting truth in the function of justice, Ira Warfield's ("Old Hurricane") absurd, blustering personality, quick and undiscerning temper, and selfish preoccupations immediately draw the curtain away from a construction of the law as a nebulous, impartial, impersonal, though precise arbiter of justice. Rather, the instability, unpredictability, and fallibility of the law, as embodied in Warfield (Capitola's court-appointed guardian), is established in the first chapter. The story opens with a description of Warfield's home, Hurricane hall, as an old, stone, stately, rugged mansion secluded in the foreboding wilderness, in the midst of a raging storm, a set of details that immediately signal to the reader the familiar mode and milieu of the gothic. Chapter One opens with the summoning of Ira Warfield to the bedside of a dying woman to hear her last confession because he is a Justice of the Peace. Warfield is depicted as a reluctant representative of the law, preferring instead to indulge his tastes for physical comfort by staying home in a warm bed with a stiff drink on this cold and stormy night. Although Warfield angrily insists that nothing shall rouse him from his state of cozy repose within the shelter of his ancestral mansion on this dark, stormy night, his selfish will seems to eventually be overwhelmed by his call to legal duty. Thus, although Warfield himself seems to attempt to make a mockery of his legal obligation or lessen its significance by dismissing his role as Justice of the Peace as so unimportant to him that he is willing to immediately abandon the position, the machinery of the law is nevertheless ostensibly set into motion when Warfield eventually consents to hear this last confession.

The dying woman's confession reveals that there is indeed a living heiress to the vast Le Noir fortune, a girl who had been secreted away in the dark of night immediately after her birth, taken from her mother who had been held captive by her evil brother-in-law who intended to kill her offspring so that he could become the heir to her husband's (his brother's) fortune. Even in her final moments of life, Granny Grewell is extremely concerned that the secret she has been keeping for so many years "Will . . . be legal . . . evidence in a court of law" (16); she holds on to the last breath of life in her body so that she can tell her story to a representative of the law, bravely declaring to Warfield, "I will tell the truth; but it must be in my own way" (17). She ensures that the gothic narrative that she reveals to Warfield of kidnapping, masked criminals, shadowy chambers, and imprisoned mothers is told within the context of legal obligation and protection, with the faith on her part in the ability of the law to provide safety and justice and the hope that her story will be given a sense of legitimacy. The Le Noir fortune includes "land, negroes, coal-mines, iron-foundries, railway shares and bank-stock, of half a million of dollars" (149).[22]

And yet, despite the seriousness of the deathbed confession scene, and Warfield's apparent concern and performance of legal professionalism, the narrator continues to subtly undermine the trustworthiness of Warfield as a serious

[22] This is an oblique reference to the system of slavery that Capitola will in fact inherit, a reality that is pushed far past the margins of the text, possibly as an example of Teresa Goddu's argument that "By passing over what is too dreadful, fiction makes the unreadable readable, paradoxically unveiling slavery yet concealing its worst aspects" (142). However, Paul Christian Jones argues that *The Hidden Hand* is "consistent with Southworth's larger project which hoped to illustrate the dangerous consequences for southern women involved in the slave system, if they did not acknowledge their responsibility for the institution and use their power to bring it to an end" (60). As the newly appointed heiress of the institution of slavery, then, Capitola is given the power to use her next role of responsible rebellion to aid in its abolition.

representative of legal authority and protection by including a barbed aside as he listens to and consoles the dying woman, "'Certainly, my poor soul! Certainly,' said [Warfield], who, by the way, would have said anything to soothe her" (16). While this aside does suggest some semblance of human emotion and sympathy within Warfield, "who in the actual presence of suffering, was not utterly without pity" (17), it also suggests his indifference to the seriousness of his position as Justice of the Peace and the legal requirements that his office holds. It also reinforces the performative aspect of his role, suggesting that there is a subjectivity, artificiality, and transitoriness associated with legal constructs. Indeed, by the end of Granny Grewell's story, in which she has revealed information that proves vital to Warfield's own personal interests, Warfield's focus is entirely on the ways in which this information will be beneficial to himself only, without a thought given to the narrative he has just heard now existing as official evidence and testimony that requires serious and immediate legal action. Upon hearing of Granny Grewell's death hours after she has told him her story, Warfield says to himself, " 'I am not sorry, upon the whole, for now I shall have the game in my own hands! . . . Ah! Gabriel Le Noir! better you had cast yourself down from the highest rock of this range and been dashed to pieces below, than have thus fallen into my power!'" (29). We will find out later that Warfield holds Gabriel Le Noir responsible for the destruction of his marriage to a very young, beautiful girl years ago. Thus, the revelation of Granny Grewell's secret to Warfield, acting as Justice of the Peace, threatens to rekindle an old feud between two men fighting over the body of a woman, driven by pride and a stubborn sense of "honor," rather than bring justice to at least three women who have been violently wronged and abused.

Furthermore, by neglecting to take seriously Granny Grewell's desire that her testimony be used as official evidence in a court of law, Warfield refuses her the possibility of being legitimated as a citizen entitled to equal rights within the network of the legal system. It is made even more clear through the eventual fate of Granny Grewell's deathbed confession, the legality of which was so utterly important to her, that not everyone possesses equal rights as fully constituted citizens and subjects before the law. It will take another twenty-three chapters until Warfield reveals to the reader what became of Granny Grewell's deathbed confession: we learn by Chapter Twenty-Four that Granny Grewell's deposition to Warfield would not have been admissible as evidence in a court of law because she was a mulatto woman (179).

By foregrounding the inheritance plot in *The Hidden Hand*, the practice of appointing guardianship over young orphaned girls is shown to be particularly destructive to women, with the legal power to make significant decisions that will affect the course of her life forever, including her financial future, her marriage, and the contours of her public and private life—even her mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Because a girl's guardian is protected, supported, and encouraged by legal sanction, guardianship is depicted as an even greater threat. These problems are shown in the text to be exacerbated, even driven, by the issues of inheritance that come into play when the basic lines of family transmission are disrupted. In the most basic sense, the characters in *The Hidden Hand* are particularly vulnerable to the interference and decisions of the legal system because they belong to families that are not heteronormatively "complete." That is, one or both of the parents are not present for one reason or another, which immediately challenges the definition of the family unit

as it is defined by the courts. In turn, this challenge entitles the courts to step in and exercise their authority to decide, according to their standards, the course of action to take in cases concerning custody, guardianship, adoption, and inheritance, among other things. This in fact is representative of developing legal practices in the mid- to late nineteenth century. As Michael Grossberg explains, "Legislators created adoption but the courts used their powers of policy making and dispute settlement to actually define the artificial family" (273); "judges would assume part of the paternal responsibility, formerly the province of the father" (284).[23]

Each major character in *The Hidden Hand* is constituted as a subject of the law and must decide how to negotiate the legal power that may be used to decide their destinies—will the law be a source of protection? A threat? Is it something to be respected and submitted to? Or is it something to be questioned and challenged?[24]

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[23] Warfield does go immediately to New York City to find the missing heiress, Capitola, with the intention of bringing her back to Virginia and eventually reinstating her as the true heiress of the Le Noir fortune. This will, at the same time, also expose Gabriel Le Noir for the criminal that he is. However, Warfield must remain secretive about Capitola's true identity, and attempt to keep her under his watchful protection within the confines of his estate, until she is "of legal age," explaining that "I do not wish that she should fall into the hands of her perfidious guardian until I shall be able to bring legal proof of his perfidy" (175).

[24] Of course, Southworth herself and every reader of her text were also constructed as subjects of the law themselves, and thus were faced with these same questions in their own lives, whether they realized it or not. Southworth's experiences with copyright issues certainly gave her some experience with the influence of legislation in her own life; in fact, Melissa Homestead claims in *American Women Authors and Literary Property, 1822-1869* that Southworth even "moved to England in order to secure copyright protection for and financial benefit from the publication of her works there . . . she also moved to England to stave off her husband's claims to any works she wrote and published while residing there" (46). In addition, Southworth has become caught up in a popular legend, which tells of Congress passing "A Bill for the Relief of Emma Southworth" specifically to enable her to divorce her deadbeat husband. Despite the prominence that this story has in most Southworth scholarship, Homestead claims that this "account is, in many respects, pure fabrication" on Southworth's part, and that "Congress never considered or passed this divorce bill" (47-48). Even if this account was indeed fabricated by Southworth, the strategic reconstruction of history on her

These decisions and negotiations are particularly important for the text's female characters because they are rendered particularly vulnerable by virtue of their gender and the legal precedents that use their gender to construct them as dependent. Each female character chooses to deal with the authority of the law and their identity as its subject in different ways. Marah Rocke spurns the legal system and allows herself to fall into poverty and anonymity, Clara Day abandons herself to the changing whims of the law, and Capitola Black takes the law into her own hands and subverts and undermines it, playing it for her own benefit and making it play by her own rules. As Capitola's foil, Clara has been raised to embrace the ideals of piety and submissiveness that have taught her not to resist the course of life as it happens around her. This submissiveness extends to trusting in letting the law run its course, and having faith that that which is morally right will prevail. As a representative of sentimental womanhood, Clara seems like she would be a sympathetic figure to female readers, yet because of her easy acquiescence, as a heroine she pales in comparison to Capitola; Capitola's unique version of womanhood— characterized by bravery and self-empowerment—are to be admired, possibly even desired, by her thrilled reading audience.

Because Clara agrees to submit herself and her future happiness and well-being to the whims of the legal system in deciding who her rightful guardian shall be, she is for a time denied the right to live in her father's home, to have access to economic support, and to have her legitimate engagement recognized, all of which should have

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part nonetheless reveals her to be intimately entangled in legal discourses, whether real or imagined.

been guaranteed by her father's will.[25] Despite her father's concerted efforts to ensure her happiness and protection after his death by verbally amending his will in the presence of two witnesses, as the law requires, his best intentions are easily usurped. This suggests that even the law's own mechanisms are guaranteed to no one and can easily be manipulated or dismissed based upon the unpredictable decision of a judge. Hence, if the legal system cannot be turned to for protection and trusted to recognize truth, then either its values and practices must be changed or alternative modes of rescuing women from unhappy futures must be the only option. Clara and her fiancé, Traverse, are quick to submit to the whims of the law in deciding their fates; they are misguided by the blind faith that they entrust to the system to enact moral justice, and suffer because of this. Even in the face of their defeat, Clara and Traverse refuse to accept that their suffering could have been avoided had the law only been just. As Clara declares to Traverse,

> "The law, you see, has decided against us, dear Traverse! let us bend gracefully to a decree that we cannot annul; it cannot at least, alter our sacred relations, nor can anything on earth shake our steadfast faith in each other; let us take comfort in that, and in the thought that the years will surely roll round at length and bring the time that shall re-unite us." (254-55)

And as for Traverse, "Too well he knew that rage, do violence, or commit extravagances as he might, the law would take its course all the same" (254). Southworth thus emphasizes the unpredictability and the ultimate, unquestionable power of the law while at the same time using Capitola and her eventual husband

[25] Even more than this, Clara is also held captive and nearly forced into marriage by the story's villains in order to gain access to her inheritance.

Herbert Greyson as counterexamples to those—such as Clara and Traverse—who give in and submit without hope.

More than any other character in *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth's unconventional heroine Capitola Black functions as the most admirable example of resistance to the oppression of the legal system. Capitola takes personal responsibility for her own well-being and the well-being of others when no one else seems willing to do so, often putting herself in physical danger in the process. When Capitola turns to the legal system to help her do what she is convinced is morally right, she discovers that her faith in its moral reason and commitment to truth is sadly unfounded. Capitola believes in the possibility of goodness in everyone and hopes for the redemption of all souls, no matter what their crimes. She tries to save Black Donald by circulating "a petition to the Governor for the commutation of Donald Bayne's sentence. And then she rode all over the country to try to get signatures to the document. But all in vain!" (468). In this way, Capitola initially tries in good faith to go through the proper avenues of the legal system, but finds that they are useless for serving her idea of justice and morality. So, once she has exhausted her "legal" options, Capitola does not hesitate to turn to her own ingenuity to administer what she sees as the only possible form of justice even though Warfield, her guardian, exclaims to her, " 'Who are *you*, to turn aside the law?' " (467). Unlike Clara and Traverse, Capitola refuses to accept that she is powerless or inferior in the face of this man-made institution, but instead invests in a higher form of moral justice. She says to Black Donald as she surreptitiously frees him from jail soon before his impending execution:

> "I bring you the means of deliverance and escape. Heaven knows whether I am doing right—for I do not. I know many people would blame me very much, but I hope that he who forgave the thief upon the cross and the sinful woman at his feet, will not condemn me for following his own compassionate example. For Donald, as *I* was the person whom you injured most of all others, so I consider that *I* of all others have the best right to pardon you and set you free. Oh, Donald! use well the life I am bout to give you, else I shall be chargeable with every future sin you commit!" (480)[26]

Thus, Capitola enacts her own form of justice, one based both rationality and compassion, fearlessness and accountability. In doing so, she also exemplifies a new and unusual form of not only justice, but of womanhood.

Ironically, Capitola is often accused throughout the story of being unwomanly, and wishes that she were a man, although her behavior is in reality motivated simply by her desire to protect herself and live an independent life.[27] After she rescues Clara from an unwanted and abusive marriage, Warfield tells her, " 'You deserve to have been a man, Cap! Indeed you do, my girl!' That was his highest style of praise" (319). However, Capitola is less at risk because of her unique version of *womanhood*—her indomitable will and fearlessness enable her to resist oppression and even violence in most instances. She is acutely aware that as an orphaned (unprotected) young woman she is particularly vulnerable in her society, yet she embraces her position both as a woman and as a woman who must learn to protect herself: " 'I happen to be without father or brother to protect me from affront, sir, and my uncle is an invalid veteran

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[26] The subtle parallels drawn between Capitola Black and the novel's most spirited villain, Black Donald (seen even most simply in their similar names), also help to blur the lines of legally and socially constructed definitions of criminality.

[27] These motivations are distilled in the early cross-dressing scenes, in which Capitola wears boys' clothing in order to be able to take on some kind of work so she can make money to feed herself and survive living on the streets.

whom I will not trouble. I am, therefore, under the novel necessity of fighting my own battles" (370). The resolution of *The Hidden Hand* places each heiress in a marriage and in her rightful position as the heiress to her father's estate, but every time Capitola defends herself before she gets to that point, it is unwittingly to protect her fortune. Although she is never aware of what her inheritance truly should be and what her lineage really is, her reward for her bravery, ingenuity, gumption, and self-sufficiency is her entitlement to property and money. Therefore, Capitola's motivation is not mercenary or monetary; rather, she fights to protect her body and her honor out of moral and ethical principles, and her unknowing reward for her unwavering dedication to her principles is the inheritance to a massive fortune and Southern estate.

The trials and rewards in the life of the unconventional heroine Capitola Black can be read as parallel to Southworth's own efforts to legitimize herself as a woman and a woman writer, and to secure her own access to economic security through an embracing and acceptance of her mode of authorship, choices of genre, and relationship with her publisher. In fact, Southworth seems to have transcribed the challenges and triumphs of Capitola over a broad framework of her own personal life, perhaps as a means of presenting to her readers a model of female experience that she considered heroic yet respectable. As a woman who lost the protection and support of her benevolent father at a young age, Southworth learned to successfully negotiate the often ambivalent, and sometimes destructive, whims of the legal system and the marketplace in order to support herself and her children—in effect becoming a "womanly" heroine of her time who maintained her dignity while reaping fame and financial security as her just rewards. From her legal maneuverings to protect her

copyrights and earnings from her greedy estranged husband to her management of her career via a consciously familial relationship with her gentleman publisher, Southworth herself embodied Capitola's unique version of womanhood—a mixture of rationality and morality with fearlessness and accountability.

Louisa May Alcott: Problematic Heiresses and the Alternative Economy of Inheritance

In the collection of Alcott's sensation stories that we have today, there is a cluster of what can be called her "inheritance stories." These particular stories contain many of the key elements that appear in most of her collected sensation stories—orphans, exotic European estates and the concerns of the aristocracy, gothic and sentimental devices, deception, power struggles, and a focus on familial and marital relationships in turmoil—but are significantly driven by the problem of inheritance. As is typical of the inheritance plot in general, this device signifies power, property, legitimacy, and identity in these stories. This cluster of inheritance stories can be broken into two groups: on the one hand, stories in which women commit "crimes" in order to gain access to an inheritance that is not rightfully theirs, and on the other hand, women who have "crimes" committed against them in order to usurp an inheritance that *is* rightfully theirs. The former group of stories includes Alcott's most "subversive" texts, while the latter are notable for their more "conservative" impulses. These more conservative stories are troubled by problematic endings and unfulfilling resolutions because the modes through which the stories' heroines succeed in attaining security and protection often place them in submissive or enslaved positions relative to

the men who end up controlling ("protecting") them and their fortunes. In addition, the more conservative inheritance stories are also problematic in ways that suggest a conflict with Alcott's own values and identity as a working woman: the heroines' passive reliance on the patriarchal practice of inheritance for the transmission of their protection and security, along with the establishment of their identities, denies them, as women, the self-sustaining benefits of "work" and an independent life. In her own life, Alcott openly acknowledged the basic necessity to work that many women confronted in a society that typically did not equate labor with respectable womanhood. Alcott saw economic independence, and self-sufficiency achieved through hard work and determination, as the means for women to obtain the rewards of broader social independence, and the inheritance plot by its very definition labors counter to those possibilities. As Joyce Warren argues, "Implicit in Alcott's focus on the search for power is the realization that the ability to earn money was in itself a source of power for women" (288). Thus, in both her subversive and conservative inheritance stories Alcott exposes the alternative economy perpetuated by the inheritance plot, hidden within the supposedly private confines of the domestic sphere. This is an economy in which women circulate among men as commodities and which exposes the reality of economic need and struggle experienced by many women while denying women their full potential to truly earn their independence.

As Alcott's journals reveal, the influence of work on her life and identity cannot be overestimated; as Sarah Elbert explains, "Alcott chose to be identified as a working woman all her life" (*Race, Sex, and Slavery* xxi). Entries from her journals, spanning several decades, illustrate Alcott's deep association of work with her identity

as well as the spectrum of emotions she experienced when she felt irresistibly compelled to work. For example, she writes: October, 1856: "I was born with a boy's spirit under my bib and tucker. I *can't wait* when I *can work*" (Myerson, *Journals* 79); August, 1866: "Soon fell to work on some stories for things were, as I expected, behind hand when the money-maker was away" (152); January, 1868: "I am in my little room, spending busy, happy days, because I have quiet, freedom, work enough, and strength to do it. . . . My way seems clear for the year if I can only keep well. I want to realize my dream of supporting the family and being perfectly independent. Heavenly hope!" (162). As these few entries suggest, Alcott had a conflicted relationship with work: it both thrilled and satisfied her yet often weighed on her mentally and physically as an inescapable burden because she took on the responsibility of supporting her family from the time that she was young. In fact, Alcott's final journal entries reveal that she almost literally worked herself further and further into illness as her health began to deteriorate late in her life. Alcott's experiences with work also revealed much to her, from a young age, about gender inequality and socially constructed hierarchies of different forms of labor. At the same time, she also quickly learned the skills for recognizing marketplace demands as a realistic and unavoidable facet of her career as an author and manager of her own literary output. The fact that Alcott's earnings from her long and consuming career as an author eventually became the inheritance that she passed on to her male heir subverts traditional structures of power and gender roles in the family, while also retelling the story of the inheritance plot in new terms. The fortune that Alcott passed on to her nephew John Pratt can be traced directly to the labor of a woman whose

commodities circulated in the marketplace, rather than being obscured by the long processes of lineage and descent or anchored within the long-dominant discourse of the patriarchal economy.

Elbert also explains that the processes of and identification with authorship "were increasingly means to self-reliance, a full personhood, and to a social authority usually denied to women. Authors were authorities; readers properly read to learn the right way to live" (*Race, Sex, and Slavery* xxvi). Significantly, these very qualities that Alcott could identify with as a professional woman writer are the same as those that are unavailable or denied to the problematic heiresses in her sensation stories—self-reliance, a full personhood, and social authority. Furthermore, although her more subversive heiresses, those who consciously manipulate and deceive for their own gain, may arguably attain these elusive benefits, they are not won without strings attached. Because of the crimes of masculine power and dominance that enable men to take control over women and their destinies, the ultimate winning of inheritance is never unqualified; women's access to inheritance in Alcott's stories is always surrounded by deception and manipulation—on behalf of both men *and* women—when the conditions of women's lives do not allow for alternative options. This helps to explain the tensions that complicate and unsettle the plots of many of Alcott's inheritance stories, often making them seem contradictory or unsatisfying.[28]

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[28] The complicated nature of many of Alcott's sensational plots is made clear by the necessity of so many critics to devise interpretive strategies by which to reconcile the seemingly contradictory, if not simply conservative, elements of many of her texts when trying to make provocative readings of them. For example, Elizabeth Keyser argues, "I credit Alcott's imagination, if not always her conscious intent, with more ideological consistency and artistic control. She may not have been subversive in [David] Reynolds's sense of deliberately flouting convention or by deliberately planting keys for the decoding of her

Alcott's 1866 serial "Behind a Mask; or, a Woman's Power" is perhaps her most studied, analyzed, and critically acclaimed sensation story. It is most often celebrated for its assertive subversiveness, embodied by its complex, driven, manipulative, and fearless heroine Jean Muir.[29] However, some critics take issue with the story's final resolution, arguing that rather than usurp structures of power and overthrow gender roles, it instead shuts down these possibilities in a deeply conservative final twist.[30] Jean's relationship with the family order is antagonistic and conflicted; it is true that while she throws herself into the manipulation and unraveling of the Coventry family with passion, relish, and highly focused commitment (seemingly encouraged by no small amount of disdain for the family's embodiment of aristocratic ease and stereotypical romantic follies), Jean nonetheless strives to become a part of that family structure. We also learn that she "faithfully perform[s]" the role of loving wife to Sir Coventry in their future years together (415), and that once she secures her marriage she feels "no wish to do mischief, but rather a desire to undo what was already done, and be at peace with all the world" (418). Critics such as

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surface texts. Nevertheless, she does consistently supply the means of dismantling the system of values that her more or less conventional plots, characters, and narrators appear to support" (xv). Keyser also argues that Alcott's texts employ a "hidden language" (4) that the perceptive reader can detect beneath the surface of the text, a language that Keyser typically reads as indicative of Alcott's own quasi-feminism. Lynette Carpenter uses a different metaphor, describing Alcott's story "A Whisper in the Dark" as "a battleground not only for its characters but for its author as well" (31) because of its thematic contradictions.

[29] For an example of this critical perspective that argues for the subversiveness of "Behind a Mask," see Elizabeth Lennox Keyser's " '*The Second Sex*': Behind a Mask or A Woman's Power" in *Whispers in the Dark: The Fiction of Louisa May Alcott*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1993. 46-57.

[30] For an example of this critical perspective that argues for the conservatism of "Behind a Mask," see Christine Butterworth-McDermott, "Behind a Mask of Beauty: Alcott's Beast in Disguise." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 18.1 (2004): 25-48.

Christine Butterworth-McDermott read the story's final marriage resolution as the ultimate conservative ending, arguing that

> What seems to be a happy ending is actually a trap in which Jean loses her "woman's power." Perhaps she gains a greater sense of power through her wealth and position, but this does not seem likely. In fact, the opposite seems true as Jean is actually transformed into the weaker vessel she used as a disguise (43); Because they now know the truth, the Coventrys will be able to command Jean to wear the mask from that moment on. . . . Jean fully embraces her future role as "angel" of Sir John's house. (44)

On the other hand, Jean accomplishes her goal of marrying into a wealthy family with a fine pedigree by consciously manipulating the ideals of femininity and the gendered roles of courtship, throwing stable notions of identity and "true womanhood" into question. She has undermined the stability and exclusivity of the aristocratic family system, and the Coventry family's wealth and name will never be the same. Jean has, through her highly nuanced attention to and understanding of identity, appearance, behavior, and femininity, begun the process of "diluting" and democratizing the highly guarded aristocratic family strain.[31] By co-opting recognizable gender norms, romantic traditions, and marital practices for her own ends, Jean succeeds in subverting the dictates of the aristocratic family hierarchy and its investment in entitlement from within its own structures of behavior and propriety, all of which strongly supports subversive readings of the text.

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[31] As Isabell Klaiber argues, Jean "moves freely between the social ranks of lords and servants—her mobility introduces a democratic alternative into an otherwise rigidly aristocratic society" (221). The displacement of Alcott's story onto an English setting and into an aristocratic family structure is, on one level, a common characteristic of gothic or romance narratives. However, on another level, Alcott's story also thus critiques the economy of inheritance as both outmoded and negatively associated with a tradition that is contrary to the ideals of "American" principles, which have supposedly left these Old World practices behind, and are themselves at risk should they begin to look too much like the darkly troubled scenes of her English and European sensation stories.

However, despite the validity of both of the these readings, it is important to note that Jean's motivation to manipulate is directly linked to the social norms that limit her options and the social and legal practices that maintain access to inheritance as the ultimate source of women's stability and safety. She is motivated by financial need, forced into her desperate situation by the social requirements that make it impossible for a divorced woman of common lineage (and a former actress, no less) to obtain social and financial security. Furthermore, it is important to remember that securing a marriage for the purpose of inheriting wealth and title becomes for Jean a troubled form of work, in which her effort, expertise, commitment, and labor—the hours that she spends strategizing and acting out her various roles among the Coventry family members—will be rewarded with monetary compensation. Numerous times throughout the story, both Jean and the narrator characterize her surreptitious behavior and mercenary goals as a self-conscious form of work that she has undertaken: " 'It will be a good field for me to work in, and the harder the task the better I shall like it'" (367); "Miss Muir quietly ate her breakfast, feeling well satisfied with her hour's work" (371). Although the family order seems to be precariously reinscribed at the story's end, with the plot's tension and disruption culminating in the typical marriage resolution, the fact remains that the wealthy Sir John, patriarch of the Coventry family, has married his heart and his fortune to an aging divorced actress with a questionable past and without the luxury of lineage or fine breeding. Through the legalities of marriage, Jean takes on the Coventry name and will have upset the family's future processes of inheritance and their transmission of the family name. Thus, this story need not be labeled subversive or conservative in order to argue that it registers

legitimate and significant cultural conflicts and questions. Whether the marriage resolution is read as subversive or conservative, it is nonetheless the culmination of a series of circumstances that have given a woman no other options. It is the device of the inheritance, and its reflection of economic tensions and inequalities, that is key throughout the story in allowing the acting out and exposure of gender norms, social constraints, and closed-off, limiting systems of marriage and family.

While Alcott's "Behind a Mask" may arguably be her most written about and analyzed sensation story, it has a counterpart in "The Mysterious Key, and What It Opened" (1867) that does as much to illuminate the significance of gender in relation to problems of economic stability, legitimacy of identity, and the role of inheritance in establishing both. "The Mysterious Key" was published in 1867, less than a year after the pseudonymous publication of "Behind a Mask," and the similarities between many of the stories' passages suggests that the latter may have in many ways influenced the writing of the former. However, unlike the latter, the former was first published under Alcott's own name in Elliott, Thomes, & Talbot's *Ten Cent Novelettes Series of Standard American Authors*, the same publishers responsible for the *Flag of Our Union*, which also published "Behind a Mask" in 1866 under Alcott's pseudonym A.M. Barnard.[32] The gender roles at play in "The Mysterious Key" are the opposite of those in "Behind a Mask," which helps to explain why Alcott may have chosen to

[32] Madeline Stern singles out the *Flag of Our Union* as one of the more "colorful" story papers with which Alcott may have been particularly uncomfortable being associated. She explains that "it was a miscellaneous weekly designed for the home circle, and it specialized in riveting and violent narratives frequently concerned with convicts and opium addicts. Although editor James R. Elliott assured Alcott that it was 'a literary paper that none need to blush for,' she seems to have disagreed, since it was for the *Flag of Our Union* that she adopted her pseudonym of A.M. Barnard" (Introduction xvi).

publish this tale under her own name; that this is an example of one of her more conservative thrillers further supports the argument that Alcott was more comfortable connecting her name as an author to sensational stories that did not overtly challenge social norms or hierarchies of literary propriety. "The Mysterious Key" is included in anthologies and collections of her "thrillers," although when read in tandem with "Behind a Mask," its focus on the heroic male character and his rescue of a pair of heiresses both teetering on the brink of destitution and illegitimacy suggests gender dynamics that are more indicative of upholding dominant hierarchies of power than threatening those values. In the story's final privileging of the bonds and gendered hierarchy of the sentimental family over female entitlement, power, and independence, the economic motives at the heart of the inheritance plot are ultimately obscured.

Many of the elements of Jean Muir's character are mirrored and echoed in "The Mysterious Key's" character of Paul Jex/Paul Talbot, his multiple names reflecting the many identities that he takes on throughout the story, similar to Jean's metaphorical "mask" that she takes off and puts on as she performs her different identities for the Coventry household. Paul is similar to Jean in his pride, his ability to win the affection, respect, and trust of those around him by altering his personality to fit their individual likes and expectations, and his determined deception of a wealthy household with the focused goal of securing their inheritance for a supposedly more needy and "deserving" heiress.[33] However, Paul differs from Jean in his final,

[33] Two moments in each text exemplify the similarities in the characters of Paul and Jean—one in which the unconscious influence of each upon their respective households is described, and another in which the true nature and intentions of each character is revealed when they are left alone: "In a week Paul was a favorite with the household . . . Always

unquestionable ability to transform from willing deceiver to conscience-stricken yet empowered protector-hero by the story's end, which allows him to remain in a position of sentimentalized masculine power in relation to the female characters throughout. Paul's motives to deceive are depicted as purely selfless and noble, although somewhat conflicted: he is driven to do what is "right," to protect his helpless female cousin and provide for her what she has wrongly been denied: a legitimate name and access to her rightful inheritance. Yet Paul is also depicted as unduly influenced, even coerced, by his cousin, as if her influence is manipulative and unnatural to the extent that she is on the verge of being a monstrous woman with the power to "unman" him. The sentimental gender equation is ultimately balanced, however, when the dominant, power-wielding female is herself "unmanned" by sentiment, and she abandons her self-serving (and frankly fairly justified) goals in favor of being welcomed into the family circle. Yet the cost to her identity is great, as by the story's end she is not only physically blind, but metaphorically silenced as well. For in order to be deserving of love, she must renounce all claims to not only her power, but also her true identity and the wealth that should come along with it.

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respectful and obedient, he never forgot his place, yet seemed unconsciously to influence all who approached him, and win the goodwill of everyone" ("Mysterious Key" 496); "For several weeks the most monotonous tranquility seemed to reign at Coventry House . . . The arrival of Miss Muir seemed to produce a change in everyone, though no one could have explained how or why" ("Behind a Mask" 376); "The moment the door closed behind her a total change passed over Paul. He shook his clenched hand after her with a gesture of menace, then tossed up the old book and caught it with an exclamation of delight" ("Mysterious Key" 497); "When alone Miss Muir's conduct was decidedly peculiar. Her first act was to clench her hands and mutter between her teeth, with passionate force, 'I'll not fail again if there is power in a woman's wit and will!' She stood a moment motionless, with an expression of almost fierce disdain on her face, then shook her clenched hand as if menacing some unseen enemy" ("Behind a Mask" 367).

Therefore, all that she ultimately inherits is a position of guaranteed subservience to the sentimental family structure, love bought at the expense of her (demonized) goals and ambitions.

In "The Mysterious Key," there are two potential heiresses in line to inherit their father's fortune. The first is Paul's cousin Helen, who was unknown to her father, the product of a short, secret, tragic marriage while he was living abroad; that she was born from a legitimate marriage means that she is therefore in fact the legitimate heiress of his estate. However, even Helen's father is unaware of her existence until a shadowy figure reveals the secret to him one dark and fateful night; a sudden heart attack soon after spares Helen's father "the sin of suicide" (520) as he reels from the implications of this discovery. Lillian, the second and younger heiress, is the product of her father's second and publicly recognized, socially sanctioned marriage. Because Helen's identity was neither publicly recognized, nor known by even her father, she was raised in poverty as an orphan following the death of her mother, with no hope for a safe and secure future other than the inheritance that no one else knows, or could believe, that she is entitled to. To further compound the suffering and hardship bestowed upon Helen, she is helplessly blind, dependent on the kindness of Paul to help her daily and to help her pursue her rightful fortune and legitimate title.[34] Lillian,

[34] Helen's blindness is significant, however, because rather than establishing her as a sympathetic figure it renders her behavior—which is driven by necessity, self-preservation, and a confident determination—even more "unnatural" and thus not only "unwomanly," but bordering on monstrosity; that is, as a blind girl, she is not entitled to the position of "normalcy" that she seeks, particularly as she is juxtaposed with the more "appealing" character of Lillian, her rival. Rather, her initial refusal to submit to helplessness due to her blindness mirrors her refusal to submit to helplessness due to her illegitimacy and poverty, but this also renders her even more of an outcast. Helen's blindness is "deceptive," veiling her true intentions and thus threatening the reader's ability to identify familiar hierarchies of power

on the other hand, has lived a life of luxury and ease as a privileged aristocratic daughter, and despite her father's untimely death, she has unquestionable options for the future securely located in an eventual good marriage to any number of respectable suitors—in addition to being assuredly supported by her father's estate.

Despite these enormous differences between the two girls' life experiences and destinies, Helen is not constructed as the more sympathetic figure due to her apparently undeserved suffering. Rather, as she doggedly pursues that which is rightfully hers at the expense of the happiness and safety of other women, Helen is increasingly depicted as selfish and misdirected in her aims. Indeed, by the story's end, she has been abandoned by Paul, her only friend and protector, because he can no longer stand the "cruelty" of her woman's determination. She is initially unafraid to declare her entitlement to power, telling Paul, " 'I am tired of pity. Power is sweet, and I will use it. Go, Paul, and be happy if you can, with a nameless wife, and the world's compassion or contempt to sting your pride' " (522). However, this moment of confidence becomes empty as it is replaced with the image of Helen left alone in the literal helplessness of her blindness as Paul shelters Lillian and her mother in his protective embrace against their "hard," "haughty," "bitter," and "proud" usurper: "her hands were clasped before her face, as if those sightless eyes had seen the joy she could not share, and at her feet lay the time-stained paper that gave her a barren title, but no love" (522). Thus, the material and social benefits that Helen could have finally

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and order. However, as will be discussed shortly, when Helen finally does submit to the will of the newly anointed family patriarch, and renounces her claim to her rightful inheritance of title and wealth, her blindness is further compounded by silence. Thus, her "rebellious" behavior is effectively contained.

obtained through the recognition of the legitimacy of her birth are drained of their significance and replaced by the sentimental investment in "love" as the true key to happiness. This causes Helen to completely renounce the claims to power that she had embraced so soon before, along with her true identity:

> Helen's face changed beautifully, as she tore the paper to shreds, saying in a glad, impetuous tone, while the white flakes fluttered from her hands, "I, too, can be generous. I, too, can forgive. I bury the sad past. See! I yield my claim, I destroy my proofs, I promise eternal silence, and keep 'Paul's cousin' for my only title. Yes, you are happy, for you love one another!" she cried, with a sudden passion of tears. "Oh, forgive me, pity me, and take me in, for I am all alone and in the dark!" (522)

Now, Helen is not only blind, but has "promise[d] eternal silence," as if her ability to speak for herself has been bought at the expense of the "self-reliance, . . . full personhood, and . . . social authority usually denied to women" (Elbert, *Race, Sex, and Slavery* xxvi), and which were a fleeting possibility for her. Thus, although like Jean Muir in "Behind a Mask" Helen becomes absorbed into the patriarchal family structure, her character allows little room for a subversive reading of the text because the issues at the heart of the inheritance plot that have driven this story—power, property, legitimacy, and identity—have clearly been abandoned by the story's end.

Like Helen's momentary, but failed, attempt to wield power and control to her benefit in "The Mysterious Key," Alcott's 1869 story "Honor's Fortune" is particularly complicated because of its unfulfilled flirtation with the exciting and liberating possibility for a young orphan to win—rather, *earn*—her independence and self-respect through a form of "work" undertaken in the city rather than enslaving herself in a lucrative though loveless marriage. This possibility, although so exciting and potentially liberating for the main character, is never realized, never depicted in

any detail in the story, but shut down rather quickly by an exotic Indian suitor who is also the executor of her uncle's inheritance and estate. The heroine is ultimately able to renounce the need for paid, self-sustaining "work," undertaken in the public sphere, yet renounces along with it the gratification, empowerment, and self-respect that she imagines would come along with it, in favor of the charms and ease of domestic bliss and marriage. Published in *Frank Leslie's Ladies Magazine* in 1869, this story has not garnered the critical attention of Alcott's more "radical"—or at least provocative—texts such as "Behind a Mask," "A Nurse's Story," or "Taming a Tartar." It is very possible that Alcott tailored this story to suit the format of the "Ladies Magazine" arm of the Leslie publishing empire and the tastes of its particular target audience, as would have been standard practice for authors submitting stories for a publishing house trying to diversify many different publication formats. This would help to explain the sudden turn the story takes in regards to the heroine's future, as well as its championing of "honorable" female values and behavior. However, much like Alcott's critics claim of her more obviously subversive stories, the seemingly (critically) disappointing tale of "Honor's Fortune" nonetheless reveals as much about Alcott's ideas about gender, power, and inequality of opportunity as a strongly subversive thriller such as the critical favorite "Behind a Mask."

"Honor's Fortune" tells the story of an orphan named Honor, a young girl who "stood there alone, face to face with a great temptation, for she held her fate in her hand" (704). By the end of the story, her fate will be happily surrendered to the man who controls her fortune, all in the name of love. Honor's name is very clearly loaded with the implication that her actions and identity should be anticipated to exemplify

culturally valued models of idealized feminine behavior such as purity, honesty, and unshakeable morality. Indeed, she is finally rewarded with her inheritance because she "unknowingly" performs the most innocent caricature of feminine selflessness and virtue. In order to escape from her cruel "cousin who grudgingly gave the orphan a home" and a life filled with "neglect, poverty, distasteful labor, and the bitterest dependence," Honor decides that she has only two choices: enter into a safe, protective marriage with a man whose love she does not return, or flee both cruel cousin and unwanted suitor and make a life for herself, singing professionally to earn money in London (704). She is thrilled by the thought of being able to support herself, the independence and self-reliance that she could achieve, and the lure of the adventure waiting for her in "the great world [that] lay before her, unknown, untried," and so sets off for the city with a great sense of eagerness and hope for her future (705). However, before she can make it to London, she meets a mysterious man who, unbeknownst to her, is in fact the executor of her uncle's estate; her uncle, upon his death, decreed that this man should choose which one of his nieces was most deserving of his wealth, and marry her in order to share the fortune with her. The suitor is disturbed by Honor's plans to work as a singer in the city, and when he asks her if her plans are really necessary, she innocently replies, " 'Why, yes, of course it is . . . I've nothing in the world but my voice and a little borrowed money. I wish to support myself, and I'll do anything rather than go back, or marry—some one I don't love' " (707). Her desire to be self-sufficient and her bravery in the face of risk and the unknown are genuine at this point in the story, but will be abandoned before she has the chance to fully embrace them: this mysterious suitor, her benefactor, is so troubled by her desire to

work (in a possibly scandalous profession) and so overwhelmed by her innocent femininity that he decides she is the one he must marry.

Honor's reward for being judged by the executor of her uncle's estate as the most "virtuous" and "deserving" heiress is the money (the inheritance) that she exchanges her self for by entering into a marriage with her benefactor.[35] The link between marriage and money could not be made more explicit, as the story's benefactor literally has the power to choose which woman he wants to marry and thus which woman will have access to her inheritance; that he makes his choice based upon his investment in the most innocent and unselfconscious performance of sentimental womanhood only further supports dominant models of which gendered identities are most valued and (monetarily) rewarded. Honor's instincts for self-preservation, or even potentially radical self-empowerment, have been tempered by the strong influence of idealized feminine behavior and culturally valued models of sentimental womanhood and romance. Even though Honor has married for love, a situation which she explicitly contrasts early in the story with the "bondage" of loveless marriage for the purposes of escape from unhappiness and poverty, she nonetheless has given up a self-aware entrance into the public market economy for a private economy still based on money and exchange. To drive this point home, the final lines of the story read: " 'The only fortune I covet is here,' " and Honor leaned her bright head on her

[35] Honor's performance of idealized womanhood is ostensibly all the more rewarded because of the very fact that her behavior is so unselfconscious and her motivations are so innocent.

husband's breast, thinking only of the generous and tender heart that took her in when most forlorn" (713).[36]

When read together, these three inheritance stories from Alcott's collected thrillers exemplify the tensions and contradictions that make critical interpretations of her sensation stories so complicated. The conflicts inherent in her use of the inheritance plot—identity, property, legitimacy, wealth, power—both expose the limitations imposed by gender norms as well as often reinforce these norms; the economy of exchange that takes place within the realm of the family, and on which marriage and inheritance are based, is both exposed and obscured. Teresa Goddu's theories on the interplay between the gothic, the sentimental, and the marketplace help to explain the possible causes for these seeming contradictions. Importantly, Goddu maintains Alcott's conscious and self-aware participation within the literary marketplace as a key component in interpreting all of her writings, whether sensational or sentimental. Goddu is right to call attention to Alcott's "mercenary motives" that were as integral a part of her creative production as were her needs to seek out an outlet for her moods, emotions, and ideas:

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[36] The language and logic of the resolution in "Honor's Fortune" bears a striking resemblance to that of Alcott's recently discovered first novel, *The Inheritance*: in the final lines of the novel, as the main characters Edith and Lord Percy are engaged, Lord Percy declares to Edith, for she nonetheless still considers herself to be poor, " 'I need no richer dowry than the love of such a heart. And though I take you without earthy wealth, still in the tender reverence and fadeless gratitude of those you bless, surely, dearest, you have won a nobler Inheritance' " (147). Like many of Alcott's thrillers, *The Inheritance* is set in an aristocratic English household and revolves around the heroine's struggle for her rightful inheritance. This preoccupation with questions of inheritance and entitlement supports the argument that there is something intriguing, threatening, and culturally consuming at stake here. Charles, Frederick, and John Pratt, Louisa's nephews, hold the copyrights to this recently published text, likely a result of her legally adopting her nephew John near the end of her life.

> like many female writers of the period, she had to disguise her mercenary motives under the pretense of disseminating the feminine values of the private sphere. Even as she skillfully negotiated the market, she had to appear to be above commercial concerns. Hence, while she could publish her domestic fiction under her own name, her gothic tales, which often reveal the "true" woman to be a fraud and which more openly expose her manipulation of the market, had to circulate masked. (118)

Although many of Alcott's sensation stories do in fact "reveal the 'true' woman to be a fraud," such as can be seen in "Behind a Mask's" manipulative Jean Muir, stories such as "The Mysterious Key" and "Honor's Fortune" are not nearly as critical of "true womanhood," but rather even ostensibly uphold its traditions in their conservative endings. This is because, as Goddu argues, "Her sentimental writings . . . do not occupy a separate sphere from her gothic tales; instead, they participate in a shared market economy" (118-19). The "veiling" and "masking" of Alcott's motives in the marketplace that Goddu describes also serve as apt metaphors for the vacillation between presence and absence of her heroine's own mercenary motives in these inheritance stories. Both contexts—the marketplace and the creative production that is itself turned into a commodity—are thus troubled by "respectable" women who make overtures to self-sufficiency in the name of economic necessity. Yet Alcott embraced her work ethic so strongly throughout her life that it penetrates even into the darkest shadows of her gothic plots and the most heartfelt oppression of her sentimental plots, making a rendering of the classic inheritance plot that is without conflict and contradiction impossible.

CHAPTER THREE

The Threat of the Insider/Outsider: Inheritance and Middle-Class Anxiety in Domestic Detective Fiction

As the fevered speculation that surrounded attempts to establish a motive for the Borden murders illustrates, the inheritance plot drives the conflict in many murder narratives and detective fiction texts, particularly those bearing the hallmarks of "domestic detective fiction."[1] Catherine Ross Nickerson identifies this genre as being characterized in part by its focus on the "interior" of middle- and upper-class domesticity: the private spaces that identify the bourgeoisie; the ties of marriage, lineage, and inheritance that ensure a stable class and family system; and the ideals of genteel womanhood that are defined by both the material spaces and objects of the home as well as the necessary bonds of proper emotional attachments (Introduction 1). These concerns make domestic detective fiction particularly suited to taking up many of the motifs and machinations of the inheritance plot; domestic detective fiction positions tales of crime—typically theft and murder—and deception within this context, creating a rich and highly charged environment within which to bring social norms and sensational deeds into conflict. In detective stories that use the inheritance plot for their basic structure, the crimes that are committed are motivated by a desire for the wealth and power that are associated with access and entitlement to material inheritance (often narratively distilled into the single, all-important object of the will of a family patriarch). The lies, betrayal, and suspicion that surround struggles for this

[1] See the Introduction and Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of the Borden murders and their relationship to the inheritance plot.

inheritance are tied to the social and legal codes that determine who is and is not entitled to and deserving of the inheritance, and why. These social codes help to delineate and reinforce race, class, ethnic, and gender hierarchies; when these codes are challenged or broken, these hierarchies can be dismantled, revised, or eventually reinscribed. While challenges to the naturalized line of descent (or the "proper" transmission of inheritance) may in themselves embody criticisms of the social fabric (i.e. patriarchal authority, gender roles, or class conflict), the formula of the detective fiction genre in this period relies on the eventual restoration of material authority and associated moral authority to their rightful owner, along with the assignation of guilt and punishment to the potential usurper or criminal. Thus, the elements of social critique in domestic detective fiction are located in and then subsumed into the traditional narrative of inheritance.

Jo Alyson Parker, in defining the inheritance plot that she identifies as a pattern in eighteenth-century novels by English authors Jane Austen and Henry Fielding, argues that the traditional inheritance plot is based on a conservative trajectory: "at the outset the protagonist, deprived of his or her rightful inheritance, must embark on a quest for security and position; by the end, he or she has been revealed or recognized as the proper heir and has come into wealth—or, at least, an elevation in social position" (11).[2] A parallel plot structure can be seen in the formula

[2] Nineteenth-century domestic detective fiction, in particular, expresses a marked affinity with earlier English novels such as those by Jane Austen because of their focus on the role of property and the estate in the transmission of a stable, uninterrupted family identity and moral authority. Furthermore, the trajectory of this narrative tradition can be seen to extend into the country house or manor house mystery genres that enjoyed huge popularity in the early decades of the twentieth century, including novels and short stories by English authors Arthur Conan Doyle (his Sherlock Holmes series) and Agatha Christie.

of classic detective fiction: the protagonist is "deprived of his or her rightful inheritance" as a result of the crime that has thrown the existence of that inheritance into turmoil or doubt; the protagonist's "quest for security or position" is facilitated by the figure of the detective character, whose unique skills bring about the restoration of order; and the revelation of the protagonist "as the proper heir" is a fundamental component of the detective's dénouement, the final scene in which the mystery is solved.[3] As Bradley D. Clissold argues, and as we see in this sketch of the structure of the classic detective genre, "For Parker, the inheritance plot 'is based on a notion of continuity, not radical change' and serves a 'conservative agenda' by restoring the dispossessed to their due positions and re-establishing proper lines of descent" (192).[4] While later permutations and revisions of the inheritance plot in other genres and literary traditions often take decidedly more radical and subversive approaches to representations and implications of heredity, genealogy, inheritance, and identity,[5] the

[3] The "manor house" or "country house" mystery genre often includes a detective who typically assembles the cast of characters—the suspects and all interested parties—in the parlor, fills in the missing gaps in the mystery narrative, and dramatically reveals the identity of the criminal. This formulaic performance shares with domestic detective fiction a focus on the family, attention to codes of gentility, and the interiority and private spaces of the home.

[4] In fact, as discussed in the Introduction, as Parker and Franco Moretti have argued, the traditional, "conservative" elements of the inheritance plot, in which the genteel identity and entitlement of a wrongfully denied protagonist is destined to be revealed, returning them to their rightful social position (and guaranteed inheritance and lineage), can be traced back to fairy tales such as *The Princess and the Pea* and *Cinderella*.

[5] See especially criticism on the modernist approach to representations of inheritance, which often center on protagonists who intentionally "disinherit" themselves, both materially and metaphorically, ostensibly freeing themselves from the chains of familial and cultural lineage and inheritance that would attempt to perpetually circumscribe and define an individual's identity. For example, see Bradley D. Clissold's "Heredity and Disinheritance in Joyce's *Portrait*." In *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance*. Ed. Allan Hepburn. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007. 191-218.

conservative nature of the detective genre, particularly in its late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century forms, lends itself to this traditional narrative of the wrongful loss and rightful restoration of inheritance.[6]

Tropes of inheritance are rendered in domestic detective fiction most often as material property, typically in the form of a will, which serves as the motivation for the commission of crime (theft or murder, for example) by figures driven by lust or greed or desperation. As Allan Hepburn explains in his Introduction to *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance*, "Last wills and testaments confirm the continuance of the family, even when challenges by orphans, interlopers, and villainous relatives threaten to disarrange the seamless transmission of property" (4). However, Hepburn also argues that "the maker of a will asserts that the story of a bequest should go one way, but the story rarely follows the testator's prescriptive demands. Human desire and connivance intervene to change the direction of the will" (10). This instability and vulnerability of the will is key to the challenges to inheritance that are so often found in domestic detective narratives. The will is a contract that is ostensibly imbued with the authority and immutability of the law, yet these stories reveal that it is no less subject to the whims and "will" of the humans

[6] Critics often disagree on the question of whether detective fiction is a conservative genre, or whether it can be potentially subversive or capable of social critique. I would argue that tracing a particular novel's treatment of inheritance is a useful way to determine whether the text lends itself to a subversive or more conservative reading. For a conservative reading of the detective genre, see Katharine Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. For a reading of the subversive potential of detective fiction, see Catherine Ross Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.

upon whose lives the will attempts to impose its narrative.[7] Thus, material inheritance acts as a very useful plot device in stories about families in turmoil, a microcosm of the society in conflict around them.

Tropes of inheritance are also more obliquely written into these domestic detective texts as physical and metaphorical markers of the character and identity of conflicting classes; these identities are believed to be fixed, written on the body or rendered in otherwise readable "signs" that are supposedly passed down among generations of particular ethnic groups or social classes. Locating manifestations of identity and character on the body is another way of linking identity to inheritance, privileging the genetic or hereditary components of identity, claiming that they are readable, and assigning them with a socially conditioned value.[8] This readability of signs—or "clues"—is useful for and linked to the process of "detection" in these texts, but is also the coalescence of a number of nineteenth-century practices that draw on discourses of visibility and materiality, including the developing technology of photography; physiognomy and widely popular pseudosciences such as phrenology; and emerging theories of criminality. One possible application of these ideas can be seen in Police Inspector Thomas Byrnes's famous "rogue's gallery," a collection of

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[7] Richard Adams's exploration of Henry James's experiences as the executor of his father's will is a particularly illuminating and apropos real-life example of the mutability of the wishes of the dead: As Henry, who desired to break his father's will in order to re-inherit his brother Wilkie, wrote to his brother William, who insisted on a strict interpretation of their father's will, " 'the best way to justify Father is simply to assume that he expected us, (as he *did* expect us) to rearrange equally' . . . Henry redefines the relationship between the written document and its author's intentions. Redistribution is not simply advisable, he submits, it is obligatory. The text demands, even dictates its own emendation" (467).

[8] This is related in many ways to theories of inheritance, the body, and racial identity; see Chapter Three for a discussion of the role of this topic in the work of Pauline Hopkins.

photographic portraits of criminals that were compiled with the intention of providing examples of the physical traits that supposedly identified criminality.[9] As the character and aim of Byrnes's gallery suggest, these discourses and modes of visibility worked with the intention of maintaining and protecting bourgeois norms by constructing modes of class differentiation, with the aim of stabilization, during a period of great social change. The hierarchy of values assigned to these markers of identity are linked to anxieties about the moral decay of the bourgeoisie and their associated fears of being "overrun" by the increasing numbers of immigrants and working-class people who were thought to possess an intrinsic and inherited/able inferiority and criminality.[10]

As we will see, the tensions at the heart of domestic detective fiction are perfectly suited to the tensions of the changing society out of which the genre emerged. The nineteenth century is typically characterized as a period of intense and sweeping social change and conflict brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and increasing immigration. The social and economic conditions that resulted from these broad social changes included exponentially increasing poverty rates and growing ghettoization of urban "slum" areas filled with tenement housing for working-class laborers (Stansell 8-9). As Nickerson writes, "Most of these [domestic detective]

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[9] Mug shots were also used as a means of identifying known career criminals to the police as well as the public. For more on the origins and functions of "rogue's galleries," see Frank Morn, *"The Eye that Never Sleeps" A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982 and LeRoy Lad Panek, *The Origins of the American Detective Story*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2006.

[10] At the same time, the possibility that exterior signs, and thus identities, could be faked presented a source of great anxiety for the middle class. For example, see discussion later in this chapter of Karen Halttunen's analysis of materiality and hypocrisy associated with the figures of the Confidence Man and Confidence Woman.

novels have urban settings, and even in those set in suburban or rural areas, the capitalist city is always on the horizon. The city is not so much the setting for the investigation (the interior of the home is where most of the clues are) as it is the setting for the temptations that lead to the crime" (*Web of Iniquity* 15). This looming presence of the "capitalist city" contributed to middle-class anxiety concerning the erosion of the values and norms of gentility and fear of the breakdown of the ideological separation between the private domestic sphere and the intruding public sphere. The rituals of middle-class domestic privacy that serve as the backdrop for the inheritance plots of nineteenth-century domestic detective fiction were not enacted in an isolated "interior" sphere; rather, the middle-class home was vulnerable to the rise of industrial capitalism and the effects of the marketplace as well as the always-already presence of social and racialized others. Indeed, the significant increase in numbers of immigrant and working-class women laboring as servants within middle-class homes embodies the fictiveness of this ideological separation. For the figure of the "other" most often to be found within the space so central to domestic detective fiction—the space of the middle- or upper-middle-class household—is the domestic servant. Meant to be theoretically "invisible" themselves, servants were nonetheless—and perhaps therefore—often privy to and witnesses of the family's intimate secrets, thus becoming integral to the commission of a crime within the household as well as the uncovering of its mystery. Although working-class characters may seem to occupy the liminal spaces of the domestic sphere and of the plots of domestic detective fiction, without these working-class characters, the manifestation of treachery within the

middle-class domestic sphere and its subsequent cover-up and discovery would not be possible.

Thus, in the two earliest known domestic detective novels, Metta Victor's *The Dead Letter* (1866) and Anna Katharine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), threats to the ideological stability and superiority of the middle class are written into the roles and onto the bodies of working-class and racialized characters, displacing the decay of the bourgeoisie onto the already ideologically degraded bodies and identities of the "other."[11] However, it is unclear in these texts whether it is the "insider" or the "outsider" who poses the real threat to the middle-class household. On one hand, struggles for the wealth and power associated with the possession of or future entitlement to material inheritance are in many ways a manifestation of the economic and social struggles of the liminal or outcast characters who are written into the margins of the text (i.e. the social climber and the domestic laborer). On the other hand, negative representations of the inferior, inherited moral and physical traits of these liminal characters are contrasted with the degraded moral natures of the ostensibly righteous and stable bourgeoisie (i.e. the family member who kills to save himself from financial ruin, humiliation, and familial disinheritance). Despite their many structural similarities, these two novels differ in the extent to which they locate guilt, brutality, and deviousness within the actual family circle. While Green lays the burden on an outsider figure—the selfish social climber who gains the family's

[11] For example, in Victor's *The Dead Letter*, while the commission of the actual crime—murder for inheritance—does take place within the setting of the middle-class home, many elements of the process of detection take place within the space of working-class tenements or in interrogations of working-class characters.

confidence but never truly belongs—Victor goes directly to the heart of the sacred family bond and undermines those ties of blood and birth by assigning guilt to a member of the family itself. Yet in the end, both novels reaffirm the peace, strength, and righteousness promised by the ideals of love and marriage between individuals of high moral character. In this way, both Victor's *The Dead Letter* and Green's *The Leavenworth Case* ultimately enact a traditionally conservative rendering of the inheritance plot, in which the rightful lines of transmission are restored despite the inside or outside forces that threatened to disrupt them.

Genre and Genealogy: Domestic Detective Fiction, Bourgeois Privacy, and Social Discourses of Crime

Until recently, most academic criticism of the history of detective fiction in the United States begins with Edgar Allan Poe's 1840s tales of ratiocination and then moves quickly through the rest of the nineteenth century to consider the different forms the genre has taken in the twentieth century. However, in a move that opens up a space for rethinking the literary and cultural implications of the genre's chronology, many critics now to take into account the detective novels written by American women authors in the late nineteenth century that in fact were the predecessors to the later and more well-known texts.[12] It is now recognized that Metta Fuller Victor wrote

[12] At the same time, critics such as Karen Halttunen identify the dominant tropes and themes of detective fiction operating within modes of cultural production that were circulating long before the rise of mass publication in the mid-nineteenth century. Halttunen argues in *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* that "The cultural construction of murder-as-mystery was already under way in 1786, over half a century before Edgar Allan Poe's 'invention' of detective fiction with 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in 1841" (92). See also Daniel Cohen's *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England*

the first full-length detective novel, *The Dead Letter*, in 1866 under the pseudonym Seeley Register; Anna Katharine Green, often referred to as the "Mother of Detective Fiction," found great popular success with her hit *The Leavenworth Case*, which was the best-seller of 1878 and shares many similarities with the plot and characters of Victor's novel (Maida 1, Nickerson 64). However, debates among critics are still ongoing concerning the nuances of the detective genre—how it should be defined, who and what belongs and doesn't belong. For example, in a recently published study, *The Origins of the American Detective Story* (2006), critic LeRoy Panek clearly disagrees with the characterization of the *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* as "detective fiction," claiming, "they're not detective stories, not by a long shot. They're sensation novels" (11). More specifically, Panek labels *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* "the two most important American sensation novels centered on crime" (10). Panek argues that the novels' preoccupation with heightened tragedy and female suffering, as well as their dramatic contrast of wickedness and virtue, places them squarely within the sensation novel tradition while seemingly simultaneously disqualifying them from the detective novel tradition, claiming that "In both cases the writers use crimes as the means to illustrate that suffering proves womanly virtue" (10-11). This implies that crime exists in these texts as a plot device that is a simple tool, important not in itself but only in its service to a somewhat limited or limiting purpose—an apparently one-dimensional performance of gender

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Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

roles.[13] Furthermore, Panek claims that the novels do not qualify as true detective novels because they conceive of guilt and justice as belonging to the realm of Providence, an older worldview that is considered to pre-date the modern machinations of the legal system, of which the detective figure is supposed to be a component (13-14). Panek thus argues that *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* cannot be considered true detective novels because they do not envision a system in which the law is applied impartially, but rather demonstrate a bias along class and gender lines (privileging the sensibilities of the middle- and upper-class, particularly of bourgeois women). However, it is arguably all of these qualities that Panek singles out as disqualifying *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* from the detective genre that make these novels such rich additions to that very genre.

Although Catherine Ross Nickerson's book-length study, *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women* was published in 1998, only five years before the publication of Panek's book, Panek does not cite or consider Nickerson's claims or her definition of the "domestic detective" genre. While Panek rather reductively focuses on the elements in Victor and Green's novels that can be linked to conventions of sensation fiction, Nickerson instead focuses on the novels' similarities to the traditions of the gothic novel and the domestic novel that were also so important in the nineteenth century, and whose generic conventions can be effectively shown to

[13] In fact, Panek's criteria that distinguish detective fiction from other genres is based on a distinctively gendered divide: "Concerning detective fiction, the most significant phenomenon was the increased role of detection and the decreased role of the unseen hand of providence in effecting a 'happy' ending in fiction. In this respect, focus began to shift from the suffering of the woman hero to the reasoning and the stratagems of the male hero who increasingly displaced the police officer as the detective figure" (212). This gendered "emotion" versus "reason" binary risks relegating texts such as those written by Victor and Green to a perpetually inferior "feminized" sphere.

engage with and critique social conditions. Panek concludes that sensation fiction and his definition of detective fiction are, in the end, mutually exclusive; as we see in his treatment of *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*, a novel can feature a murder, lawyers, amateur investigators, professional detectives, clues, and the solution of a crime without really being *a detective novel* (11). Nickerson, on the other hand, enriches our vision of early detective fiction by recognizing that it is comprised of a tangle of genres that cannot be and do not need to be unknotted from one another. Most usefully, Nickerson's ability to comfortably discuss the elements of the female gothic and the domestic novel in these texts, while simultaneously discussing them *as detective novels*, positions them more intentionally (rather than dismissively) within a significant tradition of women's writing and social critique in the nineteenth century. The formal techniques and thematic concerns of domestic detective novels such as those by Victor and Green usefully illustrate how the social norms of the middle-class family and domesticity were alternately contested and reinscribed by the devices of a genre that both emerged out of the domestic and gothic traditions and adapted the techniques and ideologies of Poe's detective genre.

By manifesting the intersecting discourses of bourgeois privacy and crime in a novelistic form that we can identify as domestic detective fiction, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor (1831-1885) made a new commodity available to the literary market; as a rich and lively form of popular fiction, Victor's detective novels had the potential both to reflect and influence broad and diverse conceptions of guilt, innocence, and punishment and the social norms that these required. As the author of what is now thought to be the first full-length American detective novel, Victor is an important

figure in the construction of nineteenth-century popular culture as a woman who had privileged high-level access to Beadle and Adams, one of the most prolific dime novel publishing houses in history. Victor not only wrote hundreds of novels for the publishing house, she was also the editor of both *Beadle's Home* and *Beadle's Monthly* and was married to Orville Victor, Beadle and Adams's editor; as Nickerson argues, "it seems fair to say that she built the Beadle empire of publications with him [Orville]" (Introduction 2).[14] In addition to editing Beadle's monthly publications, she also wrote novels of all popular genres, from political and reform-motivated anti-polygamy and abolitionist stories to boys' adventure stories, romances, and westerns; her detective novels themselves make liberal use of tropes and devices commonly associated with sensationalism, sentimentalism, and the gothic. Victor used different pseudonyms for her different genres, writing both of her detective stories under the name Seeley Register.[15] This functionally gender-neutral pseudonym supports suggestions that Victor participated in a form and forum of cultural production that was not necessarily welcoming to or considered suitable for women writers. As Alma Murch argues, "Mid-nineteenth century publishers seemed to feel there was something peculiarly indelicate about tales of crime or criminals being written by a woman, and were reluctant to print them, although stories of social or domestic life were readily

[14] Nickerson also points out that Victor raised nine children in addition to her incredibly active career as an author and editor (Introduction 2).

[15] The fact that Victor's two detective novels were published under a pseudonym that is different from any of her others strongly suggests that either Victor, or her publisher, or both viewed these two novels as belonging to a separate genre. This in turn supports arguments that while *The Dead Letter* and *The Figure Eight* may in fact contain many elements of sensation fiction, even in their own time they were viewed as part of a unique literary subset, which we now can think of as part of the detective fiction genre (with an emphasis on the domestic).

accepted" (qtd. in Maida 6-7). And what to make of tales of crime being committed *within* the realm of domestic life—*and* written by a woman? Although not much biographical information is known about Metta Victor, her given name is now connected with her stories and her identity is becoming increasingly considered to be a worthwhile subject of literary and cultural study. Her career as a prolific and popular author and her intimate tie to Beadle and Adams, the popular culture and entertainment factory of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, clearly establish Metta Victor as an influential, if often overlooked, contributor to and crafter of popular conceptions of social, political, and gender relations.

In contrast to the fantastic style of Victor's generically diverse detective novels, Anna Katharine Green (1846-1935) employed developing forms of realism in her texts, linking crime solving more strongly to modes of scientific rationalism characteristic of the later decades of the nineteenth century. In relation to Victor, far greater biographical information is available on the life of Green. She was a native of New York, born into a solidly middle-class family, the college-educated daughter of a lawyer. Green decided early on that she should be a professional writer, "perceiving herself as a serious writer who would seek national recognition" (Maida 21). Although she experimented with many genres, including drama and short stories, Green's first love and ambition was poetry; appropriately, she began her career as a detective novelist in secrecy, hiding the manuscript from her disapproving father until its completion (22). As Nickerson notes, Green's initial reluctance to openly embrace the genre "reminds us of how, from its beginnings, the detective novel was understood to be a popular, and therefore artistically inferior, form" (*Web of Iniquity* 60). Green

published prolifically throughout her career and enjoyed great success, achieving popularity not only in the United States but also in Europe; she maintained communication with authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Mary Wilkins Freeman, although Maida argues that she was essentially a creative, shy, independent thinker and writer, "not part of any literary group or clique" (29). Reflecting the outward signifiers of wealth and abundance characteristic of the Gilded Age, Green created the luxurious, literally gilded world of urban, upper-class families in *The Leavenworth Case* as an outsider, writing from the position of the middle class for readers within the middle class. As such, Green's writings often both call into question as well as reinforce dominant middle-class cultural and gender ideologies, exemplary of the emergence of the ideologies of the "New Woman" in the late nineteenth-century. Green was a woman who came into her own as a writer within a genre that was not always socially acceptable early in her career. Thus, her texts provide a rich point of entry into questions surrounding authorship and the critique of class-based norms (Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 67-69).

One of the most interesting reasons to read Victor's *The Dead Letter* and Green's *The Leavenworth Case* alongside one another is the differences in their positions within the literary marketplace despite their many textual similarities. Nickerson notes these many similarities, ranging from a secret marriage to Irish seamstresses pursued as suspects to young lawyers turned amateur detectives to sisters with the same names (*Web of Iniquity* 64). Nickerson's research has not uncovered any contemporary reviews noting the similarity of the two novels, which she notes "suggests that they had very different readerships" (64). And yet, despite these many

congruences, which Nickerson suggests may go so far as to imply some level of plagiarism on Green's behalf, Victor's novels supposedly remained firmly within the literary realm of the dime novel while Green's were popular among middle-class readers and marketed as a higher form of literature (64). *The Dead Letter* was first published in 1866 in *Beadle's Monthly*, a serial publication of the dime novel giant Beadle and Adams. It was subsequently reprinted as a fifty-cent hardbound novel, which indicates that it was marketed "to a middle- and upper-class audience," evidence given by Nickerson that seems to contradict her claim that Victor's novels remained within the realm of lower-priced dime novels and did not share the higher-class readership and marketing as Green's own novels (30, 64). This difference in marketing strategies and reception may be linked to the unique generic qualities of each of the novels, with the sensational mix of Victor's text seeming to fit with the raucousness of "lowbrow" dime novels and the rationalism of Green's text presumptively appealing to a more "genteel" class of readers. However, attempts to make distinctions based upon a text's identification as "high" or "low" culture (or something in between) does not necessarily add to or detract from its possibility for embodying some elements of useful or effective critique. Nickerson claims that despite being marketed to middle- and upper-class readers, domestic detective novels still have the potential to communicate an agenda of social criticism; as she argues, "though written by and for members of the middle and upper classes, these novels still have a certain bite, especially on questions of gender expectations" (12). While I agree with this claim, I would expand its scope and argue that gender expectations are always complicated by class-based roles and inequalities in both *The Dead Letter* and

The Leavenworth Case. In particular, the different relationships of the spectrum of characters in each novel to representations of inheritance quite clearly exemplify and embody the material, emotional, and social inequalities perpetuated by gender difference and class difference, thus making a close reading of the inheritance plot in each text a revealing method of inquiry and critique.

Indeed, Panek rightfully notes the influence that both class and gender have in these texts. As he says,

> It is apparent in both novels that class makes a very big difference (15-16); While status serves to stifle the detection in these sensation novels, in them gender provides an even greater impediment to discovering the truth. . . . [Green] focuses on the men tiptoeing around the [female Leavenworth] cousins, at once frustrated by their aloofness, by their defiance of the demands of law and justice, but awed and respectful of their privileged status as upper middle class women. Partly this comes, in both novels, from women's greater investment in social propriety than men's, but partly it comes from these women writers' views of the special character of womanhood. Accepting that their gender confers a special status on women with respect to the law, however, cannot advance the cause either of the law or the development of the detective story. (16-17)

Panek's observations about the roles of class and gender in these stories seem to come with a touch of frustration at the ways that they seemingly disqualify these novels for detective fiction status. However, recognizing that these enactments of class and gender roles are integral to the performance of nineteenth-century domesticity can instead further enhance our understanding of the unique challenges associated with rendering commissions of crime within the middle-class domestic sphere. The experience of reading domestic crime narratives—whether they be factual or fictional—and vicariously involving the reader in the details of the crime and the process of solving it by uncovering a secret (the activities of so-called "armchair

detectives") upsets the supposed division between the public and private spheres of social life. This is especially true when the murder has taken place within the domestic sphere or the family circle, providing an anonymous public with access to the spaces and relationships that are typically the most intimate. The desire to see within private, hidden spaces and to connect and make sense of a disjointed and incomplete narrative characterizes the detective genre and makes it particularly suited to domestic spaces because "private space was mysterious space, the site of secret evils demanding to be penetrated, investigated, exposed, and mapped out by the reader" (Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul* 123). The possibility—and proof—of evil lurking within the sanctity of the domestic sphere implies that popular representations of the home as the site of piety and protection were not universally applicable; in fact, violent crime within the domestic sphere proved that the cultural construct of the "happy home" was often entirely false. And yet, the great popular success of domestic detective fiction indicates that readers enjoyed the many gratifications provided by these glimpses into the private darkness, conflicts, and troubles of the homes and families in their own cultural, historical, and social moment. Integral to these stories must be the complex relations of gender and power that are written into the dominant ideologies of domesticity and the unequal structures of the heteronormative family unit. Any representation of crime in this sphere must necessarily confront and engage with these relations of gender and power, and must negotiate the problems associated with broaching the fictive separation between the public and private spheres.

The Dead Letter and *The Leavenworth Case*: Inheritance Plot Elements and Literary Devices

Daniel Cohen's history of the developing forms and growing readership of real-life accounts of crime, as detailed in his study *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture*, indicates that "large numbers of people, most likely old and young, male and female, urban and rural, middle-class and working-class, were willing to pay for the privilege of reading . . . accounts of illicit sexuality and criminal violence" by the mid-nineteenth century (38). Thus, Victor and Green's novels came onto the literary scene with a potential audience to appeal to that was both widely diverse and familiar with the fundamental premises and experiences of crime narratives. Although Panek argues that by mid-century real-life crime narratives remained a staple of more sensational newspapers such as the *Police Gazette* (96), domestic detective fiction turned inward to the private spaces of the middle class and found crimes there that were driven by struggles and conflicts that readers could recognize as familiar and frighteningly possible in their own lives.[16] The use of inheritance as a plot device in crime or detective stories is so frequent because it resonates with the intersection of gender, class, economic, and power struggles that often percolate beneath the tranquil veneer of the family. As Panek claims, "in turn of the century fiction, everyone was after women's money, or, more correctly, their family's money. The stolen inheritance

[16] This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Borden murders resonated so strongly with the nineteenth-century public—although the murders were so brutal and "shocking," their conflict and context may have also been frighteningly uncanny, feeling perhaps a little too "close to home."

comes up again and again in period fiction" (99). While Panek notes the preponderance of inheritance plots in nineteenth-century fiction, he notes only the usefulness of these plots as structural narrative devices for authors:

> Tapping into the favorite plot of the sensation novel . . . women appear in turn of the century fiction frequently in order to have their inheritances stolen from them. Rather than being a device to simply induce outpourings of readers' sentiment, in the detective fiction of the period the stolen inheritance also provided a showcase for the writers' cleverness and inventiveness. . . . this called upon the writer to invent clever or outré tricks for his or her villain to use on virtuous and helpless women and for the genius detective to solve. (160)

However, representations of inheritance also function on a broader and more significant social and historical level in these texts. Implicit in Panek's observation of the preponderance of stolen-inheritance stories in this period, yet unexplored in his analysis, is the fact that representations of inheritance were part of a shared language and culture of nineteenth-century readers, pointing to familiar and engaging problems and possibilities that these readers could understand, many of which are played out in the pages of *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*.

Set in the small New York town of Blankville, Metta Victor's *The Dead Letter* (1866) tells the story of the murder of Henry Moreland, a promising young businessman who is affianced to Eleanor Argyll, a beautiful, proper young gentlewoman flush with the brightness of her future. Henry is stabbed in the back on a stormy night while walking alone along a quiet path from Blankville's train depot to the Argyll family home to spend the weekend with his beloved. The small town is shocked and unsettled by the murder, and suspicion falls anywhere but within the household, where the murderer actually hides. The truth is that James Argyll, the

cousin of Henry's fiancée Eleanor, has in a fit of jealousy hired a deviant criminal to kill Henry. James desperately schemes to marry Eleanor in order to secure his inheritance to her fortune—he is in dire need of money to make up for his gambling debts and taste for the nefarious temptations of New York City. Thus, James Argyll represents the fallen bourgeoisie, serving as an example of the most negative possible outcome of the changing relationship of the middle class to capitalism and the burgeoning growth of the city and the marketplace. His character is driven by greed, selfishness, and moral weakness; James Argyll is a member of the middle class who is not satisfied with the already privileged lifestyle he is ostensibly entitled to by birth, and his need for more and more—more money, more risk, more sensation—is insatiably driven by the "looming city" outside the supposed confines of the private, domestic sphere. Those sacred walls of the middle-class family home, however, are not impervious to Argyll's greed, which culminates in the crime of murder, a crime that he sees as the only means of resolution because he believes it is his only available means of accessing fortune and stability through securing the inheritance of a "vulnerable" woman. In this way, the typical "coupling convention" (to use Ann duCille's phrase) of the domestic novel is undermined, perverted by greed and violence, emptied of sentiment and replaced by the bare economic value of inheritance.

However, although the plot of *The Dead Letter* turns on the commission of a crime by a family insider, the focus of the process of detection in the text revolves around the figure of an outsider. Richard Redfield, a young protégé lawyer who has been taken in and apprenticed by the patriarch of the Argyll family, becomes the prime

target for suspicion thanks to the subtly wicked efforts of James Argyll to undermine his character and credibility.[17] With little concern for saving his own reputation, Redfield enlists the aid of Mr. Burton, a private detective from the City, laboring to solve the crime himself in order to make up for the wrong done to Eleanor, with whom he has been madly in love for years. As Redfield and Burton uncover and pursue clues in the case, they focus their attention on a young Irish seamstress named Leesy Sullivan, who becomes the prime target for their suspicion. Immediately following the murder, Leesy is repeatedly seen lingering beneath the windows of the Argyll mansion, "with a wild look in her black eyes" (Victor 25). After doing some clever detective work, guessing that he should conduct some interviews in the working-class quarters of the city based upon the "shop-girl" appearance of the woman beneath the windows, Redfield learns that Leesy often found work sewing in the Moreland household and was painfully in love with Henry. However, we learn by the end of the novel that although she was not responsible for his murder, she is in fact connected to his murder*er*, the deviant criminal hired by James Argyll. With the aid of Detective Burton's young clairvoyant daughter,[18] Redfield spends most of his time in the novel chasing after the elusive seamstress until she finally reveals the details of her story to Mr. Burton in a long confessional scene. Leesy had been tormented and abused by George Thorley, a man of dark character and unknown origins who suddenly appeared

[17] Redfield's credibility is further undermined by the fact that although he has been taken in by the Argyll family patriarch, he nonetheless is not truly a "son," and thus remains a family outsider and social inferior.

[18] The figure of the young, sickly, clairvoyant female child is just one of many gothic elements in the text.

in Blankville and posed as a doctor. After Leesy repeatedly refused his unsolicited advances, Thorley killed Henry on James's request and out of spite for Leesy. Thus, the murder of Henry serves many purposes for multiple people in a complex web of desire and deceit that cuts across boundaries of class in all directions, while James's pursuit of the wealth promised by the Argyll family's inheritance enables each of the conflicts to be consummated.

Anna Katharine Green's novel *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) also links crime and inheritance and expresses similar anxieties about threats to the upper middle class posed by both insider and outsider figures. It tells the story of the murder of wealthy Horatio Leavenworth, who is the uncle and legal guardian of two beautiful, orphaned sisters—he has been shot once in the head while working late in his study.[19] All of the doors and windows to their luxurious Fifth Avenue home are securely locked, and the crime scene shows no sign of struggle or robbery, suggesting that Mr. Leavenworth knew his killer and thus immediately directing suspicion within the household. The motive for murder naturally seems to be connected to the large inheritance promised by Leavenworth to Mary, his favorite of the two nieces, because access to such a large amount of money, held and distributed according to the whim and will of the benefactor, is thought to be the best possible motivation for murder. Suspicion immediately falls on Eleanore, the sister who stood to inherit nothing from her uncle, while Mary elicits her fair share of suspicion as well; however, the unusual actions of the maid, a young Irish girl named Hannah Chester, suggest that she is the one who

[19] See Chapter One for a discussion of E.D.E.N. Southworth's critique of the threats posed to women and young girls in the legally sanctioned relationship of guardianship, as well as the intersection of inheritance with guardianship.

holds the key to the crime. While piecing together clues in the case, the young detective, Everett Raymond, discovers that Mary Leavenworth has been involved in a secret affair with an Englishman named Henry Claverling; her uncle, due to a fierce and bitter hatred of the English, has strictly forbidden Mary's association with her lover and threatens to disinherit her should she continue their relationship.[20] Acting against her uncle's will, Mary clandestinely arranges to marry Henry with the aid of Hannah, the maid, who acts as a courier for their secret messages written back and forth.

Uncovering this hidden marriage plot as a subplot of the larger inheritance plot becomes central to the novel's narrative, exemplifying the domestic detective novel's concerns with the need to maintain a stable family network, threatened by the risk of undermining traditional class and gender roles. Mary's uncle uses the threat of disinheritance as a tool of control and manipulation, illustrating the ways that inheritance can be used to perpetuate a family structure that is predicated on inequality and dominance (and often divided along gender lines). The threat of disinheritance is used here as a means of wielding punishment for any perceived transgressions from proscribed roles and behaviors; should the disinheritance actually come to fruition, the family order, though temporarily disrupted, will nonetheless be maintained because it has been shaped and controlled at the will (and by the actual will) of the patriarch. Allan Hepburn explains that inheritance and patriarchal authority are often intimately bound up with one another: "Narratives of inheritance . . . touch intimately on family

[20] The Leavenworth patriarch's somewhat inexplicable xenophobia may be another manifestation of anxieties about outsider figures infiltrating the closed family system and undermining the purity of the family's bloodlines.

relations and the authority of the father. More often than not, inheritance defines the will of the father as the intentional structure of lineage that is worked out and worked through narrative" (7). Hepburn goes on to argue that

> Setting boundaries of acceptable action and behaviour within narrative, the law sanctions the male owner of property to bequeath legacies as he sees fit, according to personal fancies and assessments of character, not according to just provision for every child. Inheritance is not a pleasure, but a threat, a means to keep recalcitrant children in line through the legally enforced discipline of frustration and renewed promises. Wills reinforce intra-familial cruelties and preferences through appeals to the law. (12)

The scenario of a "rebellious" woman threatened by a powerful and controlling male family member is typical in the gothic tradition; the possibility that Mary may have actually murdered her uncle in order to fight back, free herself, and secure her fortune gives the old story a new twist that makes it perfectly suited to the domestic detective genre.

The social milieu of the Leavenworth mansion is strictly genteel and proper, with a self-conscious awareness of the family's aristocratic status evident in the behavior of the family members and the crowds of police and jury members that gather in the study for the coroner's inquest.[21] Divisions of class and gender and the roles appropriate to these distinct spheres are strictly defined and enacted within the

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[21] For example, while Thomas the butler is being interviewed in the Leavenworth home during the coroner's public inquest into the murder, both the butler and the juryman subtly acknowledge and appreciate the overdetermined roles that they each must play: " 'The young ladies were attached to their uncle?' 'O yes, sir.' 'And to each other?' 'Well, yes, I suppose so; it's not for me to say.' 'You suppose so. Have you any reason to think otherwise?' . . . Thomas hesitated a moment. But just as his interlocutor was about to repeat his question, he drew himself up into a rather stiff and formal attitude and replied: 'Well, sir, no.' The juryman, for all his self-assertion, seemed to respect the reticence of a servant who declined to give his opinion in regard to such a matter" (Green 23).

household, causing much social anxiety in the aftermath of events. The material interior of the home is also telling—it is marked by "extraordinary splendor" and "the glow of satin, glitter of bronze, and glimmer of marble meeting the eye at every turn" (Green 11), establishing a discomforting contrast between the signs indicating high social status and material security and the implication of the cold-blooded murder that has taken place among the supposed comforts of gentility. Patricia Maida argues that "By giving the novel an aristocratic New York setting, [Green] also captured the interest of those eager to read about the closed world of high society" (5), pointing directly to the locus of tension that is so significant to domestic detective novels—the conflict between the public and private spheres that becomes tangible when crime is committed within the hallowed walls of the upper-class home. The possibility that the façades of domestic gentility and order could be so illusory, yet so seductive, presents an intriguing opportunity for the subversion of social norms from within.[22]

However, the murderer is in fact not one of the members of the inner family circle, but is Mr. Leavenworth's secretary, James Trueman Harwell, who kills for his desperate and unrequited love of Mary Leavenworth. Nickerson argues that the impetus for the murder in this novel is located within "the problem of social climbing" and argues that "The dissent and suspicions among the four principal characters . . . are all caused by the mischief of a liminal class figure, the secretary who hovers

[22] A similar theme is explored in Karen Halttunen's 1982 work, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. Halttunen frames this possibility in terms of hypocrisy, basing her work on the claim that "Victorian Americans condemned hypocrisy as a major social threat," as embodied by the dearth of nineteenth-century advice manuals that treated the subject as a significant one.

between the ranks of servant and business professional" (*Web of Iniquity* 95). Harwell believes that by killing Mr. Leavenworth, who plans to disinherit Mary, he can guarantee her access to the wealth that has been promised to her and that has made her so happy, thus winning her heart through her own greed. But upon learning the truth of her uncle's murder, Mary exclaims, "What a punishment for the love of money which has always been my curse!" (Green 376). Despite Harwell's murderous hopes, and his attempt to curse Mary's wealth with the pain of his rejection, Mary renounces her inheritance and devotes herself instead to her husband, Henry Claverling, the Englishman that she had married in secrecy.[23] The circle of domesticity, though disrupted by prejudice, greed, anger, and deceit, nonetheless suffered the ultimate violation—murder—at the hands of the *inbetween* member, the one trying to move up from his social station.[24] Hannah Chester, the maid who enabled Mary's secret marriage, and who was madly in love with Harwell herself, is dead, murdered by the object of her desire—the second victim of Trueman Harwell. Hannah has been used as a pawn in the playing out of tangled obligations and desires, and the bonds of middle-class coupling are reinscribed.

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[23] Mary's renunciation of her inheritance does unsettle the contours of the traditional inheritance plot, which signals the increasing instability and irrelevance of this system of marriage, lineage, and inheritance in this period.

[24] As will be explored later, the ambition to transcend one's given social station is a source of much suspicion and anxiety regarding the characters of Leesy Sullivan and Hannah Chester, as well.

Working Women in the Domestic Sphere: Spaces of Transgression, Structures of Enablement

As we have seen, *The Dead Letter* locates threats to the stability of the upper- or middle-class family in insider figures and in the ability of the temptations of the city to degrade the "moral fiber" of the middle class. In Victor's novel, the wealth promised by the family's inheritance acts as an impetus for greed and violence within the family itself. Yet because of dictates of gendered propriety and beliefs about the sanctity of the family bond, an outsider figure must be suspected in the place of a family insider in order for the mystery to be solved. On the other hand, the representation of threats to the family and household in *The Leavenworth Case* are embodied by a scheming liminal or outsider figure struggling to broach the imaginary barriers of the private sphere and to gain access to the family's inheritance, reflecting the increasingly visible presence of outsider or working-class figures in the bourgeois household. The conflicts engendered by this presence are further clarified by the roles of the Irish seamstresses in each novel. In *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America*, Michael Denning argues that in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the new visibility of class and of working women within society disrupts the domestic sphere and the regime of the sentimental domestic novel. As he claims, "The domestic novel was largely blind to working class women; it was a genre based around the kin networks and households of the families of white merchants and manufacturers" (187). While the genre of the domestic novel may have ostensibly revolved around the interiority and sentiment of middle-class domesticity, the households of the Victorian bourgeoisie were nonetheless increasingly engaged

with and supported by the labor of the working class, which in the mid- to late nineteenth century meant female Irish immigrants in particular. As Christine Stansell explains in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, "Since the early nineteenth century, service had increasingly tended to be women's work; by 1840 it was entirely so in bourgeois homes. . . . Once the Irish Famine immigrants began pouring into Manhattan, domestic service became even more sharply defined as immigrant women's work" (155). This combination of factors—the increasing visibility of working-class women in society at large and the increasing numbers of immigrant domestic laborers within the bourgeois household in particular—made visible the fictive nature of an ideological binary separation of the public and private spheres. In domestic detective fiction, immigrant laborers turn up in what is in fact the most likely of places—we can now see them supporting the once-hidden infrastructure that is constantly at work behind the scenes of the middle-class household.[25] The underlying anxiety resulting from this mingling of the public and the private coalesces in the emerging form of domestic detective fiction. This anxiety is embodied by the genre's concern with the subversion of class-based norms within the private sphere, which is then made public by the commission of a crime and the desire to solve its mystery. The subversion of these middle-class norms and the privacy that they are

[25] In her biography of Anna Green, Patricia Maida acknowledges the realistic existence and portrayal of working-class characters in *The Leavenworth Case*. She also notes the associated "looming presence" of the city outside the confines of the home: "Green . . . captured the variety of people—the lower, the middle and upper class, who were part of the growing metropolis . . . In the Leavenworth household, for example, the immigrant servants are portrayed in appropriate roles, speaking with accents and displaying the manners of their culture. All the servants are Irish immigrants" (11).

predicated on are also complicated by their reliance on and intersection with the working class.

The presence of working-class domestic laborers within the bourgeois household was a disruptive one not only because they challenged and unsettled constructed class and gender norms, but also because they threatened to undermine codes of domestic privacy. The domestic servant was at once an insider and an outsider who occupied a unique "in between" position that allowed them privileged access to "the family's most intimate workings" (Tonkovich 129). This unprecedented access to the details of family secrets was aided by the presumptive "invisibility" of servants (129), which operated in tension with the threat that they posed should they reveal to anyone outside of the household what they have witnessed within its walls. That is, a disregard for or regulation of the physical presence of servants—maintained by, for example, separate living quarters within the home and codes of dress and behavior often imposed by the mistress of the household—was nonetheless often complicated by the nagging realization that servants were nonetheless *there*, laboring within the family's most intimate spaces. Halttunen connects the maintenance of the servant's invisibility to the maintenance of the household's genteel status: "While a hostess entertained her visitors, the machinery of her household was being run by her servants, and thus her own gentility rested in part on their ability to remain inconspicuous. A good servant was to be 'well trained, silent, observant, scrupulously dressed, and free from *gaucherie*' " (*Confidence Men* 106). Thus, the breach of this separation threatened to expose the construct of middle-class superiority in general and domestic morality and privacy in particular as vulnerable fictions. However, in a

cruel twist, should the façade of gentility fall from the home, the family, or the master/mistress, the finger of blame or mantle of suspicion can quickly be turned upon the already degraded and "inferior" domestic servant. Yet this could also be a risky move because of the fact that the servant may have been witness to the family's darkest or most vulnerable moments. Thus, the working-class characters in both *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* and their transition from invisible to visible illustrate the narrative potential that servants offer to the domestic detective genre.

While Denning argues that the 1860s witnessed "the breakup of the domestic ideology and the demise of the domestic novel" that included "a collapse not only of a genre but also of a middle class hegemony over women's culture and the ideologies of womanhood" (186), Nickerson sees the domestic detective novel as a revised outgrowth of the original domestic novel's characteristics and ambitions:

> Detective fiction with its stable endings and unstable middles, its gothic fascinations with secrets, its ability to point to many and contradictory villains, is ideally suited for a veiled and ambivalent kind of social critique. When merged with the moral discourse of the domestic novel, that critique takes as its subject the roles of and rules for middle- and upper-class women. While Green's novels are ultimately conservative in their espousal of class solidarity and middle-class notions of self-sacrifice and female virtue, they also take seriously the troubles and injustices done to women. They may declare the middle-class home as a place best left to the middle class, but they also argue for a need for intervention in its erotic and pecuniary affairs, especially as they affect women. (*Web of Iniquity* 96)

These additional dimensions of the domestic novel that result from being newly inflected by unusual tropes and themes thus arguably complicate and enhance the social critique of domestic detective novels. And yet, their social critique of middle- and upper-class households is not bound within a closed-off class system unaffected

by transformations within the marketplace and an awareness of class-based inequalities (although this awareness may not always be a self-conscious element within the text itself). As the influence of inheritance (in both material and physical manifestations) in determining a character's fate in these texts suggests, erotic and pecuniary affairs do not just amorphously "affect women" in these novels; they manifest themselves in very different forms and have very different kinds of effects depending on the class of the women involved.[26]

For example, while the characters of Eleanor Argyll and Leesy Sullivan in *The Dead Letter* are deeply in love with and eternally devoted to the same man, Henry Moreland, Eleanor and Leesy hardly have similar fates awaiting them both before and after his murder. Considering their vastly different relationships to the inheritance at the center of the novel's plot effectively highlights the many different contours of their lives. While still a breathlessly happy fiancée awaiting her wedding day, Eleanor Argyll looks forward to inheriting a large fortune, moving into her matrimonial mansion and setting up a household, and presumably beginning a family full of healthy and prosperous Moreland children, perpetuating the family's upstanding lineage and producing future worthy heirs: "Eleanor was engaged to a young

[26] Nicole Tonkovich helps to complicate the historical and practical implications of this claim in her work *Domesticity with a Difference*. She argues that "servants, unlike their southern counterparts, were not, either in bodily appearance or legal status, self-evidently 'inferior' to their employers. In fact, the relation of servants and mistresses to the master's property were equally distant: neither legally owned the home, land, or household accoutrements that sustained them, although both were supposed to have an interest in maintaining them. Furthermore, servants' legal rights exceeded those of their mistresses. As single women they were legally responsible for their own property. They also retained the right to separate themselves from the household when necessity—or will—dictated" (134). This evidence indicates that an essentialized binary difference between women of different social classes is in fact much more complex.

gentleman in every way worthy of her: of fine demeanor, high social position, and unblemished moral character" (Victor 17). Once Henry is murdered, we don't see Eleanor much anymore because she transforms herself into the figure of the gothic heroine, detaching herself from the reality of the world around her and draining herself of agency but for within the realm of her own grief. Symptomatic of and appropriate to her lifestyle as a privileged and unburdened woman, Eleanor closes herself up in her room in mourning and marries her dead fiancé in spirit, roaming about only at dusk while cloaked in a heavy black dress. On the other hand, Leesy, the Irish seamstress, divides her time between the poor, dingy outskirts of Blankville and the equally harsh living conditions of boarding houses in New York City. Without a shred of past, present, or future financial support from an altogether absent family, Leesy earns her living as a seamstress, laboring to help take care of her dead cousin's young daughter. The public (though false) implication is that this child is in fact Leesy's illegitimate offspring, further declassing her and marking her as a woman of possible sexual impropriety. This situation further limits Leesy's opportunities and helps to ensure her inability to make a better life for herself.[27] Though treated with relative respect by her employers, the Morelands, Leesy's greatest role in life is to be the conduit through which social and moral order can once again be reestablished in the middle-class Argyll household. Without suspecting Leesy as the guilty party, and without pursuing her and uncovering her personal secrets of love and pain, the crime could never be

[27] As Nickerson notes, "the figure of the seamstress in the nineteenth century is associated both with scandalous gossip and with prostitution" (*Web of Iniquity* 88). Thus, Leesy's character is always-already imbued with aspects of these assumptions, which are slowly revealed as being untrue once she tells her own story in her confessional scene.

solved and the true treachery revealed. Upon her death by consumption, Leesy's reward is to in effect be martyred by those to whom she had never before been an equal. They admire her now not as the tattered shop-girl or starving seamstress, but as "love-exalted Leesy Sullivan" who "died with a smile on her face, going out of this world, which had been so cold to one of her impassioned nature, with joy. . . . She was buried, very quietly, but reverently, on a beautiful winter day" (204). The final romanticizing of Leesy's character empties her life story of its real hardship and struggle, erasing any implication that class inequality and ethnic prejudice may have contributed to her unhappiness and sad fate.

Likewise, the characters of Mary Leavenworth and Hannah Chester in *The Leavenworth Case*, while unwittingly involved in the same tangled web of desire and deceit, experience vastly different "erotic" and "pecuniary" fates. Hannah is depicted as living at the beck and call of Eleanore, her mistress: " 'I am Eleanore Leavenworth, and I have come for my girl Hannah. . . . Hannah, I want you,' said she . . . And, with a glance to see if Hannah were following her, she went out" (Green 309). This terse, one-sided exchange points to the often tense nature of the relationship between women as employer and employee, a relationship shaped by gender and power: "added to the hardships of domestic service were the close quarters with employers, the personalized and irregular work routine and the curious set of pressures that mistresses brought to bear on their domestics concerning their conduct as women" (Stansell 168). Any actions on Hannah's behalf that may be interpreted as signifying her attempt to feel or act beyond her social station as a working-class woman are considered suspicious and

troubling, worthy of further investigation.[28] One of the Leavenworth household's servants reports to the detective regarding Hannah's character and trustworthiness that

> As far as she, Molly, knew, Hannah was what she had given herself out to be, an uneducated girl of Irish extraction . . . she was of a melancholy nature and fond of brooding, often getting up nights to sit and think in the dark: "as if she was a lady!" exclaimed Molly. This habit being a singular one for a girl in her station, an attempt was made to win from the witness further particulars in regards to it. (Green 40)

The detective in the story struggles to prove the innocence of Mary and Eleanore in order to maintain their virtue and good reputation; the thought of a decent, well-bred, genteel woman being guilty of such a crime is nearly too great a trauma for him to bear. As suspicion increasingly falls on Hannah, the missing Irish maid, the detective's search for her becomes an outlet for the fear generated by Mary's or Eleanore's possible guilt and a potential source of relief from overwhelming social anxiety. In much the same way as Leesy Sullivan in *The Dead Letter*, Hannah is responsible for restoring social and moral order to the Leavenworth household; the act of suspecting and pursuing Hannah continues to uncover key clues in the case, with her own murder ultimately being responsible for finally exposing Mr. Leavenworth's killer and exonerating both Mary and Eleanore without a doubt.[29] The final heroic gesture of Mary's rather romanticized renunciation of her inheritance in the name of true love pales in comparison to the trajectory of Hannah's life story. While Mary and Eleanore are united with their lovers once the crime is solved, with the renewed and

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[28] The threat of the social climber infiltrating and undermining the family network or taking more from society than they are "entitled" to thus permeates the Leavenworth household and the community around it, from Hannah's "uppity" behavior to the aspirations of the real murderer, Mr. Leavenworth's secretary.

[29] In fact, through her murder Hannah becomes the ultimate self-sacrificing servant.

unquestionable assurance of their future domestic bliss, Hannah is instead murdered by her own object of desire. She will never be able to have access to the same financial, social, and emotional security as her one-time mistresses.

Inheritance, Materiality, and Detection

Nineteenth-century domestic fiction is characterized in part by a strong focus on interior spaces and materiality—the spaces of the middle-class home, the objects that fill those spaces, and the ways that these objects embody and express identity. Owning particular forms of "property" became a way for the middle class to construct and identify itself and others, as well as to construct and identify those "others" who were positioned in fundamental contradistinction to the middle class. As Stansell argues, "The homes of the urban bourgeoisie became a means of elaborating a class and gender identity" (159). This is because the rise of the middle class in the nineteenth century was also contemporaneous with, and characterized by, a rise in the (re)production and availability of material culture. For example, Nancy Cott explains that "As late as 1775 only half of the middling households in Massachusetts . . . had forks and knives, much less . . . chairs, tables, beds, pillows, tea sets, books, [and] musical instruments" (Cott, "Domesticity" 181). The ability of the emerging middle class in the nineteenth century to afford and procure such "genteel" items made it possible to construct and imagine the place of the home as a sacred space, capable of nurturing and molding the souls and morals of its inhabitants, thus functioning as a space capable of representing the upstanding values and respectable identity of the family to the outside world. The middle-class home was carefully arranged and

decorated to communicate the values and social standing of its inhabitants to themselves as well as to visitors. The materiality of the middle-class home, theoretically a "private" space yet self-consciously put on display to be read and interpreted by the public (in its exterior appearance and carefully appointed public rooms such as the parlor, for example), is an active means of manifesting in tangible objects the wealth and pedigree that on another plane of temporality translate into a family's inheritance and heritage. For example, Richard Adams notes the way that Henry James and his brother William conceived of their father's estate as simultaneously embodying and being embodied by their dead father himself, his properties, and the material objects contained within those properties (such as a painted portrait of their father):

> By salvaging the intention behind the will—the "*principle*" of his father's punitive strictures—William is preserving the fiscal integrity of the James estate—the financial principal that is perhaps the most material remaining manifestation of his father (467); as the chosen executor, [Henry] is responsible for making sure that his father is suitably "translated, perpetuated" in property, bonds, and dividends—media at once less versatile and more discordant than oils. (469)

This cultural milieu, with its concerns with questions about the connection between property and identity, naturally produced narratives centered around representations of material inheritance because "Inheritance plots usually involve a tangible form of property: a family portrait, a set of diamonds, a country seat. In the sense that inheritance necessitates the transfer of property, novels interrogate the ideology of ownership as an inherent legal right, with ramifications for both personal and national belonging" (Hepburn 5).

The ideological and material connection between the family and property makes domestic detective fiction particularly suited to the use of material inheritance as a dominant motif and plot device because, as Hepburn explains, this connection is often a locus of conflict: "The will to possess property, inseparable from the necessity of transmitting property, consumes those who live by its principles. All legacies are troubled, in the sense that they promise happiness in material or financial form and regularly deliver, in fiction at least, complication and unhappiness" (5). This "complication and unhappiness" erupts into crime in domestic detective fiction where the impetus for theft and/or murder is the desire to gain access to a family's inheritance, marring the family's legacy with a remarkable trouble. Thus, the family in these novels is not only defined by, but also thrown into jeopardy by, their property. The detective figure in these texts must be capable of mediating between the family and their property; typically belonging to the middle class themselves, detectives are aware of the necessary codes of conduct that they must obey in order to be allowed entrée into the domestic household, and are attuned to the meanings behind exterior signs of interiority. Yet, detectives are also unique in their abilities and willingness to move within spaces coded as socially threatening and among individuals marked as socially deviant or inferior. They are not only able to read these codes, but are also able to notice anything that might be out of place. Being able to read the meanings signified by the materiality of spaces—the objects that fill (or don't fill) them—as if interpreting the meaning of a clue is key to revealing the identity of the space's inhabitants. It is also useful for revealing telling details about the role and identity of the individual or outsider that is penetrating into the space of another (by paying

attention to the ways that the outsider reacts to and acts within the different kinds of spaces that they move through). This holds true for spaces and individuals across class and gender lines; as the young detective in *The Leavenworth Case* explains as he silently "reads" a room (and, by extension, its occupant), "It was the something underlying all these, the evidences which I found, or sought to find, not only in the general aspect of the room, but in each trivial object I encountered, of the character, disposition, and history of the woman with whom I now had to deal" (Green 258).

The most obvious space that is at the crux of the domestic detective novel is, by definition, the middle-class household. The physical space of this household is constructed so as to communicate messages about its family's class status and ideals, and to ensure the stability of both (or, at the least, the *perception* of stability). A description of the Argyll family home early in *The Dead Letter* illustrates how the household is portrayed as somehow protected from the degrading forces of the outside world of rapid development and change: "As I came near the old Argyll mansion, it seemed to me never to have looked so fair before. The place was the embodiment of calm prosperity. . . . Although the growing village had stretched up to and encircled the grounds, it had still the air of a country place, for the lawn was roomy and the gardens were extensive" (Victor 22). The exterior of the Argyll home promises peace and prosperity within, and yet the story's narrative twist is the disconnect between appearances and reality in this household. Likewise, the richly appointed interior of the Leavenworth home (the luxurious and nearly overwhelming abundance of satin, bronze, and marble) serves to heighten the suggestion that something is terribly wrong in the most materially secure of environments. The young detective struggles to

reconcile his competing and seemingly irreconcilable sensations of domestic order and murderous deception as he moves through the perfectly appointed rooms of Mary and Eleanor Leavenworth's proper existence. The supposition that materiality communicates stability and invincibility is thus undermined by the intersection of outward signs of class-based comfort with hidden clues of inner chaos. The interior of the middle-class household was intriguing to readers of domestic detective fiction because it was depicted there as both intrinsically susceptible to the commission of particular types of crimes—those motivated by jealousy, passion, and greed—and because it was a recognizable and familiar space. Halttunen traces the correlation between narratives of murder within the "family circle" and cultural norms surrounding domesticity in the nineteenth century that placed cultural power within the realm of "the modern sentimental family, with its concerns for emotional closeness and mutual affection" (*Murder Most Foul* 135). She argues that the growing production and popularity of domestic murder narratives in conjunction with this shift toward sentimental domesticity reveals a deep underlying "sense of unease" that both reaffirms the new cultural norms by punishing those who violate them as well as appeals to a resistance of the norms "by providing readers with the pornographic pleasure of witnessing those violations" (135).[30]

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[30] Halttunen argues that the penetration of the middle-class household may have been especially seductive to readers because of the thrilling disruption of social norms that it implies; as she claims, "The power of the story was enhanced by the excitement of uncovering appalling evil in that very place where evil was theoretically to be least expected: the holy temple of the home. An additional appeal resided in the rich details about how other people conducted their private domestic lives" (143). However, the fascination with and exposure of middle-class norms and interiority were common themes in many different forms of cultural production throughout the nineteenth century. For example, conduct books and serial publications such as *Godey's Lady's Book* instructed readers on how to embody middle-class

True to the conventions of the sentimental domestic novel out of which the domestic detective genre takes its context and many of its tropes, the narrative is ostensibly imbued with an investment in preserving the ideological division between the public and private spheres. Yet at the same time, elements in both novels consistently push against the boundaries of this division. On one hand, Victor's *The Dead Letter* and Green's *The Leavenworth Case* provide excellent examples of the divide between the front and back regions of the home that must be crossed by the detective, as well as the behind-the-scenes servant figure that must be suspected and exposed in order to solve the crime. Although this focus on interiority is necessarily marked by the self-conscious performance of propriety on behalf of all involved, this does not detract from the meaning and significance behind these performances. The space of the nineteenth-century bourgeois household was predicated on codes of privacy and rules of etiquette that prescribed the proper behavior of visitors and circumscribed the areas of the home that were open to outsiders. To illustrate this concept, Karen Halttunen draws on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who makes an ideological distinction between "front regions" and "back regions" of living spaces (*Confidence Men* 104). The front regions of the home include spaces such as the parlor or the drawing room that are made available to appropriate, approved visitors and used for entertaining or receiving guests. As such, these front regions are spaces where codes of conduct and identification are enacted or performed by both hostess and visitor alike. As Halttunen explains, "In the front regions, firm social

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ideals from proper social etiquette to modes of dress and decoration of private-yet-public spaces in the home such as the parlor or drawing room.

discipline holds in place a mask of manner and expressive control is maintained" (104). By contrast, the back regions of the home include spaces such as the upstairs bedrooms, nursery, and kitchen, where the rigid codes of genteel performance were relaxed and the family attended to the more mundane tasks of daily life. These spaces were to be tactfully avoided by visitors at all costs because "In the back regions, the mask can be lowered and expressive control is relaxed" (104). Intrusion into the back regions by outsiders was thus threatening to the stability of a structure that was maintained by its reliance on an understanding of "privacy." Indeed, the overall privacy of the home was predicated on the requirement that one not intrude into the personal affairs of the genteel family. To make this point abundantly clear, advice manuals "condemned specifically the social crimes of opening boxes, packets, and papers; reading papers that lay open to view; eavesdropping through open windows and keyholes and cracks in doors; and even watching the neighbors from the attic window" (109). In fact, these behaviors forbidden to the polite visitor point instead to the techniques practiced by detectives as they move through the private spaces of the household, constantly observing and seeking out tell-tale clues and suspicious behavior. The division between the "front regions" and the "back regions"—and the secrets that seem to be hidden behind the walls and doors of the latter—provides opportunities for both deviance and detection, for guilt and suspicion. The detectives in domestic detective fiction must thus infiltrate into the private back regions of the home, bringing the reader along with them, simultaneously acknowledging the division of the public and private by the sensitivity with which these regions are broached.

However, it is nonetheless not to be forgotten that "To own property is to participate in a national economy and to acquire the advantages that national belonging confers" (Hepburn 9), and the contrast between the material wealth of the family at the center of the drama and the working-class characters at the margins illustrates the potential differences in national belonging that can be distilled into relationships to material objects. In *The Dead Letter*, Irish seamstress Leesy Sullivan makes herself "invisible" by infiltrating the once grand and promising, but now silent and unoccupied, Moreland mansion after her beloved Henry's death. She secrets herself away in the attic and moves through the mansion's rooms under the dark of night, prompting the home's Irish caretakers to declare that the building is haunted.[31] This momentary, gothic figuring of Leesy as a ghost or spirit whose presence cannot actually be seen renders her invisible in the ultimate way: she enacts the expected role of the servant as an invisible presence in the household whose only tangible essence shall be the result of her labor, but never the offense of her physical body. Leesy inhabits this invisibility in order to be able to freely worship Henry's existence amongst his belongings in the mansion, his accoutrements of "middle-class-ness." She seems to feel his presence most tangibly when roaming amongst the material signifiers of his existence, the visible markers and telltale signs of his identity: she wears his slippers, reads his books, and stares at a painting of his likeness, speaking his name out loud to his image.

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[31] This is a characteristic typical of stereotypes attached to Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century. As Nickerson explains, "The Irish—always servants—are depicted throughout the novel as figures of superstition and ignorance" (*Web of Iniquity* 34).

The object of the portrait itself holds a significant position within the compendium of middle-class material culture, beginning with the painted portrait and developing into the photographic portrait. Speaking of the latter, John Tagg argues in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* that "The portrait is . . . a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and an inscription of a social identity. But at the same time, it is also a commodity, a luxury, an adornment, ownership of which itself confers status" (37). Early photographic portraits often mimicked the familiar poses, adornments, and expressions of aristocratic painted portraiture, but were more affordable and widely available than commissioned paintings. Tagg's description is nonetheless similarly applicable to painted portraits, such as that of Henry James's father, with paintings also indicating membership in an earlier, more traditionally aristocratic class. Henry Moreland's possession of his own painted portrait is thus a luxury that embodies his identity as well as indicates his status; Leesy's devotion to Henry's image with the intensity that she may have devoted herself to his actual physical being illustrates the interior essence embodied by and made tangible in objects.[32]

[32] A painting on the wall in the Leavenworth home has a similarly powerful affect on Raymond in *The Leavenworth Case*. He feels that it must be inspired by the likeness of the Misses Leavenworth, whom he hasn't met yet, and is disturbed by the contrast between the interior essence it suggests and the horrible crime that has taken place within its vicinity. He sees "the vision of a young flaxen-haired, blue-eyed coquette, dressed in the costume of the First Empire . . . with such a dash of something not altogether saint-like in the corners of her meek eyes and baby-like lips, that it impressed me with the individuality of life . . . I could not rid myself of the idea that one, if not both, of Mr. Leavenworth's nieces looked down upon me from the eyes of this entrancing blonde with the beckoning glance and forbidding hand . . . I half shuddered as I looked, wondering if this sweet creature did not know what had occurred in this house since the happy yesterday" (Green 12). This passage is also significantly imbued with a repressed sexual anxiety that haunts Raymond throughout his intervention into this household.

By contrast, although much of the lure of domestic detective fiction included the satisfaction of voyeuristic desires to see into the private sphere of the middle-class household and to uncover its dark underside, in these novels the penetration into the mysteries, secrets, and dark side of the middle-class household actually requires a penetration into the more available and differently marked space of the working-class household.[33] The traditional detective narrative is characterized by its "doubled" structure, of the "story-within-a-story" that slowly unfolds through the process of detection—the story of the commission of the murder concealed within the story of the investigation of the murder (Nickerson, *Web of Iniquity* 9).[34] The details of the crime become tangible and comprehensible as the clues are revealed and pieced together one by one, enabling the concealed story to become visible and coherent to the reader. Likewise, a corollary doubling of space exists in these domestic detective novels because the middle-class household itself functions as a concealed space that will be methodically revealed by the detective's infiltration into the more readily accessible and less socially regimented and protected spaces of the working class. In marked contrast to the "calm prosperity" embodied by the Argyll mansion, we are introduced to the "other side" of Blankville, the working class section of town where laborers such as Leesy live:

> Although Blankville was not a large village, there was in it, as in nearly every town blessed with a railroad depot, a shabby quarter where the rougher portion

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[33] I use the word "penetration" here intentionally in order to include an implication of the sexual undertones often associated with the movement of detectives and readers into personal and intimate spaces.

[34] As many critics have noted, doubling is also a characteristic device in gothic narratives.

> of its working people lived. The house stood in this quarter—it was a three-story frame building, occupied by half a dozen families, mostly those of Irish laborers, who found work in the vicinity of the depot. (Victor 29)

Working-class tenement homes in New York City are also depicted in *The Dead Letter*, with Leesy constantly moving from one similarly anonymous, sparsely appointed room to the next in an effort to elude detection.

In both *The Leavenworth Case* and *The Dead Letter*, the detectives infiltrate into the private bedrooms of working class Irish women as voyeurs, as intruders, looking not just for clues but for the women themselves. In both novels, finding and interrogating Hannah and Leesy is so integral to solving the murder that much of the plot's energy is focused on seeking them out in private spaces. Such spaces are easily accessible to the detectives because they are men of privilege, and they do not suffer anxiety, guilt, or an awkward conscience upon moving into these "private" spaces—there is no sense that they are breaking a social norm, that they are themselves committing a crime, or that they are violating the sacrosanct space of a "lady." Gender roles are enacted accordingly, signifying which spaces are coded as permissible and which are coded as inappropriate. This is because the spaces themselves are marked in particular ways according to the class of their occupants, often expressed through their material characteristics and location in relation to other spaces. For example, we can feel the young detective in *The Leavenworth Case* blush and divert his gaze when he enters the private bedrooms of the Leavenworth sisters, but when he enters the bedroom of their maid Hannah, his gaze instinctively and freely touches every corner, every object, and reads and classifies her space: "all and everything in the room spoke of robust life and reckless belief in the morrow" (Green 276). Likewise, upon entering

the sparse living quarters of Leesy Sullivan, Redfield performs a quick and unabashed survey of his surroundings: "A rapid glance revealed an innocent-looking room with the ordinary furniture of such a place—a cooking-stove, bed, table, etc.; but no other inmate. There was a cupboard, the door of which stood open, showing its humble array of dishes and eatables—there were no pantries, nor other places of concealment" (Victor 29).[35] The sense of entitlement that underlies this easy access of private space can be explained by the ideological connection that was often made between the materiality of the household and the moral character of its residents. As Stansell argues, "When reformers entered tenement households, they saw a domestic sparseness which contradicted their deepest understanding about what constituted a morally sustaining household; material effects and domestic morality were closely connected" (202). While the material abundance and comfort of the middle-class household, and the rich luxuriousness of the upper-class household, supposedly signify moral righteousness and order, the opposite conditions are observed and thus supposed of the working-class household and its family. This results in permissible and guilt-free access to the spaces of liminal figures, depicted not as an unwelcome intrusion, but necessary for imposing social and moral stability.

[35] This entrance into the "private" spaces of the working-class and the observant, descriptive, classifying gaze that reports on the contents and manner of living interestingly foreshadows the rise of criminal sociology and reform efforts aimed at invading and eradicating tenement "slums" such as Jacob A. Riis's publication of *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890.

Inheritance and Constructing Criminal and Law-Abiding Bodies

If the materiality of the home can be read to express the existence (and perpetuation of) as well as interpret the inner nature of a family, so can the body, countenance, clothing, and mannerisms of an individual. For example, nineteenth-century conduct and advice books warn youths trying to make their way in the newly industrialized cities that they should protect themselves from exploitation and corruption on behalf of "deviant" characters by learning to interpret "surface impressions" because "all aspects of manner and appearance were visible outward signs of inner moral qualities" (Halttunen, *Confidence Men* 40). Similarly, the reproductive technology of photography acted as a tool to record and circulate images that were thought to communicate particular class-coded messages—whether it was the painted portrait on display within the family home or the criminal's mug shot filed within the police archives or circulated in newspapers.[36] It is these same techniques and technologies—essentially "clues"—that are used by the detectives in domestic detective fiction to discern the criminals and solve the crimes. The "eye" of surveillance was not used just for looking into private spaces, it also saw, recorded, and categorized the physical characteristics of individuals in order to aid the police and ordinary citizens in identifying criminals. These discourses often linked crime and criminality with race and class, which were in turn often written on to the body; rendering physical characteristics as a form of "bodily" inheritance functions as a way

[36] See Allan Sekula's essay "The Body and the Archive" *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64 for an engaging in-depth history of the use of photography by police departments in France and England as well as the United States.

of maintaining the hegemony of the dominant classes because the physical (literal) reproduction of class difference also ensures its perpetuation in each successive generation *ad infinitum*. For example, criminality became linked to discourses of identification through physical characteristics, which took on a new dimension with the rise of photography. Shawn Michelle Smith argues in *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* that "the processes whereby identity was envisioned in the nineteenth century produced a model of subjectivity in which exterior appearance was imagined to reflect interior essence. Bodies were mapped as the vehicles of gendered and racialized interior essences; that is, bodies were posed as the surface signs of interior depths" (4). This is similar to the ways that material culture—objects—came to be thought to signify an interior essence, as in Stansell's argument about the middle-class household "elaborating a class and gender identity" (159) or in Henry James's father being brought to life in a portrait. Smith's study is based on the ways that scientific and commercial photography became ideologically and functionally connected and then used to define and support understandings of a racialized middle-class identity in contradistinction to the racialized and classed identity of outsiders, foreigners, deviants, and criminals. This ideological and functional connection between visibility, exterior signs (clues), and interiority became a particularly enticing and appropriate tool for detection and police work—by being able to "read" a person's physical characteristics based upon a set system of classification, it was thought to be possible to identify their predisposition to crime or the fact of their guilt. As Nickerson explains, "The work of the police, then, was based on surveillance of the most direct kind—the observation and recording of the faces of

criminals. The chief of detectives of New York . . . published a rouges' gallery in book form that included photographs and biographies of two hundred criminals from across the country" (*Web of Iniquity* 32).

The reading of the body, face, eyes, and mannerisms in order to discover the interior essence of individuals is a technique relied upon by the detectives throughout both *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*. After fruitlessly tracking *The Dead Letter*'s Leesy Sullivan throughout the town of Blankville and sending scores of detectives to trace her trail through New York City, fledgling lawyer turned amateur detective Richard Redfield finds her sitting alone on the porch of the murder victim's deserted mansion. Leesy seems to be lost in thought, not noticing Redfield, and so he is able to gaze long and unobserved upon her features, giving him the opportunity to use her exteriority in order to read both the outwardly marked signifiers of her class status as well as the "truth" of her inner being:

> When I turn to that page of my memory, I see her, photographed, as it were, upon it—every fold of the dark dress, which was some worsted substance, frayed, but neat; the black shawl, bordered, drawn close about the slender shoulders, which had the slight, habitual stoop of those who ply the needle for a living; the jetty hair pushed back from her forehead, the marble whiteness and rigidity of the face and mouth. It was a face made to express passion. . . . It seemed to me that if I could see her eyes, before she was conscious of observance, I could tell whether there was guilt, or only sorrow, in her heart. (Victor 33-34)

It is no accident that Redfield refers to photography here in order to characterize the literal "snapshot" of Leesy that remains in his memory; this seemingly offhand, parenthetical remark places him well within the discourses of visual culture and detection of the time. For example, Allan Sekula traces the emerging practice of photographing criminals as a component of detective and police work that arose out of

pseudo-medical and taxonomical discourses such as physiognomy and phrenology, which linked physical characteristics to an individual's supposed mental faculties and predisposition to criminality (10-13). The combination of these discourses with photographic technology necessarily coalesced in racially- and class-coded ideologies and practices. Furthermore, by describing his memory of Leesy's appearance as "photographed," Redfield imbues his retelling of the event and his subsequent conclusions (his "reading" of Leesy's guilt or lack thereof) with the supposed truth and authority of photographic evidence.[37] Redfield has captured a photographic image of Leesy in his mind as a form of a clue or proof collected by the shrewd detective. His classification of Leesy is subtle, based upon a collection of individual signs that add up to a classifiable whole: Leesy Sullivan is a working-class girl—a seamstress—who nonetheless evinces traces of refinement and depth. Although her dress is frayed, it is neat, communicating a level of care and attention to appearance that indicates an effort or ability to transcend circumstances, even if minutely. The potential for Leesy's face to express passion connotes a depth of feeling and character that could either be dangerous—murderous—or remarkable. And finally, the shape of her body—the stoop of her shoulders—indicates her profession; in this case, the work that Leesy does leaves its distinctive imprint on her body that makes her labor visible, brings it into the

[37] Although, as John Tagg reminds us, photographs hardly depict an "objective reality," but are always mediated sites of production: "we have to see that *every* photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place" (2). It is also important to note that the "documentary" aesthetic *per se* did not become consciously identified until early in the twentieth century: " 'Documentary' as such was a later development belonging both to a different phase in the history of the capitalist state and to a different stage of struggle around the articulation, deployment and status of realist rhetoric" (8).

public eye and makes it and, by extension, *her* available for public discourse and potential judgment.

The outward signifiers of Leesy's labor marked onto her body signify her class status, but then also work in tandem with her supposed interiority, which serves to complicate her character and destabilize assumptions based solely on her identity as a working-class girl. However, it is exactly this suggestion of refinement and depth, linked to an Irish seamstress, which raises suspicion and signals a possible motive for murder. While Leesy's aunt is being interviewed in an effort to gain information about Leesy's character and whereabouts, she confesses to Redfield that "She [Leesy] can read and write like the ladies of the land" (30) and that "She seemed fast with her needle, and a girl who minded her own business. I thought she was rather proud, for a seamstress—she was handsome, and I reckon she knew it" (36). When Redfield interviews Leesy herself, he finds that he is struck by her poise, her intelligence, and her articulate speech, all of which seem out of step with "her station," and interprets these characteristics as being indicative of an ambition to escape the confines of her class and ethnicity (36). Redfield fears that this ambition may have been responsible for Leesy's downfall, for her involvement in crime as a desperate attempt to live beyond the limits that confined her: "This was a girl to attract interest at any time, and I mutely wondered what had entangled the threads of her fate in the glittering web of a higher fortune, which was now suddenly interwoven with the pall of death" (34). Much like the ambitious love of secretary Trueman Harwell that leads to the murder of his employer, Horatio Leavenworth, there is a constant underlying fear throughout *The*

Dead Letter that the murder of Henry Moreland may have been the result of a similar attempt at "social climbing."

Leesy Sullivan's counterpart in *The Leavenworth Case*, Hannah Chester, is likewise inextricably linked to her body and, by association, her class through discourses of physicality and visibility that make manifest her social and cultural inheritance. Immediately following the murder of Mr. Leavenworth, Hannah goes missing from the home and scene of the crime. Attention is thus centered on her right away due to her suspicious behavior—she is believed to either be guilty of the crime in some way, or to hold the knowledge of who is in fact guilty. Since Hannah's physical absence eventually drives much of the action and desire in the plot, efforts to literally *embody* her, to make her tangible, become crucial to solving the case. Tracking Hannah down is thus vital to restoring the moral and social order of the household, and the most effective way to find a missing person is thought to be by enlisting the aid of the public—the mass of armchair detectives. A description of the missing girl is printed in the local newspaper, circulating her body and her image for identification based upon her particular features:

> Said girl was of Irish extraction; in age about twenty-five, and may be known by the following characteristics. Form tall and slender; hair dark brown with a tinge of red; complexion fresh; features delicate and well made; hands small, but with the fingers much pricked by the use of the needle; feet large, and of a coarser type than the hands. She had on when last seen a checked gingham dress, brown and white, and was supposed to have wrapped herself in a red and green blanket shawl, very old. Beside the above distinctive marks, she had upon her right hand wrist the scar of a large burn; also a pit or two of smallpox upon the left temple. (Green 101)

This description of the missing girl is a verbal articulation of the details that a photograph could have provided readers; the "utilitarian" function of photography was

recognized by American portrait photographers such as Marcus Root, who Sekula refers to in his essay, "The Body and the Archive," as "applaud[ing] the adoption of photography by the police, arguing that convicted offenders would 'not find it easy to resume their criminal careers, while their faces and general aspects are familiar to so many, especially to the keen-sighted detective police.' The 'so many' is significant here, since it implicitly enlists a wider citizenry in the vigilant work of detection" (9). Much like the "photographic" description that Redfield gives upon his first sighting of Leesy, Hannah's exterior hints at her interior, communicating her ethnicity and the physical markers of her status as a laboring seamstress. The circulation of Hannah's description in the widely read and mass-produced forum of the newspaper further commodifies both her labor and her body, making her identity available for public consumption and recognition.[38]

The revelation of and preoccupation with the darker, nefarious, hidden side of middle-class sentimental domesticity is indicative of a wider social tension: the infallibility and cultural superiority of the middle-class household was simultaneously revealed as flawed amidst a concerted social-scientific effort to establish tangible proofs of moral difference around physical constructions of criminality. Thus, while the "inherited" moral superiority of the middle class is constantly undermined in these stories of crime within the family structure, there is at the same time a contemporaneous increase of discourses attempting to assign concrete, tangible markers of middle-class moral superiority based on markers of difference, focusing on

[38] In a related sense, scandalous newspaper headlines implicating the Leavenworth sisters in the murder of their uncle are terrifically threatening because information circulating in newspapers is thought to be the most potentially damaging to their reputations.

race, class, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, and physical features. This ideological struggle took on increasing urgency in the shifting social and economic context of the late nineteenth century: as increasing numbers of immigrants began to flow into the United States, there occurred a simultaneous increase in publishing and production, growth of urban spaces, and entrenchment of a new powerful form of capitalism.[39] Thus, at the same time that the traditional social order is shown to be breaking down in domestic detective fiction, as distinctions between criminality and these markers of difference are shown to be more complex (if not entirely fictitious), discourses of criminality are laboring to reestablish and categorize the distinct "other." By providing methods and characteristics with which to identify the other, these discourses of criminality worked to provide a coherent system of law and order that was contingent upon positioning the middle-class "body" in contrast to the body of the criminal. As Sekula argues,

> the invention of the modern criminal cannot be dissociated from the construction of a law-abiding body—a body that was either bourgeois or subject to the dominion of the bourgeoisie. The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body, recognized its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked, and sought to reassure itself. (15)

This tension between the law-abiding body and the threatening criminal other—and the need to define the difference between the two—exposes the supposed separation of the public and private spheres in the mid- to late nineteenth century as a purely

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[39] As Shawn Michelle Smith outlines the nature of these social and economic changes: "the middle to late nineteenth-century saw the consolidation of industrial capitalism and the ascendance of commodity capitalism in the United States. It saw the rise of the middle classes to social dominance, and with them new discourses of gender identity. And of course the period was not only one of class and gender transformation but also one of racial reinscription, marked by the Civil War and the legal and scientific reformulation of racialized American identities" (4).

ideological, tenuous construct. While realist writers such as James and Howells may have dealt with the conflicts emerging from the intersection of inheritance, wealth, superiority, and class differences (as Cuddy and Roche argue), in these domestic detective texts the motif of inheritance is built upon further to make the connection among inherited wealth, superior qualities, and physicality in an effort to pacify the anxieties and pathologies that threaten to undermine notions of middle-class superiority.

Class, Crime, and the Rupture of the Private Sphere; or, the Inheritance Plot and Social Critique

The connection between crime and inheritance in these domestic detective novels unsettles presumptions about the stability and moral superiority of the middle-class family and domestic sphere. Rather, the inheritance plots in *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case* suggest that the perpetuation of class privilege through a closed system of marriage, lineage, and inheritance is becoming difficult to maintain and increasingly irrelevant in the face of the rise of industrial capitalism and the increasingly visible presence of social and racialized others. Challenges to the middle-class family and domestic sphere are displaced onto challenges to the transmission of inheritance that must move in an unbroken line of descent, which is revealed to function as a self-conscious performance of an outdated mode of aristocracy. These challenges come from both insiders and outsiders in *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*, suggesting that threats lie both within and without the domestic sphere, effectively breaking down the fictive distinction between and separation of the

public and private spheres that labor to "protect" and sanctify the middle-class family. Furthermore, although working-class characters in these texts are often portrayed as defined by the inheritance of "inferior" physical traits and personal characteristics, the inheritance of material objects and moral rectitude that the middle-class characters define themselves by is nonetheless also called into question.

However, through the process of detection, and in the ability of detectives to identify the criminal and return order to the disrupted household, the insiders and outsiders who attempt to disrupt the closed system of inheritance ultimately fail in their efforts. While these novels reveal potential and real points of breakdown within the middle-class family structure, the anxiety that this creates is instead displaced onto the roles and bodies of working-class characters. These characters act as enablers for middle-class crime and transgression, forming the link between the public and the private spheres because they are uniquely able to move between the two. While these marginalized characters are often themselves victims of crime, they are also typically immediate targets of suspicion. They are privy to the most sensitive secrets of the household and often hold the knowledge that would solve the crime because they are allowed access into the inner workings of the private household that the middle-class, male detectives can not be privy to; however, they are nonetheless incapable of being the agents of dénouement themselves because of their liminal or disruptive status within the middle-class household. These working-class characters enable the middle-class "insider" detective to solve the crime, dying before they can give away their secrets or soon after they unburden themselves of them. At the same time, suspecting the working-class other—following her, inquiring about her, uncovering her personal

tragedies, her desires, her fears, infiltrating into her private space—is in fact the enactment of detection in a deferred, displaced manner from the inner-circle of middle- and upper-class households. Thus, despite the inside and outside forces that threatened to destroy the inner-circle and domestic order, these "sacred" constructs are eventually allowed to remain intact and to methodically rise above the moments of disorder in the text. The final restoration of order, signified by the restoration of the proper line of descent in the transmission of the once-threatened family inheritance, finally subsumes the novels' complex narratives of class conflict into their narratives of middle-class order and prosperity.

Yet while there may not be a pointed, direct critique of power relations within the middle- and upper-class households of the mid- to late nineteenth century within these novels, the centrality of working-class characters to the plot enacts to a complicated degree the public and private entanglements made possible—nearly inevitable—by the increasing erosion of rigid distinctions between and separation of the two spheres.[40] The effects of class difference and dominance are embodied throughout the novels by the opposing erotic and pecuniary fates of the mistresses and their maids, as well as the particular ways in which class and criminality are constructed via visibility and spatiality. As Stansell argues, "Domestic service

[40] The only character in either novel that makes an overt recognition of the plight of working-class women is Henry Moreland, the victim of murderous jealousy and greed in *The Dead Letter*: "Leesy sewed in their family . . . and was always twice paid. When she'd go away, [Henry would] say, laughing in his beautiful way, 'And how much have you earned a day, Miss Sullivan, sitting there all these long, hot hours?' and she'd answer, 'Fifty cents a day, and thanks to your mother for the good pay;' and he'd put his hand in his pocket and pull out a ten-dollar gold-piece and say, 'Women aren't half paid for their work! it's a shame! if you hain't earned a dollar a day, Miss Sullivan, you hain't earned a cent. So don't be afraid to take it—it's your due' " (Victor 30).

dramatized the problems that poor immigrant women presented to the cult of domesticity. Nowhere was the contest between two modes of womanhood more evident than between the Irish immigrants and the ladies who employed them" (155). This is certainly true of the female characters in both *The Dead Letter* and *The Leavenworth Case*. While readers of nineteenth-century domestic detective fiction became active participants in the intriguing activity of uncovering murder and deception within the ostensibly hallowed halls of middle- and upper-class domesticity, it may be that they were often confronted with a social reality that was nevertheless not unaffected by external economic, social, and cultural upheavals. Readers may have found, instead, that the domestic sphere and the process of detection within it were inextricably linked to their reliance upon the liminal and disruptive status of the working class.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pauline Hopkins: The Problem of Inheritance and Discourses of Racial Uplift

By definition, the inheritance plot is influenced by and intimately connected with the past, seen in its association with concepts such as origins, legacy, and heritage.[1] At the same time, the inheritance plot looks to the future in its concern with the effects of the past and present on each successive generation yet to come. It is because of this duality that Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, as an African American race writer, editor, and activist, makes effective use of the inheritance plot to argue for both racial uplift and racial justice. As Hazel Carby argues, Hopkins's body of work displays a "consistent concern with the questions of inheritance and heritage" (*Womanhood* 162), and critics such as Carby, Lois Brown, and Julie Cary Nerad have argued that inheritance is a dominant and recurring thematic element in Hopkins's work. Carby claims that "[Hopkins's] definition of history was 'an account of the deeds of men who have been the models and patterns for the great mass of humanity in past centuries even from the beginning of the world' " (162), thus establishing the significance of the past to Hopkins's worldview. By extension, while the events of the past have had a powerful influence on the state of the present, Hopkins's writings also argue that the state of the future is yet at stake because of these same "deeds of men" in both the past and the present. Indeed, discourses of racial uplift, such as those that Hopkins constructed in her work published in the *Colored American Magazine*, were

[1] Note that slavery itself is often referred to as a "legacy" whose history and consequences continue to be recognized and felt today.

built on notions of "progress," which implies a movement forward into a better and brighter future. For example, in language that precedes and prefigures Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous declaration in his 1963 "I Have a Dream Speech," "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," prominent nineteenth-century racial uplift leader W.E.B. Du Bois writes in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "Surely there shall yet dawn some mighty morning to lift the Veil and set the prisoned free. Not for me,—I shall die in my bonds,—but for fresh young souls who have not known the night and waken to the morning; a morning when men ask of the workman, not 'Is he white?' but 'Can he work?' When men ask artists, not 'Are they black?' but 'Do they know?' " (510). These imaginings of progress express hope for a better future particularly in terms of its promise for future generations.

Du Bois often drew on tropes of inheritance in his writings in *The Souls of Black Folk*, for example constructing an image of "the wretched economic heritage of the freedmen of slavery" (479) and arguing that

> these workingmen [freed black laborers] have been trained for centuries as slaves. They exhibit, therefore, all the advantages and defects of such training; they are willing and good-natured, but not self-reliant, provident, or careful . . . Nor does it require any fine-spun theories of racial differences to prove the necessity of such group training after the brains of the race have been knocked out by two hundred and fifty years of assiduous education in submission, carelessness, and stealing. (478)

Likewise, prominent African American educator and leader Booker T. Washington recognized the significance of inheritance (figured in the following quote as ancestry, material property, family name, and race) in influencing social position in both positive and negative respects. The ease and familiarity with which Washington draws

on these tropes in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901), exemplifies their central position within dominant discourse of the time:

> More than once I have tried to picture myself in the position of a boy or man with an honoured and distinguished ancestry which I could trace back through a period of hundreds of years, and who had not only inherited a name, but fortune and a proud family homestead; and yet I have sometimes had the feeling that if I had inherited these, and had been a member of a more popular race, I should have been inclined to yield to the temptation of depending upon my ancestry and my colour to do that for me which I should do for myself. Years ago I resolved that because I had no ancestry myself I would leave a record of which my children would be proud, and which might encourage them to still higher effort. (33-34)

Similarly, in the pages of her fiction, Pauline Hopkins achieves her dual goals of making effective politicized appeals to her middle-class readers and writing entertaining reading material simultaneously by using the inheritance plot as the framework for her more pressing concerns. For beyond and behind seemingly superficial middle-class concerns such as money, property, courtship, and marriage lie much more explosive and politically charged arguments. Hopkins's techniques for exposing race-based prejudices and injustices and urging her readers to take meaningful action in their world are linked to her use and revision of the inheritance plot. By revolving the conflicts and tensions in much of her fiction around questions of inheritance, Hopkins is able to delve deeply into the many levels of significance and meaning implied by and attached to this term, including the accumulation and transmission of property and associated crime, greed, and manipulation; the deep and far-reaching effects that slavery and *de facto* and *de jure* prejudice have had on constructions of character traits and racial identity; the cultural transmission of values,

morals, and prejudices; and the disruption and destruction of families in the areas of marriage, procreation, and lineage.

While critics such as Carby and Nerad have explored Hopkins's use of inheritance as a dominant theme and literary device, critical investigation of this motif has so far focused on its role in her 1900 novel *Contending Forces*. Thus, the significance of inheritance remains to be explored in her first serial novel, *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-02).[2] In *Hagar's Daughter*, Hopkins presents readers with a generational model of social history that forms the basis of her use of the inheritance plot in the novel, using the conflicts of the past to expose parallel problems in the present and urge for change in the future. The trajectory of the novel's plot structure moves from using inheritance as a material embodiment and reflection of the legitimacy of individuals and their families to focusing instead on the influence of inherited moral righteousness on the collective community. The body of Hopkins's novel is filled with tensions and contradictions that are symptomatic of the conflicts that were being negotiated in the discourses of racial uplift that were prevalent in Hopkins's own social, cultural, and intellectual milieu at the turn of the century, an historical period that was dynamic and troubled. This includes debates centered around genetic heredity and inherited racial characteristics and biological traits that were key to the developing eugenics movement, discourses that John Nickel argues are traceable throughout Hopkins's

[2] These questions are as relevant to *Hagar's Daughter* as they are to all of her published fiction and nonfiction, including her two subsequent serial novels *Winona* and *Of One Blood*. The role of inheritance in these texts as a significant plot device remains to be fully explored.

writings and that are directly linked to her notions of racial uplift and progress.[3] However, in the end, Hopkins eventually argues in *Hagar's Daughter* that individuals have the power to shape and determine their own moral characteristics, denying that each successive generation must be bound by the intangible markers of humanity and tangible markers of biology that they have inherited from generations past. In this way, social justice and change become possible. By using variations of inheritance as dominant motifs throughout the novel, Hopkins is finally able to argue that more than acquiring property to pass down to future generations (and thereby ostensibly increasing the financial and social status and potential of the race), cultivating moral righteousness and divine principles in the nation's youth is instead more important to ensuring the capability and quality of future progress.

The Role of Inheritance in Early African American Literature

" 'The parents of children have a great responsibility resting upon them, not only in giving their own character as a good example, but in making the home atmosphere pure and exhilarating' " (qtd. in Shockley 22). Thus writes fifteen-year old Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins in her award-winning essay, "The Evils of Intemperance and Their Remedy" (1874), an essay that prefigures Hopkins's future career as a professional writer and social activist.[4] This quote from Hopkins's early essay

[3] See John Nickel, "Eugenics and the Fiction of Pauline Hopkins" in *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940*. Ed. Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2003. 133-47.

[4] Young Hopkins's essay also reveals an early, although distant, connection that she had with William Wells Brown: he was responsible for supplying the prize money of ten

suggests some of the social issues that she considered most important and integrated into her writing and rhetoric from a young age: the significance of a strong, morally upstanding personal character, and the powerful influence of the family and home on the quality of life for future generations. These ideals, while typical of late-nineteenth-century discourses of morality and domesticity, eventually converge in Hopkins's fictional writing and become more complicated by her attention to the significance of race in her rendering of stories of generational inheritance. Hopkins uses the tropes of domesticity—including morality, family, and the home—and exposes the roles that slavery, *de facto* and *de jure* prejudice, and social constructions of racial identity have in shaping these tropes and their effects on past, present, and future generations of African Americans.[5] In doing so, Hopkins in fact enters into a body of discourse that had been established by African American writers who preceded her who took up and revised dominant tropes of domesticity for political purposes, such as Harriet Jacobs. Hopkins's use of many of the devices and tropes of earlier slave narratives and novels written by African American authors is itself a tangible manifestation of her own inheritance of the literary techniques, practices, and rhetoric that were established by her predecessors, African American writers such as Jacobs and William Wells

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dollars in gold with which Hopkins was awarded. The social and literary works of Hopkins and Brown would later become intertwined in ways she may have hardly imagined as a young girl in 1874.

[5] As John Nickel claims in his article "Eugenics and the Fiction of Pauline Hopkins," "While segregation and disenfranchisement substantially blocked public avenues for social change, Hopkins, in order to construct a program for racial progress, turned to intimate areas of life—marriage and reproduction—that could be selfregulated by African Americans" (134).

Brown.[6] In turn, the success and persuasiveness of Hopkins's own politically charged arguments and teachings had the potential to shape the "cultural inheritance" of future generations of readers by influencing the nature of real social and legal relationships and practices. Thus, this socio-literary interconnectedness evident in Hopkins's work models and exemplifies the connections and influences among generations of readers, writers, and cultural communities that are ongoing and dynamic.

When viewed through the lens of race and the history of slavery, the inheritance plot manifests itself in three main areas: the inheritance of property, both tangible (such as money, land, and material objects) and intangible (such as family names and forms of cultural capital); the inheritance of racial or racialized characteristics, markers, and identities; and the inheritance of morals, traditions, values, and practices. These embodiments of inheritance are key to the racialized inheritance plot as it is used in many of the major nineteenth-century texts written by African Americans, including Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Similar to the authors of these texts, Hopkins's focus on inheritance is influenced by the impact that the legacy of slavery has had on African

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[6] In her article "Inherited Rhetoric and Authentic History: Pauline Hopkins at the *Colored American Magazine*," C.K. Doreski "explores Hopkins's move from the inherited rhetoric of the representative biographical sketch to a culturally defined, intertextually enriched vision of the way in which all history *is* biography" (75). In this way, Doreski also positions Hopkins's writing strategies within a literary and rhetorical tradition, specifically that of the "representative biographical sketch," and then argues that Hopkins revises that literary inheritance to suit her own political purposes. Doreski terms this a form of "formulaic inheritance" or "rhetorical inheritance" (74), illustrating the ways that literary techniques and strategies themselves can be imagined as a form of inheritance.

American relationships to inherited property, identity, and traditions. However, she is unique among this group of writers in also taking up the inheritance plot because of its established use as a plot device in both contemporary popular fiction and "highbrow" fiction. This is a strategy that is directly linked to Hopkins's belief in all types of fiction as influential means of reaching a wide audience and achieving racial uplift. In this complex blending of intertextuality and genre, Hopkins argues in *Hagar's Daughter* that these renderings of the tropes of inheritance are significant because of their effect not on the particular individual or the individual family, but on the broader African American community at the turn of the century; as Hanna Wallinger argues, "[Pauline Hopkins] always judged the individual according to his value for the race in general" (*Biography* 71). Likewise, this final focus on the community is itself a reflection of Hopkins's lifelong concern with "community-based, collective action" (Doreski 71).[7] It is also bound up in the nature of her most significant publishing forum, the *Colored American Magazine*, which was a co-operative publishing effort, Hopkins's connection to her African American literary predecessors, and her construction of herself as a socially and politically driven "race writer" and public figure. As C.K. Doreski argues, "The move from author of individual significance (a concern of her transcendentalist forebears) to author as a community force serving a larger historical project began for Hopkins during her formative years as editor of *CAM*" (72).

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[7] As an example of Hopkins's belief in the importance of the community, and the integration of this belief into her persona and her production, Lois Brown draws attention to the words " 'Yours for humanity,' the eloquent pledge that [Hopkins] coined and used beneath portraits and in written works . . . [which] underscored the wholehearted and selfless commitment that she brought to her professional work and community activism" (318).

In fact, the trajectory of the inheritance plot in *Hagar's Daughter*, as it moves from the individual to the collective community, echoes in interesting ways Hopkins's active construction of her public identity through the selective privileging and strategic presentation of herself as a product of her distinguished ancestry.[8] Until recently, critical approaches to Hopkins's life and writings were somewhat constrained by a lack of resources documenting her early life and her personal life; when she wrote in her early prize-winning essay about the power of parents, the home, and family life to shape the lives of generations, we could only wonder if Hopkins spoke from a place of personal experience. Thus, before the publication of Lois Brown's wonderfully detailed biography *Pauline Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution* (2008), scholarly research and critical interpretations of Hopkins were necessarily characterized mainly by a focus on the texts that she published and on her roles as a professional writer, editor, and spokeswoman for racial uplift at the turn of the century, rather than issues pertaining to her inner life, psychology, or personal and familial relationships.[9] Thus, most Hopkins scholarship has, until this point, been characterized by an absence of a focus on her as an individual. In light of Brown's

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[8] It is interesting to note that Hopkins published *Hagar's Daughter* in the *CAM* under a pseudonym, Sarah A. Allen. A number of theories have been set forth in an attempt to explain or understand the reasons why Hopkins would have chosen to publish this text (as well as others) under a pseudonym; for example, she often wrote a substantial number of the articles in each issue of *CAM*, so she may have been trying to diversify the "authorship" of the magazine (Cordell 55). Whatever her reasons may have been, the use of a pseudonym may suggest that Hopkins directed public attention away from herself as an individual figure, while instead maintaining a focus on the issues at the heart of the writings themselves.

[9] The exploration in Chapter One of Louisa May Alcott's career and use of the inheritance plot, drawing on the extensive collection of Alcott's personal journals and letters that are available to the public, provides a fitting contrast to Hopkins as an author in this regard.

methodical and well-document reconstruction of Hopkins's ancestry, family life, and personal activities from her early years on, it is now possible to deduce, for example, that it seems likely that as a fifteen year-old high school student, much of her outlook on family life would at this point have been shaped by that which she lived in her own family's home. Although her mother obtained a legal divorce from her father on the grounds of adultery—a judgment which also gave Hopkins's mother sole legal custody of the young Pauline, awarded her alimony, and reinstated her mother's maiden name of Allen—her mother soon entered into a second marriage that would provide her with lifelong happiness and Pauline with a loving and supportive stepfather; it is in fact from her stepfather that Hopkins takes her last name. The Hopkins family "enjoyed a significant amount of domestic stability in the first years of their lives together" (Brown 64), and the addition of her stepfather's own distinguished family history and lineage to that which she drew from her father's and mother's genealogies only enriched Hopkins's identification with "her impressive family tradition of advocacy and uplift" (7).

Lineage is in fact one of the most significant defining aspects of Hopkins's identity, and it is in particular a lineage that is distinguished by high morals and principles and active involvement in respectable social, cultural, and literary activities, including abolition. The links between lineage, inheritance, and racial uplift (and, therefore, the links between past, present, and future) are made clear in this way. Brown's biography of Hopkins makes significant contributions to and revisions of the body of Hopkins scholarship in her revelation of not only the details of Hopkins's ancestry and the significance with which Hopkins considered it, but also in Brown's

unveiling of Hopkins's strategic manipulations of the details of her ancestry in a concerted effort to construct herself as a particular type of "highly visible and professional persona" (15, 18). Implicit in Hopkins's construction of her public self was the creation of an identity that would help rectify "The social exclusion that she suffered" as a result of "the harsh realities of African American social elitism and class privilege" (19). By drawing out and building on particular aspects of her ancestry, and integrating the achievements of her ancestors into her own rhetorical techniques, Hopkins reveals that family lineage is key to the success of the bourgeois African American political activist. This suggests that the quality of family connections is thought to have a real influence on the identity and quality of the individual, solidifying the significance of what is inherited, both in tangible and intangible terms, from the past. Interestingly, Wallinger claims that "There is a strange reluctance on the part of the older Pauline Hopkins to spell out her relationships with famous people . . . Most likely, given the self-confidence that she had as a member of the *Colored American Magazine* staff, she wanted to be judged by her achievements and not only by her family background" (*Biography* 23). However, Brown's work revises this interpretation to a great extent, while at the same time agreeing that Hopkins was "fascinat[ed] with destiny and self-creation, principles and parentage. . . . [and] explored these issues in much of her writing" (16). Thus, simultaneous with Brown's detailed reconstruction of Hopkins's lineage, her revelation of Hopkins's strategic manipulations of the details of this lineage makes the tension between inherited and

self-made identities readily apparent, a conflict that resonates not only in Hopkins's fiction and non-fiction, but in her own life as well.[10]

In addition to the writings of prominent African American educators and leaders such as Washington and Du Bois, questions of inheritance have played a key role in African American literature since the publication of the first novels and slave narratives written by African American authors in the mid-nineteenth century. "Inheritance" is such a relevant term to this literature, and the experiences that shaped and inspired it, because it encapsulates so many of the fundamental consequences of slavery. These consequences had far-reaching and long-lasting effects, reverberating through the post-Reconstruction era and beyond. Perhaps the most powerful and fundamental determinant in mid- to late nineteenth-century African American narratives of inheritance is the literal and legal definition of slaves as property themselves. As Julie Cary Nerad argues in her article, " 'So Strangely Interwoven': The Property of Inheritance, Race, and Sexual Morality in Pauline E. Hopkins's Contending Forces,"

> For African Americans, gaining and retaining ownership of one's self was of primary importance not only for its implicit psychological value, but also because it made possible the transformation within U.S. socio-cultural and legal systems from an object position (as human chattel) to a subject position (as thinking person) and thus guaranteed (nominally at least) certain "inalienable" social and legal rights, if not always the franchise.

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[10] As Brown argues, "Hopkins was a woman consumed by the rhetoric and power of genealogy; indeed, she frequently spoke of lineage as a perpetually vexed, sometimes hobbling, and possibly emancipatory construct. Such inclinations, however, were not solely the cultivated hallmarks of a professional writer or tactics used to enhance the melodramatic plots of her serialized stories. There was a set of genuine and deep personal fact, fictions, and mysteries that shaped her views of bloodlines and inheritance" (33). Interestingly, Hopkins did not marry and did not have any children; as an only child, the lineage of her own immediate family ended with her. Instead, Hopkins's legacy lives on in her speeches and writings.

> Owning the self further entailed the possibility of owning other forms of property, even though the enforcement of Black codes and the relatively unchecked reign of white supremacist violence made that ownership tenuous. (358)

The ideological process of transforming a human individual into nothing more than a commodity, with value only insomuch as it is able to forcibly labor, necessitates a violent stripping away of the human rights and identity of the individual. The painful struggles and conflicts that result point to the very real consequences of this violence, from physical and psychological trauma, to the separation of families, to the daily inability of slaves to know or determine their own fate. Among the consequences of being defined as property were being treated as merchandise to be bought and sold, and being transferred as part of an owner's estate upon the owner's death, thus becoming one of many different types of inherited property to be passed down within families or sold or traded. In one of the most famous nineteenth-century slave narratives, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs reiterates time and again the fundamental identity of the slave as property in the eyes of society and the law, existing and treated as no more than any inanimate object, animal, or machine. Her enforced identity as property is used as a weapon of power, dominance, and control against her by her licentious master, Dr. Flint, who torments Jacobs for years while trying to sexually abuse her: "He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things" (27).

Jacobs makes clear the scope of the consequences of a human's being defined as property, explaining that "according to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, can *hold* no property" (3). Because ownership of property by slaves was prohibited under

slavery, "inheritance" could not have included land or other types of property (as it is often thought to in dominant discourse), which thus means that land and other types of real property would not have been able to be passed down for generations.[11] Furthermore, legal marriage was essentially prohibited under slavery, and slave families were often haphazardly and permanently separated and dispersed, thus making the transmission (let alone acquisition) of property either impossible, irrelevant, or achieved through channels or means other than those that were recognized or dictated by traditional laws.[12] Jacobs exposes the disparity between the economic situations of the slave owners versus that of the slaves by contrasting the former's seemingly meaningless reverence attached to the items of material inheritance that establish and prove their so-called "aristocratic" social positioning with the utter inability of the slaves to do the same. The ability of the slave owners to make gestures of pious tribute to their ancestors and to secure the stable financial futures of their offspring is used to highlight their hypocrisy as well as emphasize the plight of slaves: "When grandmother applied to him for payment, he said the estate was insolvent, and the law prohibited payment. It did not, however, prohibit him from

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[11] The significance of property to post-Reconstruction African Americans can be seen in the debates between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois over the need to acquire property and material goods as a key component of racial progress. As Julie Cary Nerad argues, "Given the then-ongoing debate between the political camps of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, turning partially on the extent to which material gain and the accumulation of property were necessary for 'racial uplift,' Hopkins's emphasis on issues of property was quite pertinent, though largely ignored" (358).

[12] The notion of property itself, as it embodies and represents the ideological construct of a family unit, may also have been conceived and lived in different ways by African Americans of the time. This may have included, for example, the transmission of oral histories or narratives or religious/spiritual rituals from generation to generation.

retaining the silver candelabra, which had been purchased with that money. I presume they will be handed down in the family, from generation to generation" (Jacobs 8).

Because slaves were themselves legally defined as property, they were also unable to legally marry, meaning that "families" were not recognized by the legal powers that legitimized family structures and organized the associated structures of entitlement, kinship, and descent. Furthermore, the transmission of family names that functioned as another proof of familial legitimacy and entitlement was also ostensibly impossible under the system of slavery, as many slaves were randomly named and renamed by their owners.[13] Thus, the family name that may have been passed on to the children of slaves as a form of inheritance was also a marker of slavery. The subjective adoption of last names by freed slaves after emancipation also complicates and enriches the picture of the transmission of "family names," and all that they are thought to represent, in these families. The law did not attach any significance to the family name of the slave, and slave children born as the product of a relationship, whether consensual or violent, between a slave and her owner were given none of the legal protection or benefits that would have been associated with the giving to the child of the owner's family name. As Jacobs writes in her narrative,

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[13] As Booker T. Wasington writes in his autobiography: "After the coming of freedom . . . In some way a feeling got among the coloured people that it was far from proper for them to bear the surname of their former owners, and a great many of them took other surnames. This was one of the first signs of freedom. When they were slaves, a coloured person was simply called 'John' or 'Susan.' There was seldom occasion for more than the use of the one name. If 'John' or 'Susan' belonged to a white man by the name of 'Hatcher,' sometimes he was called 'John Hatcher,' or as often 'Hatcher's John.' But there was a feeling that 'John Hatcher' or 'Hatcher's John' was not the proper title by which to denote a freeman; and so in many cases 'John Hatcher' was changed to 'John S. Lincoln' or 'John S. Sherman,' the initial 'S' standing for no name, it being simply a part of what the coloured man proudly called his 'entitles' " (14).

> It was a sad thought that I had no name to give my child. His father caressed him and treated him kindly, whenever he had a chance to see him. He was not unwilling that he should bear his name; but he had no legal claim to it; and if I had bestowed it upon him, my master would have regarded it as a new crime, a new piece of insolence, and would, perhaps, revenge it on the boy. (68)

William Wells Brown also writes of the significance of the moment as a free man that he was named by a white man, a moment that is rendered both as a blessing of freedom as well as a curious reenactment of the unequal roles of dominance and power that are associated with the act of naming. In his narrative, the Quaker man who aided Brown and helped him secure his freedom also bestowed his own name upon him: " 'Since thee has got out of slavery, thee has become a man, and men always have two names.' William told him that as he was the first man to extend the hand of friendship to him, he would give him the privilege of naming him" (21). Ironically, even as a free man, Brown's "identity" is not necessarily his own, or even one that he inherited from his mother and father, but rather an identity bestowed by a white man, although done so benevolently.

When compared to her literary predecessors, Hopkins's treatment of inheritance is unique because it is complicated by her involvement in the racial uplift movement among African American intellectuals of her time. Her use of tropes of inheritance is in constant tension throughout her fiction because while she is eager to legitimize, elevate, and glorify the origins and legacies of African Americans as nothing less than noble, particularly those of the bourgeois middle class, fundamental to the ideology of racial uplift is the ability of each individual to raise themselves up and improve their conditions in life through self-help, hard-work, and piety regardless of their or their ancestors' past. Thus, there is a constant tension throughout Hopkins's

fiction between establishing and privileging the respectable lineage and morally righteous principles and traditions of her characters and the ability of her characters to change, improve, and achieve progress regardless of their origins. Each scenario is attractive and suggestive in its own ways, yet each poses problems and contradictions to Hopkins's overall project of racial uplift. Specifically, this is the tension between privileging what is inherited on the one hand and pushing for self-made success and individual achievement on the other. If what is inherited is always privileged, then in theory no one has the opportunity or the ability to lift themselves up by their own efforts, but will instead always be defined by their past.

This line of thinking also threatens to support racist ideologies that assign racial identity an innate, biological locus, particularly in ways that dehumanize African Americans and that were often used to justify slavery. For example, the pseudo-scientific theory of eugenics, which rose to increasing popularity and cultural authority around the turn of the twentieth century, justified racist, ethnocentric, sexist, and classist ideologies and hierarchies with theories of genetic heredity and biological determinism. In "Eugenics and the Fiction of Pauline Hopkins," John Nickel explores Hopkins's interaction with and arguable appropriation of many of the most problematic theories of eugenics in her writings. Nickel argues that

> While Hopkins agreed with the majority of contemporary black writers that educational and moral progress was important to racial uplift, she also prescribed another remedy. . . . Hopkins advocated that African Americans' genetic improvement was necessary for racial advancement, and dependent on their marital choices. . . . Calling for the commingling of white and black racial lines, Hopkins asserted that it would produce a genetically superior race and eventually lead to the amelioration of African Americans' political and social conditions. (133)

Thus, partaking in discourses of inheritance that privileged biological or genetic forms of inheritance in determining identity presented risky territory for those who sought to overcome or dismantle social and institutional structures of inequality. While all of these conflicts are a central aspect of the tensions and contradictions in *Hagar's Daughter*, Hopkins eventually transcends above the moral morass in the novel's conclusion, reinforcing the possibility and necessity of moral progress, as an integral element of generational inheritance, to racial uplift.

Racial Uplift and Highbrow/Lowbrow Hybridity

As Hazel Carby claims, and as most critics agree, Hopkins took up the modes of fiction in order to write stories that were entertaining while at the same time aiming to encourage readers to take political action to help fight against social injustices:

> Hopkins, in particular, was described by a colleague as regarding fiction as a particularly effective way of gaining a wide audience by virtue of its being entertaining: "Her ambition is to become a writer of fiction, in which the wrongs of her race shall be so handled as to enlist the sympathy of all classes of citizens, in this way reaching those who never read history or biography." (*Womanhood* 127)

By taking up inheritance as a significant motif in her fiction, Pauline Hopkins employs a dual strategy that manipulates the literary conventions of both "lowbrow" (or popular) and "highbrow" fiction.[14] While the use of popular fiction may have ensured an appeal to a broad audience, the affinity of the inheritance plot in *Hagar's Daughter* with its preponderant use in influential highbrow fiction of her time also identified a

[14] See the Introduction for a discussion of the implications and usage of the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" in the context of nineteenth-century literary and cultural production.

much more particularized type of audience in Hopkins's readers. In this way, she obliquely reinforced the identity of her audience as respectably middle- to upper class. For example, the use of the inheritance plot, and related motifs, is integral to (among many others) Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the United States and *Macmillan's Magazine* in England in 1880-81, and published in book form in 1880), and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (published serially in *Scribner's* magazine in 1905).[15] The figure of Jewel in Hopkins's novel, and in many ways her mother Hagar before her, as a young woman newly entering the complex and often unforgiving social world of courtship and marriage among the wealthy elite, echoes such literary heroines as Henry James's Isabel Archer and, published just three years after the finale of *Hagar's Daughter*, Edith Wharton's Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*. The depiction of courtship and marriage in these three novels as a game of money, manners, and the exchange of property and name, and their look behind the gilded doors of the most elite households, is in the case of *Hagar's Daughter* not simply a way of providing readers with the voyeuristic pleasure of "seeing how the other half lives," but a method of creating a sense of identification between the audience and the text.[16] This would both elicit sympathy from readers as well as help

[15] See the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of the role of inheritance in what have come to be considered "canonical" texts of the nineteenth century, particularly those written by white male authors such as Hawthorne and James.

[16] This element of voyeurism is often spoken of in association with popular fiction such as crime narratives and, in particular, domestic detective fiction. The glimpse into the most intimate and private arenas of life and the home, and the drama and deception that often happen there, was and is an exciting and vaguely "forbidden" pleasure for readers. See

to create an imagined upper-middle-class community of readers with a sense of shared tastes, aesthetics, and the ability to identify with particular markers of the genteel, moneyed class. This is related to strategies of uplift by carving out an identity (not only to identify with, but to aspire to) for her audience, and the community that they represented, as having points of commonality with those that held cultural cachet and economic power.

Yet *Hagar's Daughter* is also a significant text in Hopkins's canon because it marks the beginning of her increasingly involved deployment of elements of popular fiction. As Carby explains, "The physical action [of *Hagar's Daughter*] . . . include[s] murder, kidnappings, and escapes, if not the actual fights often found in dime novels and story papers, and conclude[s] with a spectacle, a confrontation in open court which [brings] together the entire community of the text" (*Womanhood* 145-46). Hopkins uses inheritance as a significant plot device in her fiction in part because by the time she was writing it had been firmly established as a recognizable device of the increasingly popular genre of detective fiction, particularly domestic detective fiction.[17] In this way, Hopkins was playing to the public's established fascination with stories that dramatize private turmoil within the family sphere and that position crime, violence, and betrayal within the hallowed walls of the domestic home. Stephen Soitos, for example, undertakes a detailed analysis of the adoption of the conventions of detective fiction by African American writers in *The Blues Detective: A Study of*

Chapter Two for a more thorough discussion of this topic. See also Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.

[17] See the Introduction and Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of the history and characteristics of nineteenth-century domestic detective fiction.

African American Detective Fiction. Soitos bases his study on the claim that "African Americans from the beginning have fearlessly altered these formulas [of detective fiction] in their own way and to their own ends. Specifically, black authors were interested in using detective fiction to present African American social and political viewpoints and worldviews" (27). This is one way of thinking of Hopkins's intertextuality and use of popular fiction as a type of literary inheritance. It also points to important ways that the inheritance plot has unique meanings when complicated by constructions of race and the legacies of slavery and racial discrimination.

Thus, on one hand, the use of the inheritance plot aligns Hopkins's writing with a body of late-nineteenth-century, serialized, popular stories that use the plot at the level of entertainment, such as, for example, the domestic detective fiction of Metta Victor and Anna Katherine Green discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Both Victor's *The Dead Letter* and Green's *The Leavenworth Case*, which are referred to in current criticism as two of the earliest (if not perhaps the earliest) detective novels written in the United States, use the inheritance of money and property as the motivation for the stories' murders; violent power struggles to gain access to inherited wealth fundamentally drive the plots of both of these early detective novels. Likewise, in Hopkins's short story "Talma Gordon" (1900), the murders are immediately presumed to be tied to struggles for inheritance, as would be typical of the detective genre; yet a financial motive for murder within the family is eventually dismissed by the dénouement, revealed as irrelevant in light of the main conflicts and transgressions

that are truly at stake at the heart of the story.[18] Furthermore, by using the framework of the well-known Lizzie Borden murders, a notorious scandal that had been exhaustively played out in the pages of national newspapers in sensational terms, as the loose basis for "Talma Gordon," Hopkins consciously uses the language and content of a broadly shared popular culture to both engage her readers and make a very important political argument. That is, by co-opting the Lizzie Borden story, a well-known event of Hopkins's time and part of a collective national consciousness, Hopkins enters into an ongoing national popular dialogue and revises it to argue that hypocrisy and corruption, as well as racial mixing, lie at the heart of the nation's families. In this way, Hopkins's writing evidences the intersection of the unique characteristics of popular crime narratives with social conflict. Critics agree that Hopkins strategically adopted the formulas of popular fiction in her stories because she believed that she could reach and entertain, and by extension educate and influence, the greatest number of readers that way.

At the same time, the *CAM* was, from its very inception, intended to be a forum for highlighting the achievements of the African American community in order to uplift the race and bring about social justice. In its active participation in identifying and creating a community, both real and imagined, the *CAM* contributed to shaping particular, racially inflected ideals. Those ideals included the promotion of the markers and achievements of an African American middle class; as Sharon Harris argues, "The

[18] A similar tension is in fact also maintained in the discourses surrounding the Borden murders; while Lizzie's motive was often assumed to be financial, conflicts around gender roles, power, and opportunity constantly emerge as more compelling and complex issues. See the Introduction and Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of this case.

primary audience for the *Colored American Magazine* was middle- to upper-class readers. Little attention was focused on the working- and lower-middle classes in the magazine" (xxxii). While the *CAM* was at heart a politicized magazine, and writers such as Hopkins used forms of popular fiction in its pages, Hopkins and the other editors of the *CAM* strove to craft an African American interest magazine that would achieve and embody a level of cultural respectability similar to that eventually claimed by the *Atlantic Monthly*. As Hopkins biographer Hanna Wallinger argues, "The *Colored American Magazine* set out to be a quality journal similar to the *Atlantic Monthly* and saw itself as a magazine dedicated to the needs of a particular reading group: African Americans and as large a number of white sympathizers as possible" (*Biography* 50).[19] Wallinger locates a strong influence in Hopkins's editorial leadership of the magazine, arguing that with "the inclusion of numerous poems, short stories, and serial novels, the *Colored American Magazine* truly turned into a quality journal" under her tenure (54). Thus, Hopkins herself arguably worked to make the magazine a journal with cultured, educated, and morally upstanding literary content. In this dynamic combination of literary hierarchies, the *CAM* under Hopkins's leadership worked to make the most of the realms of "highbrow" and "lowbrow," creating a hybrid periodical that offered the potential for success in the number and type of subscribers as well as success in the magazine's capacity for influencing social

[19] C.K. Doreski further supports this comparison between the two journals, while noting their distinct differences: "[The *CAM*] (not unlike such nineteenth-century bourgeois cousins as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Putnam's Monthly*) schooled its readers in arts and manners, hoping to provide that surface of success expected in the emerging middle class. But it also advanced a politically charged, cultural agenda in its challenge to the status quo and its commitment to the discovery and preservation of African American history" (72).

change as an instrument of entertainment, didacticism, and racial uplift. Hopkins's strategic use of representations of inheritance in her fiction proves to be a telling embodiment of this complex duality.

Hagar's Daughter: A Story of, and For, Generations

In Hopkins's stories of race and the inheritance plot, the plot functions as a tool, an over-plot, a strategic way of entering into a more detailed exploration of the "real" issues at stake.[20] Hopkins's serial novel *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* was published in the *Colored American Magazine* in the years 1901-02, and is the first of her three serial novels. The story of *Hagar's Daughter* begins by focusing on inheritance represented as material objects and real property, associated with class-based stability and wealth, that signify social status and embody the respectability of proving and tracing a family's history and lineage. As the plot moves toward its first major moment of conflict, struggles to gain access to this material inheritance serve as the impetus for crime, murder, kidnapping, and deception. In this way, the initial plot paradigm closely follows the use of inheritance as a common plot device in detective fiction as a popular genre. However, as the story continues to unfold, "inheritance" as a significant literary plot element and social construct shifts from literal material objects and wealth to represent more fluid and intangible human

[20] This is similar to the function of the inheritance plot in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Inheritance in Twain's novel is first introduced as literal money and property, an economic motive for theft and murder. This functions as the instigation for establishing fundamental plot points that will in turn drive the larger action and episodes of the story, most significantly the question of the roles of nature (inherited character and racial traits) versus nurture in determining identity. See the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of the role of inheritance in this text.

characteristics of morals, values, ideals, and behavior as they are or are not passed down through generations. Hopkins thus uses inheritance as a plot device and a theme to drive the story at the level of entertainment value and popular appeal as well as to seamlessly shift the story's focus to the broader and more politically pressing issues of human beliefs and behavior, as they influence and are influenced by racism, injustice, and inequality. As has been noted, each of these representations of inheritance are linked to one another and are complicated by the history of slavery and its far-reaching and lasting effects on African American families, notions of property, and constructions of racial identity and difference.

The plot of *Hagar's Daughter* is as complex and winding as would be expected of popular serial fiction of the time, with the action ebbing, flowing, and rising to cliffhangers with each installment.[21] Part of the complexity of the plot of *Hagar's Daughter* lies in its use of an introductory section set twenty years before the main action of the rest of the story, giving readers a look into the origins, motivations, and actions of the main characters.[22] The use of disguise throughout the rest of the novel further complicates the story, as the identities of three of the main characters are intentionally disguised, while the identities of a number of others are revealed to be

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[21] Augusta Rohrbach interprets an interesting significance in Hopkins's use of the convoluted strategies of popular fiction, giving her adaptation of this genre a conscious political and philosophical intentionality: "Her complicated plots—plots sometimes too elaborate to be considered anything other than a series of episodes—duplicate the complexities of identity and experience for Hopkins. . . . her use of serial fiction, with its emphasis on the episodic and yet continuous unfolding of plot, duplicates her developing sense of history" (483).

[22] The climax of this section is quite clearly modeled after William Wells Brown's 1853 novel *Clotel*, meaning that while origins are significant to the plot of the novel, they are also established as relevant to the text and its author within a particular literary tradition.

uncertain or unstable. The novel opens with a brief historical background of the circumstances leading to the Civil War, detailing the build-up and eventual explosion of tensions between North and South around the question of slavery. In particular, the treatment of the conflict vilifies the South and gives the North the potential to redeem itself for its acquiescence and thus responsibility for the conflict, explaining that the situation was "due more to the long-accustomed subserviency of Northern people to the slaveholders than to a real, personal hatred of the Negro" (3). This comment is clearly related to Hopkins's construction of her audience, comprised mostly of middle-class Northerners, both black and white, and speaks of her hopes of influencing her readers to revive the passion and agitation for social justice of the earlier abolitionist movement that had once been active in the North (especially her home of Boston). These sentiments clearly establish the tone, perspective, and intention of the novel as a politically motivated attack against racial injustice.

As the novel begins, the narrator tells of the happy coming together of two Baltimore plantation estates through marriage. This plotline immediately signals the economic basis of marriage and the system of slavery that essentially underlies and supports the type of property to be exchanged and gained through this marriage. The main character, Hagar Sargeant, is eighteen years old, a cultured, educated (read: socially marked as white) young girl on the verge of womanhood, naïve but breathlessly hopeful of her future. She innocently falls in love with and marries the middle-aged owner of the neighboring estate, Ellis Enson, becoming the wealthy and well cared-for matriarch of his estate. Due to Ellis's marriage and the subsequent birth of his daughter, the inheritance of the Enson estate is guaranteed to pass by his

brother, the rascally St. Clair, who is unmarried and was declared unfit to inherit by their father, the dead Enson patriarch. Thus, in order to secure his access to the inheritance (which includes money, property, and slaves), St. Clair is willing to do whatever he must to destroy his brother's family. St. Clair falls into association with an evil, unscrupulous slave trader named Walker who is able to provide him with just the information that he needs—St. Clair's brother Ellis has unknowingly married a black woman. Hagar is revealed to be "black" because Walker can prove that he "lent" her, as a slave child, to Mr. and Mrs. Sargeant, her ostensible "parents," after she was orphaned. Her birth mother was in fact a slave, and Walker's possession of the knowledge of that maternal connection and the bill of sale is the only proof that anyone will need, legally or socially, to establish Hagar's "true" racial identity. After struggling with what is, for him, the instinctively reprehensible notion of having married a woman with a single drop of black blood in her veins, Ellis decides to run away with Hagar to Europe where they can live their lives together in peace. However, before he can make the necessary arrangements, Ellis is found dead of an apparent suicide. With no one left to protect them, Hagar and her daughter are carted off to the slave market to be sold immediately; before this deed can be accomplished, and in a clear echo of William Wells Brown's novel *Clotel*, Hagar throws herself and her baby into the icy waters of the Potomac in full view of the nation's capital, and the two ostensibly meet their deaths.

After establishing this background, the setting and action of the novel shift to Washington, twenty years later, and to the wealthy and well-connected social circles of the nation's elite families and corrupt politicians. Although none of the original

characters from the novel's first section seem to be recognizable, they are in fact all present, although disguised and referred to by new names.[23] Hagar has survived her suicide attempt, and is now living a free and comfortable life disguised as Mrs. Bowen, the wife of Senator Zenas Bowen, although her husband is unaware of her true identity. Unbeknownst to Hagar, her daughter also survived the fall into the Potomac, was miraculously saved by Senator Bowen, and has been raised as his daughter, and thus Hagar's stepdaughter, Jewel, although neither parent is aware of the child's true identity. St. Clair Enson is disguised as General Benson, working in collusion with the slave trader Walker, who is now living as Major Madison, and his ostensible daughter Aurelia to secure access to yet another fortune (read: inheritance) not rightfully theirs by manipulating social relationships into money-making marriages. It is the slow and eventual revelation of all of these characters' true identities that drives the rest of the story,[24] a technique that makes the plot well-suited for the somewhat intrusive detective elements that are introduced in the latter third of the text. These revelations of identity (and, significantly, racial identity) are also key to revealing the complicated racial, sexual, and familial genealogies that have long troubled the African American

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[23] In her Introduction to Hopkins's collected magazine novels, Hazel Carby further explores the significance of this use of disguise in relation to constructions of race and identity: "while this use of disguise is conventional and formulaic, Hopkins also complicates questions of hidden identity through her three heroines who are disguised as white. The disguise of whiteness enabled Hopkins to write a 'black' story that unravels in the heart of elite Washington society" (xxviii) and "*Hagar's Daughter* contains three black female characters who exist within the context of a white community and are believed to be white; for each, blackness is a secret and a means of their victimization" (xxxvii).

[24] Again, this narrative process of revelation is also characteristic of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

experience in the United States as a result of the violences perpetrated by slavery and post-Reconstruction Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.

Lois Cuddy and Claire Roche nicely summarize one of the major strains of the novel's plot, linking its concerns with light-skinned characters and "amalgamation" to a pattern of writing by African American women writers such as Hopkins:

> women authors often confronted the questions of racial equality through plots of inadvertent or purposeful "passing" in which beautiful light-skinned women or men of "mixed blood" are superior to both blacks and whites. The narrative crisis occurs when the whites learn of the "tainted blood," and the responses of the characters are the measure of their worth in these stories. (36)

True to the formula outlined here by Cuddy and Roche, in the final pages of the novel Hagar's "true" identity as a "black" woman is revealed, and subsequently Jewel's identity as Hagar's long-lost daughter is also revealed. Because of the cultural edict that the condition of the child must necessarily follow that of the mother, Jewel's inherited identity is also radically revealed to be black. It is with both of these revelations that, as Cuddy and Roche argue, the virtue and worth of each character is put to the test, revealed in their reaction to the acquisition of this knowledge. Hagar's long-lost first husband, Ellis Enson (who, it turns out, is not really dead, but has instead been living as a lead detective, "the chief of the Secret Service Division" (258)) contritely and compassionately atones for his previous prejudices and takes Hagar again as his beloved wife (made possible by the convenient death of her husband, Senator Bowen, due to an illness). However, Cuthbert Sumner, Jewel's longtime love and newly-wedded husband, is unable to overcome his deeply ingrained prejudices and casts her away from him upon discovering what he disturbingly sees as

her "black bestiality" (270) and imagines as "the grinning, toothless black hag that was her foreparent" (271). Thus, the questions of morality, right feeling, and right action, become the measure of individual character as well as the potential for future justice and sweeping social change in the face of dominant discourses of inherited identity. Finally, as Hazel Carby notes, in the closing of the novel Hopkins makes a "shift from individual to nation," "rapidly shift[ing] her readers' attention from the individual consequences of racism to systemic oppression: 'Sumner questioned wherein he had sinned and why he was so severely punished. Then it was borne in upon him: the sin is the nation's' " (Introduction xlii). Thus, we see that in the novel's conclusion Hopkins has reiterated her focus on the community, rather than the individual alone, through the trajectory of a story that spans generations past, present, and future.

"It Was a Valued Heirloom": Inheriting Property

Hopkins uses material objects and real property—tangible forms of inheritance—in *Hagar's Daughter* to expose the roles that power and inequality have played in determining the fates and social status of African Americans as a result of the legacy of slavery. While the legacy of many African Americans' relationship to property, as a direct result of slavery, had been one of denied access and struggle to gain, Hopkins's text does not take a straightforward approach to the best way to rectify this particular history of material and social inequality. Through the course of the novel, material symbols of wealth and elite social status are rendered as mostly transitory and fleeting, easily taken away and destroyed. They are also the locus of

conflict, deception, and ruthless abuses of power, not least because the many embodiments of wealth are direct products of the slave system that serve and uphold them. Thus, although the accumulation of wealth and property may in theory be an attractive and important means of providing African Americans with cultural markers of bourgeois respectability and power, Hopkins's text in fact diminishes the value of acquiring and inheriting real property and material goods. This is a fraught position for Hopkins to take in light of the *CAM*'s aspirations to be a high-quality journal associated with an audience of mostly middle-class (and aspiring middle-class) readers. For, inevitably, class, property, wealth, social status and power are inextricably connected. Despite this connection, Hopkins argues in the end of *Hagar's Daughter* that the most critical and effective way to uplift and increase the potential of the race and the future of all generations is to cultivate, teach, and pass down moral righteousness and divine principles in the nation's youth. This position in fact places Hopkins and her text at the center of some of the most debated issues of the racial uplift movement, such as those articulated by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.

Indeed, Washington and Du Bois are often thought of today as occupying the central conflicting positions in turn-of-the-century racial uplift debates. In Julie Cary Nerad's study of the role of property and inheritance in Hopkins's novel *Contending Forces*, Nerad places at the forefront of her analysis the positions that Washington and Du Bois took regarding the appropriate role of property in the African American struggle to attain a better life:

> Washington emphasized technical and manual training in order to accumulate property, and the basic physical and social benefits such wealth could bring, at the expense of immediate political and social equality for African Americans. For Du Bois, such a compromise was unacceptable, although he did recognize the necessity of acquiring property. . . . Du Bois also believed that property gains could too easily threaten the more needed focus on equal political representation and advanced educational opportunities. (359)

A similar tension complicates *Hagar's Daughter*, as the action and conflicts in the story revolve around three main estates: the Sargeant, Enson, and Bowen Estates.[25] The story opens with a young and unmarried Hagar Sargeant living at the estate that is her parents' home and which "was the one next adjoining Enson Hall; not so large and imposing, but a valuable patrimony that had descended in a long line of Sargeants and was well preserved" (32). Hopkins describes the material objects in the home that Hagar is responsible for caring for, heirlooms that she treasures so reverently:

> Hagar stood at the window contemplating the scene before her. It was her duty to wash the heirlooms of colonial china and silver. From their bath they were dried only by her dainty fingers, and carefully replaced in the corner cupboard. Not for the world would she have dropped one of these treasures. Her care for them, and the placing of every one in its proper niche, was wonderful to behold. Not the royal jewels of Victoria were ever more carefully guarded than these family heirlooms. (33)

Hagar's motivation for so carefully attending to this ritual of preservation is, whether consciously for her or not, driven by the power of such objects to establish ancestry, family lineage, and class. Objects that are imbued with the symbolic power of "heirlooms" are treasured because they tell a story of a family's history, and are proof of the veracity of that story. By maintaining these objects, Hagar is symbolically and

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[25] Struggles to usurp the inheritance of the Sargeant, Enson, and Bowen estates drive the story's plots of deception and crime, and position Hopkins's text well within the popular genres that she hoped to co-opt in her work, particularly (domestic) detective fiction.

by association maintaining her own identity as the member of a family that possesses a history of respectable social position and stable racial identity, and is thus deserving of entitlement and recognition within the dominant community.

To provide a marked contrast to the white world of privilege and security in which Hagar is raised, Booker T. Washington's autobiography begins with a very different rendering of the narrative of family legacy and inheritance that he learned as a young slave:

> Of my ancestry I know almost nothing. In the slave quarters, and even later, I heard whispered conversations among the colored people of the tortures which the slaves, including, no doubt, my ancestors on my mother's side, suffered in the middle passage of the slave ship while being conveyed from Africa to America. . . . In the days of slavery not very much attention was given to family history and family records—that is, black family records. (1)

Family history is often preserved in material objects that are passed down through the generations, and Washington points to the many ways that this practice is rendered problematic for slave families—not least because of the very loss of family history and records.[26] The treatment of property in Hopkins's text is fundamentally informed by this very problem, as is suggested by the focus on family heirlooms described in the scene above. However, her argument here differs from what Washington taught as a powerful yet polarizing leader in the African American community at the turn of the century. In his famous speech given at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895 (and often referred to later as the "Atlanta Compromise"), Washington focuses on the uplift and

[26] This problem also points to the significance of ancestry in constructions of Hopkins's own identity as an African American woman, as discussed by biographers Lois Brown and Hannah Wallinger.

progress that would result from a building up of the "material prosperity" of the race through a commitment to vocational labor:

> "Cast down your bucket where you are" . . . Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions . . . Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life. . . . No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. (134)[27]

While Washington suggests that the accumulation of property (as the result of this commitment to vocational labor) should be, first and foremost, the most important goal of African Americans as they attempt to lift themselves up out of poverty and degradation, Hopkins instead traces the hypocrisy, instability, and vulnerability that have long been associated with the privileging of material prosperity. In this way Hopkins, like Du Bois, argues that there are more important things than property to focus on in the struggle for racial progress.

For example, the Enson Estate in *Hagar's Daughter* must always be thought of as a *plantation* home in particular, a system whose overall economic security, in addition to its day-to-day maintenance, relies on the labor of slaves. Thus, it is in the best interests of the estate's owners to protect that system regardless of their personal

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[27] Even in the latest years of his life, Du Bois seems to have continued to reflect on the significant differences between his beliefs and the teachings of Washington, writing in his autobiography: "Saving I neglected. I had had no experience in saving. My mother's family with whom I lived as a child never had a bank account nor insurance; and seldom a spare dollar . . . In money matters I was surely negligent and ignorant; but that was not because I was gambling, drinking or carousing; it was because I spent my income in making myself and my family comfortable instead of 'saving for a rainy day.' I may have been wrong, but I am not sure of that" (1118-19). This almost seems to speak directly to a line from Washington's Atlanta Exposition address: "The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house" (137).

political persuasion. The wealth and history of the Enson Estate initially suggest the potential for Hagar to establish herself and her daughter as heirs to a narrative of cultural legitimacy and social respectability and to secure their subject positions as protected, privileged white women. Yet this estate instead functions from the outset as the impetus for murder and the motivation for destroying the lives of its heirs. The nature of this property, and thus the identities and relationships of its heirs, is ultimately overdetermined by the long association of the property's original owners with slavery and concessions to a deeply entrenched racism. Because it is located in "the North," and yet is still subject to the influence of supporters of slavery, the Enson estate successfully reveals the hypocrisy that lies behind the façade of so many who make hollow concessions to the abolitionist movement. By the end of the novel, this estate has been abandoned and lies in ruin, functioning as a typical gothic haunted house in which the horrors of the past live on as ghostly reminders:

> Enson Hall reminded one of an ancient ruin. The main body of the stately dwelling was standing, but scarcely a vestige of the once beautiful outbuildings remained; the cabins in the slave quarters stood like skeletons beneath the nodding leaves and beckoning arms of the grand old beeches. War and desolation had done their best to reduce the stately pile to a wreck. It bore, too, an uncanny reputation. The negroes declared that the beautiful woods and the lonely avenues were haunted after nightfall. It had grown in to a tradition that the ghost of Ellis Enson "walked," accompanied by a lady who bore an infant in her arms. (228)

This decaying of the material embodiment of the history of slavery is a shift that mirrors the decaying usefulness and increasing irrelevance of racism and inequality that marks the end of the novel. This parallel reinforces the interplay between property and morality that is prevalent throughout the novel, and suggests that the nature of

inherited property also threatens the nature of inherited moral traditions and practices—their decay and degradation may be mutually constitutive.[28]

Through this particular treatment of property, Hopkins yet again positions her text within a complex literary context and tradition. In making her connection between the home, as both a literal and ideological construct, and the gothic, Hopkins draws from the rhetorical tools of her literary predecessors as well as contemporary popular fiction. As Eugenia DeLamotte argues,

> This Gothic setting [of the "ruined plantation house"] reveals slavery as the originary crime underlying all the others. . . . The brief but critical segment of the book centered on this Gothic dwelling is obviously indebted not just to the Gothic of Hopkins' contemporaries and immediate predecessors (Wilkie Collins, for example), but even more fundamentally to the older tradition of Ann Radcliffe. (71)

However, the gothic horrors of the home (not just the plantation home in particular) in Hopkins's text in fact have a genealogy that reaches back to texts at once different from and more familiar to Hopkins's genre than those that DeLamotte references: these horrors in fact haunt the earliest texts of African American literature. There are many different kinds of homes represented in these texts: the happy home, to the extent that it could be made "happy" while laboring under the constantly threatening shadow of slavery; the Plantation Home, an ever-present threat, the site of the worst violence perpetrated against slaves and the perversion and destruction of white and black families alike; the coffin-like "dungeon" attached to her grandmother's house that Harriet Jacobs lived in for seven long years in order to finally escape to freedom. In this final example, Jacobs represents her ancestral home as a prison, a house of

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[28] As is discussed in the Introduction, this theme is also prominent in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*.

horrors, as well as a conduit to her freedom.[29] In fact, the symbol of the home is ubiquitous in early African American novels and slave narratives, used as a powerful and extremely relevant embodiment of the violence and horror of slavery, reaching into each and every imaginable construct of the homes of all, both black and white. As Jacobs implores her audience,

> Reader, I draw no imaginary pictures of southern homes. . . . The young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows. Children of every shade of complexion play with her own fair babes, and too well she knows that they are born unto him of his own household. Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness. (36-37)

In a building on and revision of this tradition, the Bowen Estate, which includes the fortune linked to Jewel through her inheritance of her wealthy father's money is, in the second part of the novel, the impetus for deception, manipulation, and efforts to forcibly secure marriages based on cunning and social positioning.

There is one unique and vital piece of material property that plays a key role in both the unfolding of the narrative and the novel's larger argument about the nature of property itself. In the final pages of *Hagar's Daughter*, as the truth behind all of the hidden identities and secret lives is revealed, the hidden compartment in a small locket offers forth the contents that it has hidden for years. A small piece of paper tucked away in this locket finally establishes Jewel's identity, both her racial identity and her family lineage. Hazel Carby argues that this locket functions as a typical generic device, one of many "magical resolutions" in the novel that "were common popular

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[29] See Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997 and Justin Edwards, *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2003 for very useful analyses of the role of the gothic in Jacobs's text.

fictional narrative devices for returning an orphan to his or her true parents" (Introduction xli). It is important to note that Carby goes on to argue that "The secrets of the 'little hair trunk' lead to the discovery of Hagar's daughter but not to the restoration of a moral order. . . . the resolutions in *Hagar's Daughter* reveal the contradictions inherent in Hopkins's attempt to use popular and easily accessible narrative forms to question the morality of, rather than to restore faith in, the social formation" (xl-xli). However, when considered in light of the role of intersecting property, inheritance, and identity throughout *Hagar's Daughter* and in their contemporaneous debates around property and racial uplift, the consequences of Hagar's discovery of this locket and its secrets are less "typical[ly] generic" and more significantly strategic, as well as less contradictory, than Carby claims here.

This locket is a family heirloom that has been passed down among generations of women and that ultimately holds the family truths that have heretofore remained hidden. Hagar's "mother" passes down the locket to her (although we have learned that Hagar's birth mother was in fact a slave, not the white woman who raised her), as well as the secret of the function of the locket and, by extension, the secrets that the locket thus is able to conceal: "Her mother had given her the locket at the time of her father's death, and had told her that it was a valued heirloom, and had explained to her the intricate working of the triple case. Probably no one had ever discovered the secret spring, and the case was supposed to be empty" (Hopkins 277). These secrets are thus connected to the inheritance of a family heirloom that holds Hagar's family secrets through all of the drama of the story. The discovery of this locket and the note hidden inside it essentially "ruin" Jewel's life because it confers "blackness" upon her and

turns Cuthbert away from her, ending their prospects for marriage and happiness. Thus, the destructive potential of inheritance is literally written into this piece of property, the family heirloom that once again establishes, verifies, propagates, and inexorably (nearly relentlessly) inscribes a fixed identity. Thus, it is only fitting that the moral order cannot, as Carby notes, be restored in this scene. As will be discussed later, it is only in the final scene of the novel that the potential for a new moral order emerges.

"The Blood of Generations": Inheriting Racialized Identities

Along with the spread of industrial capitalism and debates over the nature of labor and the accumulation of wealth and property, the nineteenth century was also marked by ongoing public debates over the nature of race and identity and the implications of race in social, scientific, and pseudo-scientific theories of identity and behavior. These debates had tremendous power to shape not only public opinion but also public policies and legal practices that in turn held enormous power to directly affect the lives of individuals and communities. At the heart of these debates were struggles to define the nature of inherited racial or racialized characteristics, markers, and identities. For example, the infamous "one-drop rule" dictated that any person who was proven (or even just claimed) to have a single drop of black blood in their veins was legally determined to be black. Thus, under this system, race was thought to be a biologically determined form of inheritance. However, racial identity was actually a socially constructed form of inheritance in this nineteenth-century system as, for

example, the condition of the child was said to follow that of the mother.[30] Thus, the racial identity of descendents was dictated by the construction of the race of their mother, as determined by the one-drop rule, regardless of her actual lived or chosen identity. Kristina Brooks argues in her article, "Mammies, Bucks, and Wenches: Minstrelsy, Racial Pornography, and Racial Politics in Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter*," that "The plot [of *Hagar's Daughter*] is driven by this mother-daughter relationship and the theme of maternal inheritance, which is most significant for its bestowal of racial identity" (120-21).[31] While this is true, we see that in *Hagar's Daughter* Hopkins in fact fights to move away from these deterministic definitions of race and their location in markers of biological inheritance. Rather, she strives to locate identity in markers of success and achievement; moral and intellectual strength; and legacies of righteousness. As her biographer Hanna Wallinger argues,

> Like many of her contemporaries, Hopkins felt the need to move away from the definition of races as inferior or superior, civilized or uncivilized, of races as determined only by skin color, shape of the head, texture of the hair, or shape of the nose. Famous men and women, according to her and

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[30] This claim is informed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant's definition of race in *Racial Formation in the United States*: "the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. With this in mind, let us propose a definition: *race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called 'phenotypes'), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. In contrast to the other major distinction of this type, that of gender, there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along the lines of race" (55).

[31] For a more detailed analysis of the history and implications of the intersection between race and maternal descent, see Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer 1987): 64-81) and P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Who's Your Mama? 'White' Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-Passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom." *American Literary History* 14.3 (Fall 2002): 505-39.

> most other African American intellectuals of her time, possessed reliable and verifiable records of achievements that could be documented. (*Biography* 70)

This perspective is embodied in Hopkins's focus on the inheritance and transmission of morals, traditions, values, and practices that should instead be used to consider the quality of a person's or a people's identity, rather than markers of biological inheritance.[32]

The female characters in *Hagar's Daughter*, in particular, struggle to come to terms with their own racial identity, while the men who love them struggle to accept blackness in the women they have been sexually attracted to or intimate with and have married.[33] Indeed, not a single male character in the novel is made to undergo this process of "blackening," which is significant because under the rubric of racial inheritance, blackness is always thought to be passed down through the mother.[34] The moment of Hagar's blackening is sudden, violent, and total, as she learns that her mother was a slave, and that she is thus in fact "black" and legally a slave herself:

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[32] It seems that this is a position that both Du Bois and Washington could have agreed on. For example, Du Bois imagined "a morning when men ask of the workman, not 'Is he white?' but 'Can he work?' When men ask artists, not 'Are they black?' but 'Do they know?'" (510) and Washington argued that, "Every persecuted individual and race should get much consolation out of the great human law, which is universal and eternal, that merit, no matter under what skin found, is in the long run, recognized and rewarded" (36-37).

[33] As Sigrid Anderson Cordell notes, this event in Hopkins's novel is a common plot device in literature of her time: "In addition to standard 'passing' narratives . . . the trope of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed sentimental heroine discovering that she has, or is accused of having, African-American ancestry appears throughout nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction" (64).

[34] As Cuddy and Roche note, "the eugenicists believed that the mother's heritage was primarily responsible for the defective traits" (37). Thus, the logic of maternal descent and inheritance that was used to propagate and populate slavery prior to its abolishment was revised to perpetuate associated sentiments of racial inferiority in the post-Reconstruction period.

> Could it be true, or was it but a hideous nightmare from which she would soon awake? Her mother a slave! She wondered that the very thought did not strike her dead. . . . Her name gone, her pride of birth shattered at one blow! Was she, indeed, a descendant of naked black savages of the horrible African jungles? Could it be that the blood of generations of these unfortunate ones flowed through her veins? (57)

Here we see that Hagar's instinctive mode of making sense of her identity is to think in terms of genetic inheritance, imagining the blood in her veins as a conglomeration of every drop of blood of her African ancestors, washing over and overpowering every drop of white ancestry in her blood. She imagines her African ancestry as primitive and savage, all in the terms of the biological racism that was so prevalent in Hopkins's day. Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche locate the origins of this line of thinking, embodied so clearly in the language and imagery of Hagar's reaction quoted above, in Darwin's evolutionary theories that were set forth in *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* and that fundamentally informed the eugenics movement:

> On the one hand, Darwin placed the Anglo-Saxon peoples in the "higher" orders and affirmed by "scientific" proof the European (and American) white man's intellectual, oral, and physical superiority. . . . On the other hand, Darwin and his colleagues and followers relegated the world's non-Anglo peoples to the "lower" races associated with inferiority, barbarism, and a closer affinity to the primate progenitors of the human race. (32)

By directly confronting this language and logic in dramatic and highly charged scenes such as this one with Jewel, Hopkins exposes and undermines the fears that underlie and perpetuate white racism and black degradation.

In contrast to the teachings of the prominent leaders of the racial uplift movement, Hopkins's writings focus on and seem to elevate amalgamation, or racial mixing by creating heroines such as Jewel that are of mixed-blood and typically light-skinned. According to Cuddy and Roche, "Du Bois preaches separatism and looks to

'race unity,' 'race solidarity,' and pride in the gifts and achievements of his people. He rejects 'amalgamation, which would gradually eliminate Negro characteristics" (34). In fact, Booker T. Washington also seems to have taken a position similar to that of Du Bois on this issue, famously arguing in his Atlanta Exposition address that "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (136). It is indeed in this respect that Hopkins's positions on the future of the races and the character of progress and uplift differ significantly from those of her uplift colleagues, and that her work has always incited an element of frustration and disapproval among Hopkins's contemporaries as well as scholars today. Sigrid Anderson Cordell notes that Hopkins's use of light-skinned heroines has often been a source of uncertainty and criticism regarding the goals and efficacy of her work as vehicles of racial uplift (53). Cordell goes on to argue that "Hopkins's refusal to compromise on questions of racial equality was an extension of, rather than a departure from, her advocacy of miscegenation. . . . far from embracing a strictly separatist politics, Hopkins openly advocated miscegenation as the ideal solution to racial strife, partly because it would destabilize fixed notions of 'pure' white blood" (61). Therefore, Hopkins has effectively debunked and turned away from the use of inherited racial identities and biological characteristics as the most useful, legitimate, and reliable sources of determining identity. Du Bois wrote in "Of the Sons of Master and Man," published in 1901, the same year that the serial publication of *Hagar's Daughter* began: " 'It is, then, the strife of all honorable men of the twentieth century to see that in the future competition of the races the survival of the fittest shall mean the triumph of the good, the beautiful, and the true' " (qtd. in Cuddy and Roche

34). As Cuddy and Roche interpret the significance of this quote, "No longer accepting survival in terms of biological reproduction alone, Du Bois looks to the qualities of morality, aesthetics, and spirituality that, according to Darwin's views, will enhance human life" (34). This is the very argument that concludes Hopkins's novel, *Hagar's Daughter*.

"Born With a Noble Nature": Inheriting Moral Characteristics

In addition to manifesting itself in representations of property and (racialized) identity, the motif of inheritance can take other forms such as morality, character, education, and freedom. While these latter types of inheritance may be thought of as less tangible than material objects such as family heirlooms, houses, or bank accounts, their influence in the world is no less real and visible in their effects and influence. In fact, the phrase "cultural capital" can be used to describe many of these types of inheritance, a phrase which strongly suggests the ability of these traits to afford their bearer the power to "purchase," "trade," or otherwise gain access to power and opportunity and to possess types of cultural cachet that can operate on par with other forms of literal wealth or political power. This is another way of formulating and fixing what Julie Cary Nerad identifies as "the complex connections among material gain, education, social equality, and political representation" (359). Or, as Washington phrased the significant advantages of possessing cultural capital in his time, "I believe it is the duty of the Negro—as the greater part of the race is already doing—to deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure

influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights" (143-44).

For example, when reading a slave narrative such as that written by William Wells Brown, we can explore cultural capital as a form and function of inheritance by looking beyond the assumption of materiality and asking questions such as: If not money or wealth or a traceable and stable ancestry or lineage, what *could* Brown "inherit" from his family? What was he in turn able to pass down to his own children as their inheritance? As a slave, the child of slaves, Brown was deprived of the ability to read and write. Education is a powerful form of cultural capital, with the ability to even simply read and write empowering an individual in incredible ways. In fact, the "higher education of Negro youth" was considered by W.E.B. Du Bois to be one of three main things to fight for in order to improve the lives of African Americans (politically, economically, socially, and personally), along with "political power" and "insistence on civil rights" (398). As he writes in "Of the Dawn of Freedom," "The opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter, and showed itself in ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent" (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 385). It is this very enlightening and empowering potential of education that caused it to be forbidden to slaves as a means of control and degradation. It is thus fitting that Brown writes in detail of the unusual way in which he learned how to read, taught by two young white children after Brown gained his freedom: "We all laid down upon the floor, covered

with the same blanket; and first one would teach me a letter, and then the other, and I would pass the barley sugar from one side to the other" (23). His first education was paid for with the first shilling he was ever able to earn for the product of his own labor as a free man (21), and the fruits of that labor are passed on to his children, beginning the process of enriching and uplifting the lives of each successive generation: "He has two daughters who are now in this country, being trained for teachers. Of course we need not add that for their education they are entirely dependent on their father's exertions" (38). Brown is able to pass on freedom and the ability to access education to his own children as their rightful inheritance, an inheritance he should have been entitled to from the moment of his own birth, as his ancestors before him should have been, too: "How ardently must the love of freedom burn in the poor slave's bosom, when he will pass through so many difficulties, and even look death in the face, in winning his birth-right, freedom" (18). Thus, freedom, like education, is a birthright, yet one that was able to be denied under slavery, while becoming a newly available form of inheritance to be transmitted within families following an escape from the degradation and limitations of slavery.[35]

In addition to these forms of cultural capital, inheritance can take the form of what Hopkins calls "the power of principle," or moral principles that are or are not passed down through families, communities, or societies (5). Moral principles were

[35] This is not to claim, however, that legally defined freedom automatically enabled access to education or other forms of cultural capital. Following Reconstruction, Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, along with more subtle forms of entrenched racism that exist to this day, perpetuated the debilitating effects of slavery in revised terms and incarnations. As Du Bois says, "For this much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free" (*The Souls of Black Folk* 390).

central to Hopkins's worldview and project of racial uplift, as we might well imagine of a woman who wrote an essay titled "The Evils of Intemperance and Their Remedy" at the tender age of fifteen. As Claire Pamplin argues in " 'Race' and Identity in Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter*," in Hopkins's imagining of the inheritance plot, "Her purpose is to demonstrate that the color line is so unreliable as to be no definer of race, no line at all, and thereby to expose the injustice of social and economic discrimination based on race. In Hopkins's view, the 'line' to be drawn was the line between those who aspired to education, hard work, and morality, and those who did not" (169). This debate was central to the ideologies behind both racist propaganda, such as the constructions of racial inferiority discussed previously, as well as the project of racial uplift. As Pamplin explains, "The notion of the black as a separate and possibly lower species had its proponents in post-Reconstruction racist thinking, but the dominant mode of distinguishing between the races became quality of character" (171). Hopkins's text finally argues that social justice is possible because of the fact that individuals have the power to shape and determine their own moral characteristics, and that because of this each generation is not forever bound to be defined by the markers of identity that they have inherited from generations past. Interestingly, this comes into direct conversation with, and refutes, the ideology of inheritance set out by a mid-nineteenth century writer such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose work, according to Gillian Brown, argues that "family inheritance, an endowment both economic and moral, links persons to real property as well as to physical properties and characteristics, placing persons under the power of their legacies" (107). As Hawthorne himself writes in the preface to *The House of the Seven*

Gables, "the author has provided himself with a moral—the truth, namely, that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief" (x).[36]

In his narrative, William Wells Brown recognizes the importance of moral principle not only to those who are oppressed, but also to those who are free: "In proportion as his mind expanded under the more favourable circumstances in which Brown was placed, he became anxious, not merely for the redemption of his race from personal slavery, but for the moral and religious elevation of those who were free" (28). Significantly, this is depicted as a revelation that becomes clear to Brown as a result of the process of his freedom and education. In *Hagar's Daughter*, Hopkins similarly draws attention to the importance of realizing, attaining, and practicing right moral principle in the lives of those who have traditionally held the power to dominate and perpetuate the status quo. The character of Ellis Enson, initially tragically defined and powerfully influenced by the racial prejudice and investment in class superiority that he has inherited as a product of his own upbringing, causes much suffering and tragedy due to his adherence to these beliefs early in the novel. It is because he can not overcome his inherited prejudices that he rejects Hagar upon learning of her blackness, that Hagar is taken to the slave market, and that she is driven to attempt to kill herself and her daughter: "Ellis loved his wife devotedly, but the shame of public ostracism and condemnation seemed too much for inherited principles" (60). Likewise, Cuthbert Sumner, the suitor and eventual husband of Hagar's daughter Jewel, is a generation

[36] See the Introduction for a more detailed exploration of the role of inheritance in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*.

younger than Ellis Enson, and suffers from a similar unquestioning and tragic adherence to the inherited racial prejudice that causes him to cast Jewel aside when he, in a parallel moment to Ellis Enson's own life, learns of her blackness:

> Cuthbert Sumner was born with a noble nature; his faults were those caused by environment and tradition. Chivalrous, generous-hearted—a manly man in the fullest meaning of the term—yet born and bred in an atmosphere which approved of freedom and qualified equality for the Negro, he had never considered for one moment the remote contingency of actual social contact with this unfortunate people. (265)[37]

Yet, because Ellis Enson is eventually able to see and overcome the error of his beliefs and the destruction of his actions, he is able to obtain a second chance at happiness with his true love, Hagar, upon their unlikely reunion. Enson is also able to pass on his knowledge and the lessons he has learned to young Sumner, hopefully planting the seed of a greater social change: " 'Sumner,' he said, with impressive solemnity, 'race prejudice is all right in theory, but when a man tries to practice it against the laws which govern human life and action, there's a weary journey ahead of him, and he's not got to die to realize the tortures of the damned' " (270).

The final scene of Hagar's Daughter, in which Hopkins attempts to reconcile all of the tensions and contradictions that have battled throughout her novel, depicts a

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[37] Hazel Carby argues that Sumner's tragic fault is in fact his inability to draw on his "family history of links to the abolition movement," instead "becom[ing] an embodiment of the inherent and thinly disguised racism beneath a professed sympathy for black people" (Introduction xli). Carby goes on to argue that "the denial of heroic status to Cuthbert Sumner" thus leads to "a searing indictment of 'the limits of New England philanthropy' " (xli). Thus, Sumner's inherited character is actually not one of real sympathy for the injustices suffered by African Americans, as the abolition movement professes, but one of hypocrisy and ultimate selfish prejudice. Had he been able to overcome this degraded and faulty inherited character, and establish his own, more noble morals and beliefs, Sumner could have attained true happiness with the possible love of his life (like Enson was able to).

male heir to the Enson fortune, a young boy, "screaming and laughing, chasing a gorgeous butterfly":

> Across the lawn of Enson Hall a child—a boy—ran screaming and laughing, chasing a gorgeous butterfly. It was the child of St. Clair Enson and Elise Bradford, the last representative of the Enson family (284); Cuthbert watched him with knitted brows. In him was embodied, a different form, a lesson of the degradation of slavery. Cursed be the practices which pollute the soul, and deaden all our moral senses to the reception of the true doctrines of Divinity. (284)

It is significant that there is a child at the end of this long story of love, pain, deceit, and estrangement across generations of families. This figure of the heir is the living embodiment of the crimes of the past (including his own illegitimacy as a child born outside of marriage, and the murder of his mother by his father) and the inheritor of both his mother's and his father's biological and character traits.[38] As this boy runs and laughs and chases a beautiful, free butterfly, his figure is overwhelmed by suggestions of carefree innocence and happiness. In him is embodied the living potential to grow into the new possibility for goodness or to perpetuate the cycles of evil in generations past. Therefore, as the story closes, we are left to wonder the extent to which the boy has inherited his mother's and/or his father's morals and principles (or lack thereof) and to ponder what beliefs and practices he will both enact in his own

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[38] Significantly, the boy's mother is the one who tries to teach Cuthbert about the plight of the mulatto woman, trying to get him to be more sympathetic and understanding. Thus, she is a very different version of racial tolerance than the child's father, the wicked St. Clair Enson. She gives this complicated speech about mixed blood women: "The loveliness of Negro women of mixed blood is very often marvelous, and their condition deplorable. . . . Living, they were despised by whites and blacks alike; dead, they are mourned by none," and also makes some more damning accusations: "We in the South are flagrant in our abuse of the Negro but we do not descend to the pettiness that your section practices"; "black blood is everywhere—in society and out, and in our families even; we cannot feel assured that it has not filtered into the most exclusive families"; and "As life, real life, has unfolded to my view, I have come to think that there is nothing in this prejudice but a relic of barbarism" (159-60).

life as well as pass down to his own children and heirs.[39] As Hazel Carby argues, "At the moment of Sumner's realization of regret, Hopkins shifted the attention of her reader from individual to nation, from the acts of particular characters to systemic oppression, and rejected the possibility of a simple return to an acceptable moral order that a conventional 'happy ending' would have indicated" (*Womanhood* 152). Thus, the question of inheritance turns, at the story's end, from questions of inherited property and racial characteristics to the inherited qualities of humanity that are at once intangible and yet so very tangible in their consequences, as seen in the intertwined family tragedies that have played out in the pages of *Hagar's Daughter*.

[39] By ending the story with a single remaining *male* heir, Hopkins effectively shuts down the perpetuation of the logic of "the condition of the child follows that of the mother," by giving the reader no hint of the possible identity of a future female partner for this boy (and mother of his children). She thus leaves open to interpretation the identity of the next generation of citizens, leaving the reader to ponder the hopeful state of the future.

CONCLUSION

The motif of inheritance can be found in a wide variety of literary texts, across time periods, national traditions, and genres; the sheer ubiquity of the motif points to the depth and breadth of its meanings and applications, as well as to its deep cultural resonance. Yet the various meanings of representations of inheritance are deeply connected to the particular circumstances in which they are produced because they are contingent upon the contours and definitions of evolving human relationships—familial, institutional, and communal. As I have argued, the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States witnessed a unique cluster of social changes that unsettled traditional implications of inheritance and added new dimensions to its meanings. This includes the rise of professional authorship and the rapid growth of the publishing industry; the changing relationship of African Americans to property and citizenship from slavery through the post-Reconstruction period; increasing urbanization, industrialization, and technological advancements in modes of transportation; a significant influx of immigrants; developing theories of evolution and eugenics; the increasing involvement of the legal system in the definition and affairs of the family; and changing relationships of women to property and the law. Many writers in this period produced narratives that reflect many of these social changes, and that speak to the usefulness of inheritance as a motif to engage with the conflicts and anxieties that these particular social changes engendered.

It is as women and as women moving within the marketplace as commodities themselves—for example, as literary celebrities like Southworth, Alcott, and Green,

and highly visible public figures like Hopkins—and as the producers of commodities in the stories that they wrote and were paid for—that these writers are most unique in their relations to and applications of representations of inheritance. Nineteenth-century American women writers working in the serial marketplace negotiated a web of relationships and expectations that presented them with a unique set of challenges to adapt to in order to both succeed as professional writers as well as to maintain respectability as working women and public figures. Despite the limitations often imposed by these challenges, the women in this study were able to integrate into their texts traces of the structures of power and inequality that they often confronted in their own lives or that operated in the relations of race, class, and gender that surrounded them. That the texts they wrote were by and large great popular successes suggests that these women were able to balance the textual demands of entertaining literature with the nuances of social critique. For these women writers knew all too well the benefit of being taken under the protective wing of a "gentleman publisher" like Robert Bonner, and the nature of a publishing industry that often mirrored the relationships of the patriarchal family. In this sense, these women writers often negotiated a web of relationships that echoed in many ways those of their own families and marriages, however tumultuous those may have been. They also knew the risk of being disinherited from the marketplace and the affections of a large reading audience, not the least of which was the risk of a return to financial hardship—much like suffering the literal act of disinheritance.

When the first run of E.D.E.N. Southworth's serial novel *The Hidden Hand; or, Capitola the Madcap* was published in the *New York Ledger* beginning in 1859,

the novel's heroine, Capitola Black, captivated her audience yet was not a new type on the literary scene. Rather, the domestic, sentimental, and popular literature of this period often made use of sympathetic orphan characters, playing to the growing social value of childhood and concern for the vulnerability of children. The figure of the orphan, bereft of family ties, with no prospect of inheriting wealth or family support, and thus cast adrift in the potentially threatening world at large without safety and protection, was thus an effective device for eliciting the emotional involvement of readers and building on moments of suspense and worrisome danger. As is true of Capitola Black, orphans were also often figures that were loaded with meaning and the potential for drama because they could be unstable pawns in battles for power and control—battles that were often distilled into struggles over the inheritance that the orphan is rightfully entitled to, but unable to claim. So it is with Capitola, a young heroine who plays to the public's delight in characters who possess the ability to push boundaries while remaining secure in their commitment to the moral values of right and wrong. Capitola is rewarded for her strength of character—her bravery, wit, intellect, and strong will—by the awarding of her rightful inheritance. Along the way, Southworth uses Capitola's status as an orphan, and the object of her rightful inheritance, to draw attention to legal inequities imposed upon females, particularly as articulated in *de facto* and *de jure* guardianship practices. Southworth also, as I argue, presents readers with a comfortably distanced narrative that is parallel in many ways to her own personal life struggles. Considering the wild popularity of *The Hidden Hand*, this novel exemplifies the dynamic nature of the serial text as an intermediary between fact and fiction, with the power to have real resonance in the lives of readers.

Perhaps the most distinct connection between the literary marketplace and the inheritance of property in this study is produced by Louisa May Alcott's wholehearted investment in a determined work ethic as it combined with her own unique family situation. The fluidity of her role within the Alcott family, moving among identities as needed without adherence to binaries of gender or power, culminated in her adoption of her nephew as a strategy of protecting her copyrights. After writing throughout her career about the power of inheritance to shape a woman's opportunities for better or worse, Alcott made a move in her own life that finally rewrote the traditional narrative of the dependence of women and families on the support provided by inheritance of the patriarch's lineage and estate: when she died, her nephew John Pratt inherited her copyrights, and was thus entrusted with the responsibility of managing them and their financial returns according to Alcott's wishes and best interests. By adopting her sister's son, she officially altered the legally defined structure of her own family because of the potential risks and rewards that property rights offered; she also clearly understood the power of property's influence on the future as a mode of inheritance.

However, at the same time, a curious set of questions arises from this situation, in that despite the fact that the inheritance that Alcott passed on to her family was the product of a woman's labor in the marketplace, upon her death it is nonetheless a man to whom the control of her copyrights, and thus the character of her legacy and the content of her future earnings, has passed. There is in this scenario a possible return to a more traditionally gendered ordering of entitlement to property and the ability to define others through its control. Thus, the difficult questions that have vexed so much criticism of Alcott's work—that is, debates over the conservative versus subversive

nature of her sensation stories and their problematic heiresses—is echoed in Alcott's personal dealings with inheritance. Indeed, as each chapter's analysis in this study acknowledges, the possibility for the reinscription of a conservative agenda is an ever-present quality of representations of inheritance, even when they are located in the midst of a potentially revisionary text. Despite these unsettling questions and often uncertain textual agendas, Alcott's sharp awareness of financial matters, familiarity with the machinations of the publishing industry, and embrace of the fluidity of the family structure are revealed in her decision, and are indicative of her identity as a canny and prescient businesswoman.

The domestic detective fiction of Metta Victor and Anna Katharine Green, while ostensibly focusing on the interiority of the middle-class domestic sphere, is in fact strongly influenced by the conflicts and controversies that erupted outside the walls of the sacred family home. Thus, the family problems that lead to theft, violence, and murder in these texts are an extension of the problems in society around them (and vice versa), and indicative of the artificiality of the "private" sphere as a construct rather than a reality. In this way, domestic detective fiction is similar to its literary predecessors and cousins, including crime narratives, gothic and mystery fiction, and earlier and later forms of the detective genre, which also register the existence of real social problems. Victor's *The Dead Letter* and Green's *The Leavenworth Case* are particularly interesting for the ways that they reveal the ostensible moral and material superiority of the bourgeoisie to be tenuous, threatened by the incursion of the vices and temptations associated with the nation's booming cities and burgeoning immigrant and working-class populations. The walls of the middle-class family home—and the

ideologies that construct them as barriers against the degrading forces of the outside world—are thus revealed to be permeable. At the same time, the family as a sacred institution, a circle of love and protection, is also revealed in these texts to be fallible. Nineteenth-century readers, much like the multimedia consumers of today, found these revelations irresistibly fascinating, both for their familiarity as well as their strangeness—for the experience of the "uncanny."

Material inheritance is used in these domestic detective novels partially as a strategic textual device that continues to be an identifying feature of the detective genre well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The object of the patriarch's will, or a tempting set of family jewels, are on one level useful devices for setting the commission of crime and the process of detection into motion. At the same time, and as the stories of crime in domestic detective fiction especially reveal, the weighty ideological implications of inheritance in the family structure add more complex dimensions of corruption, vulnerability, and tragedy to these narratives. The dictates of "proper" middle-class behavior and "right" family feeling quietly inform treatments of the sensitive details of the crime, the suspects, and the spaces and members of the household. Unique to the domestic detective novels of this period, however, are their simultaneous use of inheritance to signify race, class, and ethnic identities, as well as their intersection with criminality. This is an outgrowth of the scientific and pseudoscientific discourses of identity that circulated throughout the nineteenth century, but that rose to prominence following the abolition of slavery and in the wake of the increase in immigration and the resulting growth and ghettoization of urban spaces. Thus, the inheritance plot in these domestic detective novels is complicated by

the inclusion of characters, settings, and plot elements that exist at the margins of the text but that nonetheless uncover the darker implications of the meanings of inheritance that lie beneath the text.

While all of the authors in this study were public figures due to their prolific textual production, their marketplace success, and their rise to literary celebrity, writer, editor, lecturer, singer, actress, and activist Pauline Hopkins stands out as the figure of the five who is most intensely linked to public life. Ironically, the details of her private life were limited in scope and specificity until Lois Brown's weighty and detailed biography of Hopkins was published in 2008; Brown's research in fact rewrites many assumptions that have informed Hopkins scholarship for years. Importantly, the life and literature of Pauline Hopkins are inextricably bound up with representations of inheritance. By positioning her fiction as politicized pieces of entertainment operating within the ideologies of the racial uplift movement at the turn of the century, Hopkins also positions her texts within a unique and complex web of discourses surrounding inheritance. In the very act of using inheritance as a significant motif in her fiction, Hopkins gestures to the African American writers who preceded her and who also used tropes of inheritance in their slave narratives, autobiographies, and fiction to argue against racial injustice and to reveal the horrors and degradations of the institution of slavery. Hopkins thus also places herself within a tradition of literary inheritance, adding her texts to the genealogy of African American narrative. This undoubtedly would have been important to a woman who placed so much weight in the power of genealogy, an element of Hopkins's biography that Lois Brown was able

to render as a much more complex element of Hopkins's self-conscious construction of herself as a public figure.

Hopkins also uses the inheritance plot in particular, in conjunction with representations of material and metaphorical inheritance, to insert herself and her serial novel, *Hagar's Daughter*, into the debates surrounding the methods and terms of racial uplift that were a significant part of her social and political milieu. Drawing on a common critical tradition that juxtaposes the positions of race leaders W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington with one another, three main discourses of inheritance emerge in Hopkins's text; these are the inheritance of property, of racial(ized) characteristics, and of moral values and traditions. Hopkins's own treatment of these three different forms of inheritance is complex and often contradictory, which rather than being a flaw is in fact indicative of the fraught nature and serious implications of the debates that she works through in her text. While the inheritance of property has weighty implications for former slaves—who were themselves legally defined as property and thus unable to legally possess property—Hopkins nonetheless recognized many of the destructive possibilities of the accumulation and transmission of wealth. Hopkins advocated the cultivation of a strong African American middle-class, but this included the attainment of cultural capital such as education and the pursuit of talents such as writing, music, and the arts. In this way, Hopkins also privileged the achievements of the individual over their racial construction as the most important means of establishing a respectable identity and uplifting the community as a whole. However, *Hagar's Daughter* eventually moves beyond these concerns of property, race, and identity, and finally argues that the inheritance of righteous morals, passed

down to each successive generation, holds the most promise to bring about real social change.

Thus, the authors in this study often engage with the social and political conditions and conflicts of their time in their writing, using representations of inheritance to distill these various problems into a succinct, yet adaptable, motif. Although each chapter's analysis has touched in some way on the specter of England as it haunts representations of inheritance and national identity in this period, the struggles for power, identity, and belonging that lay at the heart of struggles for inheritance also have broader international and transnational implications and connections in these texts. While the connection between inheritance and many of the major social, cultural, economic, and legal changes of the second half of the nineteenth century were explored in my analysis, this period was also marked in significant ways by processes of expansion, incorporation, and imperialist projects such as westward movement, the Gold Rush period, the U.S.-Mexico War, and the involvement of the United States with Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Cuba. These processes enacted the inscription and enforcement of borders and boundaries and raised questions of inclusion, exclusion, and belonging that were formally enacted in rights of citizenship and informally expressed in the language of affective ties. Such metaphors are taken directly from the legal and emotional language of family discourse, and point to Amy Kaplan's argument that the ideology of the domestic "relies structurally on its intimate opposition to the foreign" (25). These events and entanglements thus unsettle the ideology of the "national family." In so doing, material and metaphorical representations of inheritance are also brought into play,

giving new meanings and possibilities to established lines of descent, mounting challenges to the proper transmission of property, identity, security, protection, and belonging, and threatening discourses of "blood purity" or social purity (Nickerson, Introduction 7).

Despite the apparent efforts of these authors to define an "Americanness" in distinction to and as a renunciation of the British legacy of aristocracy and concerns with tightly regulated systems of inheritance and purity of bloodlines, the American "national family" in their texts is in fact in conversation with a wider and more complicated variety of international and transnational connections. For example, the anxieties that arise from the intersection of inheritance with expansion, incorporation, and imperialism frequently manifest themselves in domestic detective fiction and sensation fiction in the association of criminality with "foreignness." In Victor's 1869 domestic detective novel, *The Figure Eight; or, The Mystery of Meredith Place*, a passionate and manipulative Cuban child bride's presumed innately jealous, tempestuous nature marks her as a suspect in the murder of her husband and the theft of his fortune. Foreign spaces and international conflicts also function in these texts as theatres for the performance of power struggles and battles between "good" and "evil," relocating transnational conflicts onto seemingly individual conflicts between heroes and villains. This includes the tracking of a criminal to Mexico in *The Dead Letter*, a wildly sensational interlude that takes the reader far from the small town of Blankville and the growing city of New York through the Isthmus of Panama and to the deserts of Mexico; Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* traces a battle for male domination (with the prize being the entitlement to the innocent young Clara Day and

her inheritance) that is played out during the hero and villain's military service across the border during the U.S.-Mexican War. The heroine of Alcott's story "Honor's Fortune" is "rescued" from a scandalous yet empowering future—earning her own way as a professional singer—by marrying a mysterious "swarthy" foreign suitor with "lustrous, dark eyes," "luxuriant black hair," "the well-cut features of an Arab" and a "sinewy, brown hand" that "was as small as a woman's" (706); this marriage both enables Honor to access her monetary inheritance as well as translates a transnational business partnership into a transnational marital relationship. In "Talma Gordon," Hopkins's 1900 adaptation of the story of the Borden murders, a legacy of piracy and pillaging in the East Indies is linked to corruption and thievery within the heart of America's government and revered "First Families." In each of these cases, the ideological borders that surround the national family and the nation's families are shown to be much more permeable and shifting than claims to a discrete and insular "Americanness" presuppose. This suggests that the narrative of national inheritance, and the individual and collective identities that this narrative includes and perpetuates, is complicated by legacies of power, dominance, manipulation, and crime that resonate beyond borders and that rewrite the contours of an "American" heritage.

Although they are a part of a broad tradition of literary representations of inheritance, the texts and authors in this study nonetheless stand as representative of a particular piece of a particular historical moment. As it is in the nature of representations of inheritance to look back to the past as well as forward to the future, it is only fitting, then, to consider briefly the shifts that the motif will undergo and the contours that it will take on in the historical moments following the turn of the

twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Published between 1901 and 1902, *Hagar's Daughter* stood at the beginning of a new century and a new era; while the focus of Hopkins's text moves from the significance of the individual to the power of community, discourses of inheritance in the twentieth century began to broaden in scope from their connection to local and national communities to their ability to connect global and transnational communities. For example, in twentieth-century American literature, the children of nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States often explore the meanings and complexities of their seemingly dislocated heritage, and question the connection of their own inherited identities to the traditions and legacies of their parents' birth countries. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the inauguration of President Barack Obama, often described as "the first African American president," was haunted by the nation's difficult history of slavery, injustice, and conflicted discourses of mixed-race identity that will forever be part of the American legacy. The turn of the twenty-first century was in many ways marked by global turmoil, and President Obama has often been described as "inheriting" the "legacies" of conflict and war from his predecessor. However, the possibilities for "real social change" are once again spoken of, in language that is at once a turn to the lessons of the past as well as a look ahead to the future—a future that is yet again characterized as the hopeful inheritance of the next generation.

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