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Gothic Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gothic Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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My dissertation takes a new approach to the study of the American gothic, focusing on the rhetorical strategies by which authors chose to deploy the conventions of gothic writing. While many investigations into the American gothic presuppose a national subject, whose fears and desires can be located and diagnosed, I argue that such a subject is incoherent, and that the psychic cartography of fear in nineteenth-century America varied widely from North to South, master to slave, carpetbagger to scalawag, white supremacist to freedperson. That being the case, it makes sense to read the gothic not as an essential feature of the writing this dissertation examines, but as a set of tropes and conventions which circulated through a variety of texts depicting spectacles of horror or reaching out to readers' sense of fear. I call gothic episodes all chapters, scenes, and charged moments from literary works and broader print culture whose tropic or affective schema trace back to Gothic Revival texts. Significantly, these texts were well-known to nineteenth-century American readers, whose literate response to the appearance of gothic conventions was frequently expected by the writers deploying them. To supplement the critical narrative about the gothic that explains its power as originating in the psychologically repressed, I want to emphasize how writers *rationally* employed the mode to create calculated

effects. I read these episodes as primarily persuasive rather than mimetic and thereby recover the rhetorical import of the gothic as understood by the authors who deployed its conventions. The following chapters examine how gothic episodes were put to work by abolitionists, proslavery advocates, freedmen, Klansmen, carpetbaggers, and advocates of African American civil rights, and I show how gothic effects were calculated to play upon diverse fears, prejudices, and desires for a variety of strategic purposes, from energizing supporters of political causes to manipulating the historical record of Reconstruction. Gothic episodes appear early on in a variety of American literary traditions, putting the so-called "literature of fear" to work in shaping the history and culture of the American nineteenth century.

Introduction

On August 30, 1831, the Richmond *Enquirer* published an article reporting the Nat Turner rebellion under the headline "THE BANDITTI." The appellation, which would likely have been aligned in the minds of the paper's readership with the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, concords with the article's first description of the revolt: "What strikes us as the most remarkable thing in this matter," writes the editor, "is the horrible ferocity of these monsters. They remind one of a parcel of blood-thirsty wolves rushing down from the Alps; or, rather, like a former incursion of the Indians upon the white settlements" (Greenberg 67). In the moves from bandit, to monster, to wolf—or put another way, from human, to chimera, to animal—the article concisely dehumanizes the rebels in a fashion typical of the ideology of American slavery. It also produces a series of spatiotemporal displacements similar to those found in much gothic writing. The figure of the blood-thirsty wolf simultaneously reinforces two contradictory tropes from the American discourse of slavery, those of the cannibal and the animal. Dislocating that figure and placing it in Europe's Alps, the article articulates slave violence as a fearsome threat, but also tempers that threat by imagining it in a foreign landscape. Then, by comparing the recently quelled slave revolt to Indian raids, the article presents an image of racialized savagery that is contained by its inevitable and overwhelming eradication. Alpine wolves will never arrive at Southern doorsteps, and Indian raiding parties in Virginia have already been decimated by the events of national history.

When faced with pieces of gothic writing such as this, I focus on questions of strategy: For what reasons did the editor choose to clothe the narrative of Nat Turner's rebellion in the trappings of gothic conventions? Or stated more broadly, why was "Southern discourse…all too ready to conflate the real horrors of slavery and insurrection with the conventions of Radcliffean cliché" (Ginsberg 100)? By the 1830s, the Southern press had developed an expertise in *not* reporting the news, as was inevitable in any society built around an institution founded upon mutual fear and its logical attendants, repression, denial, and censorship. Ed White writes that the Southern press "fairly consistently restricted information about slave resistance, for the obvious reason that the more you talk about it, the more likely it is to occur" (96). This fact left newspapers like the *Enquirer* in a bind: How could they make the events of the rebellion known while also keeping them concealed? How could they narrate the event to a select audience of slaveholders while obfuscating it to Northerners and the slaves themselves? Gothic writing provided one answer to this problem. The language of excess, it allowed the editor to articulate a picture of the rebellion that was vivid and extreme, provocative of a jolt of fear that would bolster the vigilance of its Southern readership. But that language is also the language of fantasy, allowing the effacement of the event at its moment of inscription. One cannot plan one's own slave revolt with the strategy of rushing down a mountainside like a pack of wolves.

While gothic writing has long been conceived in terms of the unconscious, the return of the repressed as manifested in a haunting (be it of author, discourse, or nation), in this study I will examine the way that gothic conventions were deliberately deployed by writers to produce calculated effects. This orientation functions on several premises that differ slightly from those of much critical writing on the gothic. The first and perhaps most significant is the supposition that gothic writing was a known entity, an already-received literary genre whose conventions would be recognizable to American readers in the nineteenth century. Despite Ralph Waldo Emerson's pronouncement in 1837 that the American "day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" (53), the influence of English gothic novels reverberated far past that date in the canon of American letters. The popularity of gothic novels in the early republic had a profound influence on American writing thereafter. To take one conspicuous example, in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Nathaniel Hawthorne presents what amounts to a revised version of Horace Walpole's introduction to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*. "Ancient and modern romance" become "Romance" and the "Novel," the "epoch now gray in the distance" is that of Puritan New England rather than medieval Italy, and the "sins of the fathers" are more generically recast as "the wrong-doing of one generation," but the program of explained poetics, historical situation, and the articulation of a moral is identical.

The interest that David Punter, whose methodology combines Marxist and psychoanalytical approaches, takes in a figure like Walpole is that of diagnosing what the author's preface unconsciously reveals about eighteenth-century British attitudes toward shifting class relations between the medieval and the modern periods. My approach supplements rather than contradicts such studies, asking what an author like Hawthorne hoped to achieve through what seems to me a transparently self-conscious act of literary appropriation and repurposing (in this case, perhaps to highlight the theme of inheritance, literary and otherwise, that the preface both names and exemplifies). To a degree, some gothic critics have created a false dichotomy when discussing intentionality. For example, Robert K. Martin criticizes Donald Ringe's assertion that psychoanalytical readings "always distort the works they treat" and "blind us to what the authors themselves were trying to do." Martin characterizes Ringe's position on intentionality as itself a "critical blindness" to the fact that "the subject is unaware of his or her own intentions" (x). But must we choose between the deprecation of all unconscious meaning or the disavowal of all intentionality? I think few would agree with this position, and the second premise I want to articulate is that the intentions of the American gothic writers identified here are frequently legible and worthy of examination. To return to my original example, the rhetorical strategy of the *Enquirer* editor reveals quite a lot about the methods by which slave violence could and could not be discussed in the antebellum South. Significantly, it is not just the affective possibility of gothic writing that the editor manipulates. Certainly, as I previously noted, the motive power of fear, directed toward the slaveholding class, is central to the editor's strategy. But also significant is the way he plays upon the visibility of gothic tropes *as such*. The conflation of the real horrors of the slave revolt with gothic fantasies is no rhetorical failure, but quite to the contrary, it is a successful method of managing revelation and concealment simultaneously. This strategy of using gothic conventions to create simultaneous hyper- and invisibility would become central to the strategy of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction.

The third premise of my argument, which should be apparent from the title of this dissertation, is that we have not only gothic novels and short stories, but also gothic episodes in works that are heterogeneous in form and content. While the gothic conventions Hawthorne employs, from the inheritance plot founded upon theft and murder in the past, to the centrality of the haunted house of the novel's title, help structure the entirety of *The House of the Seven Gables*, such is not the case with the works I will examine in what follows. Gothic conventions appear across a broad spectrum of nineteenth-century American writing, from the newspaper article and novel identified here to political pamphlets and organizational manifestos. There are also novels that, unlike Hawthorne's, employ gothic conventions only occasionally, perhaps in a moment, scene, or chapter, without consistently returning to them.

I choose the term "episode" because of its suggestion of the in-between, as in the status of the episode in the Greek tragedies of Thespis. Many of the literary texts I will examine have been assigned to various genres—the sentimental novel, realism, naturalism, the melodrama—that seem different from or even oppositional to the gothic. What I examine, then, often appears as an interruption or digression, not a part of a gothic whole. The gothic episodes I propose to examine stand out, both in terms of style and content, from the narratives in which they are embedded, but at the same time, cannot be dismissed as mistakes or even trivial flights of fancy. Taken in terms of their rhetorical intent and the effects they are designed to produce, they tend to speak to the literary skill, not the psychic repressions, of their authors.

That literary skill is central to my conceptual orientation of this dissertation. Rather than conceiving of the American gothic as an *expression* of national fears, I propose to examine how and why highly skilled American writers deliberately use gothic episodes to create a variety of effects. I argue from the perspective that gothic conventions provide a method of generating fear, a feeling with potentially immense affective power, but furthermore that the deployment of such highly recognizable (even if categorically indefinable) tropes could potentially do much more than just frighten. These gothic episodes appeared in a literature that commented on and participated in contemporary political and social arguments, arguments which often concerned race. While many previous studies of the American gothic have examined how racial issues haunt, perhaps in unconscious ways, the works of canonical authors like Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne, I will instead look at how gothic episodes are self-consciously deployed by writers debating abolitionism, the legacy of Reconstruction, and questions of race during the era of lynching and Jim Crow in the South. While the tools of the Enlightenment certainly were put to use in these literary interventions, so too was gothic writing, which, like the sentimental, made a powerful emotional appeal. Many critics have noted that the British Gothic Revival took place in the age of Enlightenment.[1] If the power of the literature from that period has traditionally been explained by the psychologically repressed, as if gothic terror were an Other haunting Enlightenment rationalism, I want to emphasize how various nineteenth-century authors *rationally* employed the mode to create calculated effects.

I have avoided to this point the question that every critic of gothic writing, especially when the term is used to modify "American," is tasked with: namely, what is the gothic? The cleverest critics tend to sidestep this question entirely. Teresa Goddu is one of the most influential critics of the American gothic and perhaps not coincidentally also among the most artful dodgers of this central question, writing that "Just as *gothic* unsettles the idea of America, the modifier *American* destabilizes understandings of the gothic" (4) and otherwise responding with her own series of questions rather than providing a straightforward answer.[2] Her approach is shrewd in that it tacitly questions whether or not "the gothic" wholesale is a coherent entity. Critics who deploy the term in that manner are prone to untenable generalizations; what does it mean, for example, that "the Gothic does not affirm anything and, therefore, does not posit social change as the answer to social ills" (Gross 29)? There is not some essence that controls the deployment of gothic conventions, and such categorical claims are therefore easily belied, Louis Gross' particular one, for example, by Kari Winter's book-length study of how female gothic novels and slave narratives share strategies used to critique patriarchy and white supremacy.[3]

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[1] See David Punter, *The Literature of Fear*, Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing*, or almost any other book-length study of the Gothic Revival.

[2] The editors of the critical volume *Frontier Gothic* make a similar claim, suggesting "the very concept of American gothic is paradoxical, since so much of American culture denies the possibility of gothic experience" (13), and Agnieszka Monnet claims that "This confrontation of opposing and ostensibly incommensurable concepts is an important dimension of the gothic" in American writing (9).

[3] See Winter's *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865*.

Conceptions of "the gothic" tend to lead to other slippages into what I would characterize as naïvely conceived unities, such as those of a "national narrative," "spirit of the nation," or "American experience," each of which presuppose a coherent national subject which the gothic can haunt.[4] But historically, the national subject diagnosed in many ways does not make sense when taking a broad view of America in the nineteenth century. How could the fears of Northern capitalists, Southern slaveholders, and black slaves possibly all be contained within one psychological rubric?

Another pervasive but problematic critical method of dealing with the term "gothic" is to redirect it from modifying "genre" to a related, often more diffuse, referent. Robert Miles identifies the gothic as a "discursive site" (4), Eric Savoy claims it "coheres…around poetics" (vii), and Justin Edwards refers to both "gothic rhetoric" (xx) and "gothic discourses" (xxi), to name just a few examples. The critical uneasiness with ascribing the status of genre to the term "gothic" likely arises from several factors. First, there is the apparent paradox of the phrase "gothic novel." If we grant that both "gothic" and "novel" have generic referents, they would seem to be antonyms, and their collapse into one another would undermine the very work that identifying genres is supposed to perform, namely, establishing discrete and coherent categories. This collapse then leads to the problem of containment, in that once gothic has escaped the constraints of a clear generic category, its potential for proliferation seems to be limitless. Leslie Fiedler famously describes all of American literature as "bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadistic and melodramatic" (29), while Fred Botting goes even further in claiming that "Gothic can perhaps be called the only true literary tradition. Or its stain" (16). While the collapse and/or overwhelming expansion of categories might provide fodder for interesting generic criticism, a survey of writing on the gothic gives one the sense that most critics are not interested in genre per se. The fact that what we talk about when we talk about the gothic[5] corresponds so minutely with what Jacques Derrida writes about when he writes about genre—"impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation, or degenerescence" (57)—indicates that gothic studies should naturally lend themselves to discussion of genre. Perhaps it is precisely the fact that Derrida's study of genre predates the contemporary field of gothic literary studies that rehashing such moves seems redundant. And if the law of genre is "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy," then critical moves through, away from, or outside of genre seem appropriate.

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[4] These configurations come from the title of Robert Martin and Eric Savoy's *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, the book jacket of *Frontier Gothic*, and Louis Gross' *Redefining the American Gothic*, p. 3.

That said, I question the efficacy of merely substituting a term such as "discourse" or "poetics" for genre. Doing so simply enmeshes the critic in an inescapable dialectic of form and content. What is a "discursive site," an imagined space in which can be located a related body of statements, themes, or concepts, but a genre, which we also conceive of using the spatial metaphors of the border or boundary?[6] The ways of making associated with a mode or the tropes of a poetics are always constituted in their application to a material, so it seems unclear what function is served by moving from content-based (generic, discursive) to formal (poetic) identifications of the gothic, especially when the body of texts examined often remains so markedly consistent between studies taking either approach.

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[5] Even if, as I propose here, there is no singular entity known as "the gothic," the phrase offers a useful if somewhat imprecise way to identify what would otherwise have to be referred to as "gothic conventions," "gothic writings," or other cumbersome labels. (Similarly, the introductions to many studies of the gothic argue that it fails to qualify as a genre, then follow this claim with frequent use of the word "genre" to refer to gothic writing.)

[6] Furthermore, a gothic discussion of discourse would also seem to have been prefigured by critical theory, namely by Michel Foucault's assertion in "The Order of Discourse" that the disciplinarity underlying discourse "pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins" (60).

There is another move that critics often either condemn or rather sheepishly perform when discussing what they mean by gothic writing, and that is the identification of conventions. In the former camp, for instance, Cannon Schmitt characterizes an antiquated understanding of the gothic as "a limited set of narrative conventions…as well as thematic obsessions" (7), while in the latter, Maisha L. Wester asserts that, "more than a mere genre…the gothic is a series of tropes and themes used to meditate upon a culture's various anxieties" (2). This approach has some marked advantages. First, it is a critical commonplace that even if we cannot define the gothic, we know it when we see it. This phenomenon suggests that gothic writing is most immediately identifiable at the level of discrete textual instances, in other words, conventions, tropes. Then, and significantly for this study, I am more interested in how American writers and readers of the nineteenth century understood gothic writing than how scholars do today. The term "gothic" seems to have been understood primarily in terms of architecture, followed in distant second and third by pseudo-scientific racial theories (some white supremacists traced America's pure "Gothic" bloodlines[7]) and finally Gothic Revival literature. The significance of architecture serves as a reminder that the movement away from thinking of the gothic in terms of its trappings, including the moldering castles, monasteries, and crypts that give it its name, is a recent phenomenon that should not be anachronistically projected upon earlier readers and writers. Furthermore, the referent of "gothic literature" has shifted dramatically between the nineteenth century and the present day. Considering the bestselling gothic novels of the early republic (from Reeve, Radcliffe, Lewis) against the body of literature published on in a periodical like *Gothic Studies* reveals a difference in order of magnitude when it comes to generic scope.[8] Some of the perceived disadvantages of a conventions-oriented approach to identifying gothic writing, I would argue, work to the advantage of my methodology. Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick concedes that "the identification of conventions is almost the least dialectical of critical activities, the most assimilative, the one in which the slippage of things into their opposites is most necessarily imperceptible" (266). But would such a process not allow "gothic" to be yoked to "novel" or "American" in just such a way as seems contradictory to so many critics? It is at the level of conventions that American literature assimilated gothic writing into its own literary genetic makeup.

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[7] See G. P. Marsh, *The Goths in New England. A Discourse Delivered at the Anniversary of the Philomathesian Society of Middlebury College*.

My argument should make it apparent that the way American writers used gothic conventions changed over the course of the nineteenth century. Much of the gothic writing identified in Chapter One, from Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Wells Brown, for example, employs architectural or pictorial details that clearly draw upon the late-eighteenth-century writing of Ann Radcliffe. By the end of the nineteenth century, the gothic tropes employed by American writers had circulated in our own native literature for a number of decades. Hence, the way those authors understood gothic writing would naturally differ from their forebears. Brown draws directly upon a description of an Italian graveyard in his 1853 novel *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, but fifty years later it is Brown himself to whom Pauline Hopkins looks for her gothic tropes, rather than exclusively to British predecessors.

If we assume that writers deliberately appropriated gothic conventions, the question that follows is: To what end? How did American writers use gothic conventions to produce calculated effects? This is the central question of my dissertation. As an "affective form," gothic writing is “primarily structured so as to elicit particular responses in the reader,” as George Haggerty writes (8). Indeed, Edgar Allan Poe himself asserts that he commences his process of composition with “the consideration of an *effect.*” To understand the effects produced by gothic writing, we must attend to the readers at whom they were aimed. Indeed, historically-minded critics have sometimes noted the necessity of thinking about the gothic as it was understood by past readers and writers. In her study of *Republicanism and the American Gothic*, Marilyn Michaud argues that “it is necessary to employ a method of historical inquiry that examines the vocabulary and rhetorical strategies of another generation; to recapture, as much as is possible, the fears of those who participated in events” (15). I would extend this claim by asserting that, beyond understanding their fears, we need to be sensitive to another generation’s understanding of those literary tropes called gothic: how they related not only to fear, but also to fictiveness, indeterminacy, fantasy, nationalism, race, and so forth. As I showed with the anecdote that opened this introduction, the very self-evident fictiveness of gothic conventions could be strategically manipulated by skilled authors.

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[8] For a discussion of the popularity of the gothic novel in nineteenth-century America, see Donald Ringe's *American Gothic*.

It is for these reasons that this study focuses on the rhetorical strategies attendant upon the use of gothic conventions. By “rhetorical,” I suggest an orientation toward instrumentality and reader reception. This is somewhat akin to what M. H. Abrams calls a “pragmatic theory” of literary criticism. As Abrams explains, a pragmatic critic “looks at the work of art chiefly as a means to an end, an instrument for getting something done, and tends to judge its value according to its success in achieving that aim” (15). The writers examined in this dissertation all participated actively in some of the most contentious political debates in their respective eras, about abolitionism, the legacy of Reconstruction, and the rights of African Americans during Jim Crow and the era of lynching. As such, it makes sense to examine why they included gothic episodes in their writing, and what effects those episodes produced in those debates. I will show that, while the gothic has long been understood as an historical mode, its historical function in these writings can best be understood when it is examined rhetorically.

My argument about the rhetorical nature of these gothic episodes proceeds upon the assumption that, while always historically informed, the gothic is not always (as critics like Goddu seem to suggest) an historical mode—that is, it is not always employed by authors who are consciously writing history or unconsciously registering it. David Punter observes that eighteenth-century British gothic writing "seems to have *been* a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it" (59). A major difference between the British and American gothic is that so much of the American past in the nineteenth century was not obscure. As William Wells Brown writes in *Clotel*, "The origin of American slavery is not lost in the obscurity of bygone ages. It is a plain historical fact" (180-1), and being the subject of "plain" history, seemingly wouldn't merit the British gothic treatment of feudalism found in a text like *The Castle of Otranto*. Furthermore, it is important not to confuse texts of historical significance with histories. Teresa Goddu provides a much-needed supplement to psychoanalytically-focused gothic criticism when she ties the writings of the abolitionist era to their historical context. But her proposition that "history invents the gothic, and in turn the gothic reinvents history" is a tricky one. Indeed, by making out abolitionist writings to be primarily motivated by an impulse to document slavery historically, Goddu assumes that the purpose of these texts is mimetic, that they aim to register the event of slavery. I think that, rather than attempting to "rematerialize the ghosts of America's racial history" (132), the focus of many of these texts is as much or more directed toward their audiences than the subjects represented. That being the case, there is a clear need for a critical intervention directed toward the rhetorical strategies that such a focus produced.

Chapter one traces the appearance of gothic episodes through a variety of abolitionist and pro-slavery writings and argues that those episodes fulfilled a variety of rhetorical functions. For instance, abolitionists such as William Wells Brown, Theodore Dwight Weld, and Sarah and Angelina Grimké depicted gothic spectacles of slavery in order to persuade readers to identify with engaged, humanitarian witnesses of its horrors, while also demonizing slaveholders. I argue that the same dynamic of horror, pity, and empathy proved to be crucial to Harriet Beecher Stowe's strategy in the gothic passages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the chapter examines the circulation of gothic depictions of slavery between nonfiction abolitionist tracts and the movement's most prominent novel, which drew heavily from *American Slavery As It Is*. I furthermore argue that William Wells Brown's use of gothic episodes in *Clotel*, which is also indebted to previous abolitionist writings, inaugurates a tradition of African American gothic that tacitly connects the slave narrative to gothic writing. The chapter concludes by examining the way that the very gothic conventions in abolitionist writing that were criticized by pro-slavery opponents also appeared frequently in their own writing, and I show how the figure for dangerous abolitionist rhetoric in Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* is himself a gothic villain—suggesting the degree to which gothic episodes played a significant role in the rhetoric of both sides of the debate over abolitionism.

Chapter Two examines another striking example of the way the gothic was deployed in a moment of political crisis: the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee and then throughout the post-war South. The Klan's ghostly costumes, nighttime parades and shows of force, and most importantly, use of gothic writing in the press, together highlight the way that gothic effects and conventions could be put to work to produce significant political ends. The first part of the chapter focuses on a number of early writings about the Klan, from both the popular press and the Klan itself (and sometimes the two simultaneously), arguing that the use of the gothic allowed the organization to spread rapidly while also concealing its existence by creating doubt as to the veracity of reports about the group. The second part of the chapter follows the legacy of Reconstruction-era Klan writing as it was alternately contested, reinforced, and revised in historical novels about Reconstruction written by such authors as Albion Tourgeé, Thomas Nelson Page, and Thomas Dixon, Jr. I argue that the success of Dixon's novels, which helped inspire a revival of the Klan in the early twentieth century, is characteristic of the relationship between historical and fictive incarnations of the Klan that relied upon gothic conventions. The chapter concludes with an examination of a newspaper article written by William Wells Brown that successfully combats the Klan's literary strategy.

In Chapter Three, I look at the way that turn-of-the-century African American novels often deployed gothic episodes to depict not only lynching, but also one of the most significant and dangerous actions for African Americans from slavery times to the nadir of race relations: reading. Building upon Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's claim that the reading of characters in gothic writing often oscillates between page and flesh, the first part of the chapter investigates the way that Pauline Hopkins uses a gothic conception of identity to attack the logic of racial essentialism in her novel *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*. Hopkins interrogates the themes of inheritance and identity as they intersect with biological and other naturalizing discourses of racial difference, and she exposes the primacy of writings, especially legal and financial, in the constitution of racial character. In addition to this specific relationship between race and writing, the chapter also examines the way both Hopkins and Sutton Griggs draw upon gothic conventions to dramatize the significance and perils of African American literacy in the Jim Crow era. While literacy seemingly offered a way for political and cultural advancement to African Americans, pieces of writing, from legal documents, to railway signage, to inflammatory newspaper articles, repeatedly impedes that supposed progress in novels such as Griggs' *The Hindered Hand*. Indeed, scenes of lynching often ensue from or are reported by way of newspaper articles, and discoveries of identity ensuing from discovered letters, bills of sale, and other written documents drag characters back into the horrors of slavery and Reconstruction that they have attempted to leave in the past. Eric Sundquist has suggested that Charles Chesnutt in particular is a more appropriate precursor of the Southern gothic exemplified in Faulkner than a figure like Edgar Allan Poe, and in this chapter I show that, following in the footsteps of William Wells Brown, a number of African American authors produced what could be considered the first wave of Southern gothic as they contested the color line in the early years of the twentieth century.

Chapter One

The Hideous Designs of Abolitionism-Era Writing

The years preceding the Civil War saw the publication of many of what have long been considered to be central texts of the American gothic canon, written by Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne. While earlier critics of the American gothic, such as Harry Levin and Leslie Fiedler, tended to read these works in a psychological and symbolic register, in which blackness always stands for sin, terror, and guilt, subsequent critical reassessments have grounded these writings more firmly in their historical context. The period between William Lloyd Garrison's launching of *The Liberator* in 1831 and the commencement of the Civil War in 1861 was one of fervid debate over slavery in the United States, and slavery constitutes one of the most important contexts of the American gothic. But rather than merely informing canonical gothic texts, slavery shaped the development of the American gothic as a whole: gothic conventions furnished abolitionist and pro-slavery writers with a rhetoric by which they could represent the slave system (or its foes), and in turn, the gothic images they produced constitute much of what is "American" about the American gothic.

In this chapter, I will look at a handful of gothic episodes from texts spanning a broad spectrum of writing, literary and otherwise, abolitionist and pro-slavery, from the antebellum era. One point of entry will be to examine the way in which these gothic episodes attempt to engage their readers emotionally. Rather than simply eliciting sympathy for the victims of slavery, these episodes more frequently present a witness to scenes of horror with whom the reader can empathetically associate, and cast the perpetrators of spectacular violence in such a light that the reader negatively identifies with them. One persistent criticism of many abolitionist texts is the degree to which they silence the victims of slavery by denying them a voice, and I will examine why this silencing occurs and to what degree the authors of these texts were aware of this omission. To do so, it is necessary to keep in mind that these texts were written with an immediate and pressing rhetorical end—to turn the tide of public opinion in the North against slavery. Perhaps abolitionist authors realized that the most effective strategy was not necessarily to render fully the experiences of the slave in hopes of engendering a radical sympathy in Northern readers.

Another critique of abolitionist writing is the assertion that it tends to silence the voices of slaves in favor of those of voyeuristic white witnesses to the horrors of slavery. Stephen Browne argues that in the antislavery tract *American Slavery As It Is*, Theodore Dwight Weld "anticipated a dilemma which often besets discourses of reform: in speaking for the oppressed we speak instead of the oppressed" (286). Browne goes on to point out that in creating a tract about slavery, Weld "virtually silenced its victims," and comes to the conclusion that the text allowed its Northern audience to "indulge a kind of vicarious horror while never really abridging the distance between Northern class identity and the realities of Southern slavery." Katherine Henry similarly notes that, while *American Slavery* functions upon a legal conceit in which the reader hears testimony about Southern slavery, "the testimony of white witnesses is tormented by the "shrieks" and "groans" of the brutalized slaves who must themselves remain on the outside" (33). Browne and Henry's critiques rest upon the assumption that abolitionists' class allegiance, unacknowledged racism, and desire to palliate their own sense of guilt allowed them to overlook the actual plight of the slave in their writings, and that the absence of the slave's voice is an unconscious failing of these works. While I agree that these texts constitute only a fragmentary historical rendering of life under slavery, I will challenge these critics' assumptions about the strategies of abolitionist writers. Browne claims that, by publishing his tract anonymously, "Weld makes conspicuous the avowed aims of the text to capture *American Slavery As It Is*—unmediated, authentic, factual" (285). As I will show at length later in this chapter, *American Slavery* continuously refers to its mediated nature, and gestures toward the fact that the description of slavery which it renders is incomplete. The same can be said of works by many abolitionists, both white and black, Northerners and former slaves. It is difficult indeed to imagine any writing that is not in some sense mediated, the written word being itself a medium. In fact, the distinction between speaking *of* or *for* the oppressed seems to be of limited use, as even survivors of slavery such as Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown note that they can speak strictly of their own experiences, and only indirectly about those of others under slavery.

The gothic episodes to be examined in this chapter—from works by Weld and the Grimké sisters, Stowe, Douglass, and William Wells Brown—all tend, like *American Slavery*, to call attention to their mediated and incomplete accounts of slavery. As a result, they call into question Browne's opposition between speaking of rather than for the oppressed, or put another way, between texts that purport to allow readers to witness rather than experience slavery. Short of allowing the dead to speak, as Toni Morrison does in her postmodern slavery gothic, *Beloved*, it is difficult to imagine a strategy by which the most extreme experiences of violence under slavery could be rendered but from the position of an observer. Furthermore, the witnesses to slavery's violence in these texts provide readers with empathetic figures who model the desired response to slavery: to be aware, affected, and mobilized to take action against the system that allows such violence to occur.

Writing of the French humanitarian J. Henri Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino*, Joseph Slaughter argues that it is more realistic to expect a reader to identify imaginatively with a humanitarian observer of extreme suffering than with the suffers themselves. Dunant's work, he argues, assumes "that we will *pity* the sufferer, but the narrative invites us to *empathize* with the humanitarian" (Slaughter 101). Rather than asking the reader to engage in what might be an impossible act of radical imagination, Dunant's writing creates what Slaughter calls a "triangulation of humanitarian sentiment" between sufferer, witness, and reader. As Slaughter explains,

> the affective structure of the humanitarian triangle implicitly recognizes the philosophical and practical limits of our generous imaginings, our historically feeble capacity to imagine ourselves in the place of the suffering other…. The other imagined through the humanitarian dramatic triangle is not the absolute other: it is precisely the reader's peers, which suggests that humanitarian sentiment may be an effect of the reader imagining that people like him or her are (or should) be moved by tales of suffering. In other words, the sense of ethical obligation perhaps develops not in response to another's tragedy but as a sense of responsibility to the moral integrity of one's own class of humanity. (102)

Slaughter's account applies particularly well to *American Slavery*. But even if William Wells Brown, and Stowe's fictive Cassy, are not "precisely the reader's peer," each offers the reader a figure who is easier to empathize with than the other actors in each respective text. These writers had to overcome distances and differences of geography, class, race, and experience to allow their primarily white, Northern (or British) readers to imagine the horrors of slavery. To take

Slaughter's analysis a bit further, furnishing the reader with an empathetic humanitarian witness to the horrors of slavery allowed for several results beneficial to the purpose of the abolitionist writers. First, these witnesses provided readers with models upon which they could develop their own response to slavery. Then, we might expand the concept of triangulation to include a fourth actor: the perpetrator of violence. David Boocker has noted the significance of what he calls the "rhetoric of demonization" in abolitionist writing, illustrating specifically how abolitionists compared their Southern antagonists to Milton's Satan (Boocker 20). To turn Northerner whites against slavery, it could be just as effective to develop their sense of antipathy toward slave owners as that of sympathy toward the slaves themselves. The countless cruel masters in *American Slavery*, Covey in Douglass's autobiographies, and Legree in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are but a few of the many figures described by witnesses of slavery with whom readers almost certainly would develop a negative identification. Between empathizing with the witnesses of slavery, abhorring its perpetrators, and pitying its victims, readers of these works are invited in numerous ways to develop an opposition to slavery and join the cause of abolitionists and other antislavery forces.

Reading abolitionist tracts as histories, modern critics have been repeatedly struck by the problematic nature of writings about the horrors of slavery that fail to provide readers with the experience of the slave. Indeed, these texts are not ideal histories, but neither were they designed to be. By looking at these works in terms of their rhetorical strategies and ends, including the use of gothic episodes, we can make better sense of how they stage the horrors of slavery. In their frequent focus upon the evils that slavery entailed, these works also opened themselves up to criticism that in some surprising ways corresponds with psychoanalytic criticism of the gothic. Proslavery writers such as Caroline Lee Hentz and Mary Eastman charged that the more gruesome passages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflected, not the reality of Southern slavery, but rather the perversion of Stowe's imagination, and the same critique was further applied to abolitionist writers as a group. I will conclude this chapter by examining how Hentz criticizes Stowe's work, but then employs the gothic herself in her anti-Tom novel *The Planter's Northern Bride*. The power of gothic conventions to demonize the opposition, and rhetorical force with which gothic terror and paranoia could act upon the reading public, made the very means Hentz critiqued useful in her portrait of insidious abolitionist eloquence. It is an ideologically varied spectrum of texts, indeed, that employed gothic episodes in abolitionism-era writing.

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Writing to Theodore Weld in late 1838, Lydia Maria Child declared that she was "disheartened sometimes to see how few of the *nominal* abolitionists are *real* ones. Many in this region, for instance, have "their dander up" (as some express it) about their own rights of petition, etc., but few really sympathize with the slave" (Weld 735). Child refers to a rule adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives in 1836 that prevented the hearing of petitions with antislavery intentions.[9] The rule turned out to be a boon to abolitionists, whose work in previous years, based on pamphlet campaigns that stirred fears that Garrisonians and "immediatists" were fomenting dangerous and extremist political positions, met with little success. But once a concrete political right—that to petition Congress—was threatened, some previously apathetic or even hostile Northerners began to give an ear to the abolitionist cause. That attention was of limited value, however, so long as it was concerned only with the right to petition. Abolitionists needed to find a way to use the platform they had gained with that issue to draw the attention of their Northern audience to the plight of Southern slaves, and make that audience *care*. Hence Child's distinction between "*real*" and "*nominal*" abolitionists, the latter group of which were concerned primarily with their own rights. Judging from the failure of earlier abolitionist campaigns, it appeared that a new strategy was needed. As Child indicates, the real path to abolition lay not through the mind, but the heart: the "real" abolitionists are the ones who "sympathize with the slave."[10] To make an indifferent Northern public feel such sympathy was a daunting task, which would have to overcome not just apathy, but widespread, outright racism, as well as fear of political instability from what was rightly perceived as a threat to the Union.

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[9] The gag rule was one of a series of anti-abolitionism resolutions introduced by South Carolina congressman Henry Pickney. It was eventually overturned through the efforts of John Quincy Adams. See Curtis, *Free Speech.*

One strategy the abolitionists settled upon was to produce pamphlets that purported to depict the reality of slavery in the South, allowing the portraits of slave life to speak for themselves in place of a reasoned argument. Child produced one such pamphlet in the same year she complained to Weld about nominal abolitionists; entitled *Authentic Anecdotes of Slavery*, the work focuses on the way slavery breaks up families, dulls the ability of slave owners to feel sympathy, and results in horrific violence. Tracts such as this usually consisted of testimonials from Northerners who had resided or travelled extensively in the South, or Southerners who had either never owned slaves or manumitted their slaves and moved north. Such testimonials appeared frequently in William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* and other abolitionist papers, and were collected and published by various anti-slavery societies. Attacked by advocates of slavery as lies and exaggerations, these tracts consistently emphasized their basis in fact. Child's *Authentic Anecdotes*, for example, opens with the following avowal of its accuracy:

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[10] The publication of Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* in 1985 did much to energize the conversation about the uses of sympathy in abolitionist writing. Her chapter on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* focuses on Stowe's religious aims more than her political ones but acknowledges both. My argument is indebted to her insight that "it is not as if rhetoric and history stand opposed…. Rhetoric *makes* history by shaping reality to the dictates of its political design," even if I am unsure that it does so "by convincing the people of the world that its description of the world is the true one" (141).

> The apologists of Southern slavery are accustomed to brand every picture of slavery and its fruits as exaggeration and calumny.—The FACTS stated in these sheets are capable of satisfactory and legal proof. In cases where, from personal considerations, the *names* of persons or places are suppressed, the circumstances and authority on which they rest will be fully made known, on application at the office of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, No. 25 Cornhill, Boston. (2)

Child slyly evokes one of the atrocities regularly charged against Southern slave-owners—the branding of their slaves—in the first sentence, but immediately follows this play on words by characterizing her text as something *seemingly* nonliterary, a collection of stated facts that should be held up to a legal standard rather than a literary one. She also implies the tract's inability to represent slavery fully: as some testimonials would put their writers at risk of retaliatory violence, an incredulous reader must apply in person at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society for the truth to "be fully made known." Child is clearly aware of the fine line her text balances upon: on the one hand, it must depict slavery in a dramatic and moving fashion that will engage her reading audience and elicit an emotional reaction, while on the other hand, it must be scrupulously documentarian and grounded in fact. To present an unverified or inaccurate picture of slavery—the "exaggeration and calumny" charged by slavery's apologists—would give substance to the characterization of abolitionists as dangerous fanatics.

At this very time, Weld was working with Angelina and Sarah Grimké to compile the testimonials, letters, newspaper articles, advertisements, and legal writings that they would shape into *American Slavery As It Is*, the greatest tract of all in terms of scope and impact, and one of the most unrecognized yet influential piece of American gothic writing. This is not to say that Weld and the Grimkés saw themselves as producing a gothic text. Weld especially was scrupulous when it came to personal habits and pleasures, abstaining from drink and following Sylvester Graham's rigorous program of austere diet, cold-water bathing and exercise, as well as constantly analyzing his own moral flaws and weaknesses. He seems unlikely to have indulged in gothic novels, which were viewed with distrust (while still somewhat commonly read) at the time in the United States. *American Slavery As It Is* constitutes a landmark in American gothic writing for two reasons. First, it is hard to underestimate its impact upon writers producing gothic texts in its wake. It was Harriet Beecher Stowe's main source for her depiction of Simon Legree's plantation, where the gothic episodes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* occur, and she heavily excerpted it in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1853 to defend the depiction of the South in her novel. The many literary responses to Stowe's novel are largely attacking a vision of the South that Weld and the Grimkés created. *American Slavery As It Is* provided a model for other writers of how to depict a horrifying vision of life in the slaveholding states through a combination of spectacular descriptions of violence and protestations of the inadequacy of language to capture fully the reality those descriptions pointed toward yet failed to render. Secondly, it is surprising how much of current gothic criticism sounds like it could be describing the style and structure of the tract. I will briefly enumerate the variety of ways in which *American Slavery* appears gothic: in terms of its subject matter, imagery, affective rationale (to borrow a phrase from George Haggerty), narrative structure, and historical sensibility.

The claim that the tract is gothic in subject matter needs little elaboration. With a few notable exceptions,[11] the general critical consensus is that one way gothic writing can be identified is by the emotions it depicts and evokes: fear, terror, horror, paranoia, and so forth.

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[11] See Anna Monnet, who claims in *The Poetics and Politics of the American* Gothic that the gothic's capacity to produce fear is overstated. I disagree with this statement, which does not account for how gothic texts may have been experienced by audiences in ages in which the truly fear-inducing imaginary had not moved into visually-oriented media such as film.

The tract relentlessly records the horror and disgust of the various witness whose testimony it collects, and Weld asserts that, "Were there nothing else to prove [slavery] a system of monstrous cruelty, the fact that FEAR is the only motive with which the slave is plied during his whole existence, would be sufficient to brand it with execration as the grand tormentor of man" (*American Slavery* 109). Responses from those sympathetic to the abolitionist cause are predictable: William Ellery Channing, for example, wrote to Angelina Grimké that "The extracts [of the tract] in the Emancipator have filled me with horror" (Weld 761).

The structure of Weld and the Grimke's tract also evinces remarkable coherence to gothic conventions. Anna Monnet points out that many gothic novels begin with a preface addressed to the reader, exhorting them to examine the fantastic events described and make a judgment as to what has in fact occurred. Just so, *American Slavery* begins by informing its reader that "you are empannelled as a juror to try a plain case and bring in an honest verdict. The question is not one of law, but one of fact—'What is the actual condition of the slaves in the United States?'" (7). Under the guise of prosecuting a case, Weld and the Grimkés martial their evidence. Comprised as it is of a variety of legal texts and testimony, the tract again resembles gothic novels that use interpolated documents—letters, wills and other legal documents, diaries, and so forth—to produce a self-referential and internally-validating reality. There is frequently so little difference between these various documents that they begin to blend together, producing archetypes rather than specifically instantiated characters: victimized slaves, cruel and merciless masters, and horrified witnesses. This effect is yet another hallmark of gothic literature. David Morris argues that from *The Castle of Otranto* onwards, two of the most persistent stylistic elements of the gothic are repetition and exaggeration. Something of this nature occurs by way of one of the most frequent strategies deployed in the tract, which is to appropriate the language of slaveholders and turn it against them. This is done by excerpting numerous small parts of advertisements, usually for runaway slaves. Take for instance, this excerpt from an advertisement published in the Raleigh "Standard" by Micajah Ricks:

> "Ranaway, a negro woman and two children; a few days before she went off, *I burnt her with a hot iron*, on the left side of her face, *I tried to make the letter M*." (77)

Horrible enough as this "testimony" is in its own right, it is just the first in a list of over *one hundred* one- to two-sentence extracts that Weld and the Grimkés compile under the heading "Brandings, Maimings, Gun-Shot Wounds, &c." The tract does have a narrative, in a sense, but like most gothic narratives, it endlessly revolves around the same turn.[12]

In effect, the writings of slaveholders *become* gothic writing via the reading and composition practices of Weld and the Grimkés. Their strategy was to cull the worst atrocities that they could from an archive of almost 20,000 Southern newspapers they collected at the American Anti-Slavery Society headquarters to create a vision of the South that was maximally horrifying. Weld was encouraged by fellow abolitionists to "reject much testimony...not because the facts are not well authenticated but because those which are merely *horrid* must give place to those which are absolutely *diabolical*" (733). This strategy, a sort of cherry-picking of the most rotten fruit, led sympathizers with slavery to voice their frustration. In her pro-slavery novel *The Planter's Northern Bride*, Caroline Hentz complains that the abolitionists "pass over everything that is fair and pleasant to the moral sense, and gather every shadow, which, darkening under their touch, rolls into a mass of gloom and horror, oppressive and sickening to the soul" (86).

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[12] This strategy might partially explain the unease of readers like Katherine Henry with abolitionist writing. As I show later in an analysis of William Wells Brown's prefatory narrative from *Clotel*, strategies focused upon the reception of Northern readers often quite deliberately elided or replaced the actual, physical atrocities suffered by Southern slaves. Here, the dizzying, almost sublime effect created through repetition also divests each incident in the list of atrocities of specificity. This remains one of the more troubling legacies of abolitionist writing, even if an examination of their rhetorical strategies helps explain why they chose to proceed as they did in spite of such problems.

This complaint describes the strategy of *American Slavery* well. Not only does the tract "gather every shadow" by collecting the most disturbing material from a large archive to the exclusion of all else, but there is also an important sense in which Weld and the Grimkés made such material "darke[n] under their touch" by way of their manipulation of typeface, especially with the use of all capitals and italics. One of the most important lessons to be taken away from finding the gothic in antislavery tracts, slave narratives, and political novels is that, rather than constituting an alternative vision or history of America, the gothic provides the *same* history as we would find elsewhere—in newspapers, letters, novels, in short, print culture writ large—but with only a change in emphasis. Weld's gothic voice speaks loudly in his introduction, enough so that William Wells Brown borrowed his language of clanking chains, "pale lips and trembling knees," and such for his own use in *Clotel* (*American Slavery* 7). But it speaks more loudly still *through* the language of the slaveholders which he reappropriates. The main idea of the sentence taken from Micajah Ricks, in its original context, is that he has lost valuable property and seeks its return; the description of his slave is subordinate and meant only to expedite the process of her recapture. In *American Slavery*, the emphasis is reversed, and the sentence reads more like a confession, with the emphasis on the violence Ricks has perpetrated upon his slave. It is tempting to read a further meaning into Ricks' sentence (if it can even be called his at this point). "*I tried to make the letter M*," he writes, admitting a failed compositional attempt. Ricks' attempt to inscribe his ownership upon his slave is deformed, assumedly, by her resistance to such torture. Weld and the Grimkés read his advertisement as another hideous inscription, and both divest Ricks of possession of his language and deform it to speak against the system he seeks to perpetuate.

It is worth noting that here, as almost everywhere in *American Slavery As It Is*, Weld and the Grimkés do little to give voice or presence to the slave: Ricks emphasizes his ownership, the abolitionist editors emphasize his cruelty, and in both contexts the slave is a passive textual presence who is merely acted upon. Critics such as Stephen Browne have pointed out the way that the tract tends to turn the central horror of slavery into *witnessing*, not *experiencing*, torture at the hands of cruel masters. In a typical passage, F. C. Macy relates that he "could not endure the dreadful shrieks of the tortured slave, and rushed away from the scene" (106). Macy articulates his feeling upon witnessing the torture of the slave, whose own experience is registered only as "shrieks" that *cause* pain more than they give voice to the experience of it. *American Slavery* persistently seems more interested in the feelings of its audience than the actual victims of slavery whom it presents as a horrible spectacle. This strategy obviously erases, to a large degree, the actual experience of the slaves for whom the abolitionists were ostensibly attempting to evoke sympathy. Katherine Henry complains that this strategy of tying political oppression to the readers' sense of their "own tender interior" depends "upon a problematic blurring of literal and figurative, actual and imaginary," and indeed, that it tends "to elevate the imaginary over the actual" (67). While I partially agree with Henry's analysis, in that it points to an important way in which abolitionist writings fail as a history capable of registering the event of slavery, I also think such a view misses the point that this elevation of the imaginary is precisely the rhetorical intention of abolitionist writers, who saw themselves producing something closer to propaganda than history writing. Angelina Grimké explains in a letter written to Anna Frost just after the controversial publication of *American Slavery* that the tract's concrete aim was "to excite a holy indignation against an *institution* which degrades the *oppressor* as well as the oppressed." She characterizes the tract as a tool, specifically a weapon:

"These shafts have not been aimed *in vain*, but are now doing the work on the SYSTEM of SLAVERY which they were designed to do" (Weld 813). In Grimké's view, *American Slavery* is a functional, results-oriented piece of writing that is "designed" to do specific "work"; it is pragmatic and short-sighted in its goals, and while its erasure of the actual experience of slaves is bad history, it was terrifically effective rhetoric.[13]

I think that Weld and the Grimkés were acutely aware of the representational lacuna at the heart of *American Slavery As It Is*, which bears a deeply ironic title. That its authors knew they were not presenting and could not present "the thing itself" is abundantly clear from the language of the testimonies they compiled. Examples abound:

> I will state to you a *few* cases of the abuse of the slaves, but time would fail, if I had language to tell how many and great are the inflictions of slavery, even in its mildest form.
>
> And on the part of slaveholders, there is cruelty *untold*. The labor of the slave is constant toil, wrung out by fear. … I could spend months in detailing the sufferings, degradation and cruelty inflicted upon slaves. But my soul sickens at the remembrance of these things.
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> But I forbear—the sufferings of the slaves are not only innumerable, but they are *indescribable*. I may paint the agony of kindred torn from each other's arms, to meet no more in time; I may depict the inflictions of the blood-stained lash, but I *cannot describe* the daily, hourly, ceaseless torture, endured by the heart that is constantly trampled under the foot of despotic power. That is a part of the horrors of slavery which, I believe, no

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[13] Abolitionists had a knack for converting historical horrors into effective rhetoric. Lydia Maria Child advocated keeping a collection of instruments of torture at the Anti-Slavery Society office so visitors could examine them and imagine the pain they wrought; Elizabeth Pease lamented the lynching of the abolitionist publisher Elijah Lovejoy while simultaneously noting that "viewing it in reference to the cause he so nobly espoused, there is little doubt but that such an outrage will work for good" (Weld 546).

> one has ever attempted to delineate; I wonder not at it, it mocks all power of language. (*American Slavery* 26, 49, 57)

The latter of these excerpts comes from a testimonial written by Angelina Grimké herself. Again and again, these testimonials elaborate the numerous ways in which they *fail* to present slavery "as it is." Slavery is too hideous for words to describe, too great in magnitude for a work to contain its account, too painful to recount witnessing, and ineffable in its totalized experience. The persistent failures of representation in *American Slavery* are not accidental nor incidental, but are a major feature of the tract: representative failure is both the gothic heart of the text and its central rhetorical maneuver.

Fred Botting begins his study of the gothic with Michel Foucault's insight, in *Language to Infinity*, that "the novels of terror introduce an essential imbalance within works of language: they force them of necessity to be always excessive and deficient" (qtd. in Botting 1). With its exhaustive scope and seemingly endless repetition, *American Slavery* reads as overwrought, excessive, even hysterical. But it is gothic in that it *evokes* terrors more than it explicitly describes them, forcing the reader to participate imaginatively in its scenes of torture and violence. As Henry James writes, a writer need only "make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough…and his own experience, his own imagination…will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars" (8). This participation, this use of the reader's imagination in creating a vision of slavery, was a first step toward participating in the antislavery cause. In a sense, the gothic rhetorical strategy employed by Weld and the Grimkés resembles the first successful tactic of the abolitionists, tying their movement to the right to petition: it made the issue about the white, Northern audience they were addressing. (Only here, it is their thoughts and feelings, not their political rights, that are imagined to be under assault.) To predicate their case upon a radical imagined sympathy between Southern slaves and their Northern reading audience, while perhaps a morally satisfying idea, must have seemed to be too precarious a tactic to Weld and the Grimkés. But to hear witnesses who resembled themselves express horror upon facing the reality of slavery offered Northern readers a chance to take up and express the same sentiment in opposition to the institution. Forcing white, Northern readers to recreate imaginatively the horrors of Southern slavery was a powerful rhetorical tactic, but it also made abolitionists vulnerable to critiques from their opponents in the debate over slavery, as we shall see at the conclusion of this chapter.

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In the preface to her 1856 novel *Dred, A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Harriet Beecher Stowe writes that "in a merely artistic point of view," the institution of slavery offers "exciting possibilities of incident" and "every possible combination of romance" (*Dred* 3). Troubling in its cold and calculated assessment of the horrible reality of slavery, this passage furnishes Teresa Goddu with proof that Stowe erases the historical actuality of slavery, which has for Stowe been "imaginatively subsumed by gothic conventions" (136). But if the intro seems at this moment to turn away from a specific historical context, it is—as the word "merely" should alert us—a temporary one. Stowe explains that her primary object is not artistic, but moral, making the artistic point of view a secondary concern. Her primary concern is the effect her work can produce in a specific and critical historical moment, as she goes on to explain:

> Never has there been a crisis in the history of this nation so momentous as the present. If ever a nation was raised up by Divine Providence, and led forth upon a conspicuous stage, as if for the express purpose of solving a great moral problem in the sight of all mankind, it is this nation. God in his providence is now asking the American people, Is the system of slavery, as set forth in the American slave code, *right*? Is it so desirable,

> that you will directly establish it over broad regions, where till now, you have solemnly forbid it to enter? And this question the American people are about to answer. Under such circumstances the writer felt that no apology was needed for once more endeavoring to do something towards revealing to the people the true character of that system. (*Dred* 3-4)

Stowe seems to have two minds about the problem of slavery: it is at once civic and specific, "a crisis in the history of this nation," and abstract, "a great moral problem in the sight of all mankind." It is within the former context that she situates her own novel and the effect she hopes it to produce. The "broad regions" where slavery had been forbidden to enter were the western territories put into play as potential slave states by the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which passed just as Stowe was beginning to compose *Dred*. There was the real chance that the balance of power between the North and South could swing toward proslavery forces if the institution expanded west. Stowe was convinced that, should the Northern public know "the true character" of the system—which she characterizes in the introduction to *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "evil, and only evil, and that continually" (*Key* III)—sentiment would turn against its expansion. Hence, her calculated assessment of the artistic possibilities furnished by the subject of slavery is motivated by her desire to produce a specific historical end: if her novel's "exciting" scenes of "romance" can bring in a large reading audience, then that audience will be exposed to the true, evil character of slavery. This goal is of a piece with Stowe's statements of purpose in her previous two works. She writes that the object of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is "to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race" and "to show their wrongs and sorrows" (*Uncle* xiii), and in the subsequent *Key* to "bring this subject of slavery, as a moral and religious question, before the minds of all those who profess to be followers of Christ, in this country" (*Key* III-IV).

Stowe's strategy is similar to that deployed by Weld and the Grimkés in *American Slavery As It Is*. She assumes that the best argument against slavery can be made not through reason, but through emotion, and that emotion is best evoked by presenting scenes of slavery to the Northern public. Also like Weld and the Grimkés, Stowe realized the deficiency inherent in such presentations. She asserts in the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that "what may be gathered of the evils of slavery from sketches like these, is not the half that could be told, of the unspeakable whole" (*Uncle* xiii), and says of the *Key* that "the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery" (*Key* 5). Finally, like the creators of *American Slavery*, Stowe saw herself as *arranging* material rather than creating a new and unique fictive world. In her *Key*, itself an *American Slavery*-like compendium of authenticating documents, she calls *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "a collection and arrangement of real incidents,—of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered,—grouped together with reference to a general result," and labels it "a mosaic of facts" (*Key* 5). But there is one crucial difference between the approaches of Stowe and her predecessors, in that she sees her works as distinctly literary in a way they did not.

Weld and the Grimkés chose material for *American Slavery* based upon its dreadfulness (the "*diabolical*" rather than the "merely *horrid*"), with seemingly little regard to its literary merit. With a few notable exceptions, including the Grimké sisters' own testimonials, and a narrative describing the mutilation and murder of a slave named George by two of Thomas Jefferson's cousins, *American Slavery* is comprised of unpolished testimonies and newspaper extracts that only gain their literary power—their power as a gothic rhetoric—through the way Weld and the Grimkés combine and manipulate them. Stowe went through a similar archive but chose her material for both its shock value and inherent literary quality. Expressly seeking material for her novels, she seems to read the archive as itself a gothic text. She sees the

Southern "law-book," for example, as "horrible records…describing unheard-of scenes of torture and agony, perpetrated in this nineteenth century of the Christian era, by the irresponsible despot who owns the body and soul!" (*Key* 40).

While the briefer extracts included in *American Slavery*, such as that of Micajah Ricks, are just substantial enough to *evoke* scenes of horror, Stowe prefers descriptions or more substantial narratives. The extracts in her *Key* tend to be about the length of the longer testimonials in *American Slavery*, ranging between a couple of paragraphs and a couple of pages. Stowe pays attention to the quality of the writing she excerpts as well as the content. She calls an especially opaque piece of legal writing "a literary curiosity" (75), judges that a description of a slave named Harry in a North Carolina paper contains "an inkling of history and romance" (85), and explains that she has chosen to include the legal decision from a case in which a master had his slave decapitated in Charleston harbor "for its intrinsic literary merit, and the nobleness of its sentiments" (99), just to give a few examples of her writerly reading practices. The latter of these examples must have attracted Stowe because it went beyond even her description of Simon Legree in painting a slaveholder as a gothic villain. The "Honorable Judge Wilds" claims that the "annals of human depravity might be safely challenged for a parallel to this unfeeling, bloody and diabolical transaction" (99), namely, the murder perpetrated by the plaintiff, John Slater, whom Wilds repeatedly calls "a monster." Wilds concludes his ruling, which assesses the maximum sentence under law, a fine of seven hundred pounds, by professing a hope that Slater's conscience will administer the punishment that the law cannot:

> Your days, which will be but few, will be spent in wretchedness; and, if your conscience be not steeled against every virtuous emotion, if you be not entirely abandoned to hardness of heart, the mangled, mutilated corpse of your murdered slave will ever be

> present in your imagination, obtrude itself into all your amusements, and haunt you in the hours of silence and repose. (100)

One obvious attraction of this passage must have been its evocation of Legree, who is haunted by the memories of both his abandoned mother and the female slave he tortured to death in the garret of his plantation house. By showing that her literary work closely mirrored "real world" texts such as legal rulings, Stowe validates her novel, which was the ostensible goal of the *Key*. But it is a strange legal text, resembling a curse from a Brockden Brown novel more than the dry and legalistic language we would expect to find in a judge's ruling. Essentially, such texts prove that the flip side of Stowe's proposition is also true: the historical record resembles the darkest passages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Where the records Stowe examines are inherently gothic in their literary style, she tends to present them with little commentary, but having recognized that a historical archive can be read as a gothic source text, Stowe also brings her imagination to bear on less obviously gothic passages. An energetic and inventive close reader, Stowe teases out insinuations of violence and horror from seemingly more mundane legal writings. To her eye, the law-books register a history of violence even when they record laws supposedly enacted to protect slaves from harm. She describes these texts as "exceedingly suggestive" and cannily points out that outlawing horrible acts of barbarity is tantamount to confessing that such activities are occurring, for "Laws are generally not made against practices that do not exist, and exist with some degree of frequency" (87). Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick has noted how veils, designed to cover the object of sexual desire from view, come themselves to represent sexuality in gothic texts. Stowe's achievement as a reader of the Southern legal record works similarly, as she again and again shows how the "veil" raised to cover the most brutal practices of Southern slavery in fact frequently registers those practices. Evocative rather than descriptive, such a register leaves room for the reader to imagine the worst. Considering a passage from the Revised Statutes of North Carolina that allowed whites to kill recalcitrant runaway slaves, in any manner, with impunity, Stowe writes, "What awful possibilities rise to the imagination under the fearfully suggestive clause '*by such ways and means as he shall think fit!*'" (*Key* 84). Stowe considers this statute in a fashion that combines factual examination of the legal writing with an imagined "melodrama" (as she calls it) in which the statute is put into play. Because the "ways and means" on the historical record include lynching—Stowe cites the public burning of a slave named McIntosh in Saint Louis—she finds the statute's phrase "more terribly suggestive to the imagination" than anything she can herself write. Nonetheless, she proceeds to sketch out a history of Prue, a luckless slave who has hidden out in the Southern swamps after having received one whipping too many from her master. In short, Stowe's technique in the passage, and throughout her *Key*, is to combine fact and fiction, using her imagination to produce fictive stagings of the suggestive possibilities in the historical record that she examines. In this sense, the *Key* is similar to what Stowe describes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be—a "mosaic of facts," artistically arranged and brought to life by the author.

Like Weld and the Grimkés, Stowe invites the readers of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* to view the historical record from an essentially gothic perspective, and she too uses emphasis and recontextualization to make the writings of Southerners speak against the institution of slavery by prompting readers to participate imaginatively in scenes of slavery's horror. In fact, Stowe excerpted *American Slavery* heavily in her *Key*. But the *Key*, like *American Slavery*, is a tract, and was little read in comparison with the work to which it was a companion piece, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. If Stowe saw all of her works as having immediate, concrete rhetorical aims—to bring the ills of slavery to the attention of Northern audiences, in hopes of eliciting sympathy for the slaves and undermining support for the system—then *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is by far her most rhetorically successful work in terms of the range of its readership and hence impact. The portion of the book spanning Chapters 32, "Dark Places," to 42, "An Authentic Ghost Story," draws heavily upon *American Slavery As It Is*, and contains several gothic episodes. Stowe discovered that by giving an imaginative stage to the site of slavery described in only the most skeletal terms in Weld and the Grimkés' tract, the gothic rhetorical effects of that work could be made to do work and reach audiences beyond the scope of what abolitionist tracts had been thus far capable.

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The world of Simon Legree's plantation that Stowe creates in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is basically that of *American Slavery As It Is* furnished with richer imagery and more fully-drawn characters. The tract breaks down the conditions of slave life into its basic components: food, dwellings, punishments, clothing, labor, treatment of the sick, and so forth. These various aspects of slave life are systematically addressed throughout the Legree section of Stowe's novel. Her descriptions, in "Dark Places," of the slave's quarters, and the necessity of their grinding their meager peck of corn at one hand-mill late into the night, both draw directly upon *American Slavery*. Sections of "Emmeline and Cassy," "The Victory," and "The Martyr" which depict Legree gambling on the size of his crop, endorsing the cost-effectiveness of "wearing out" slaves during the high season, and punishing his slaves in fits of passion can all be traced back to the tract as well. But working with the novel form, Stowe has different tools at her disposal for portraying the South. Weld basically makes the South out to be hell on Earth in *American Slavery* to convince his readers that "public opinion" in the South will not safeguard slaves: he depicts a lawless world in which duels and vigilante justice are everyday occurrences, and seemingly everyone, from college students to state legislators, is always on the verge of plunging a bowie knife into somebody's breast. But, drawing as he is upon the scant descriptions furnished by newspapers, this world lacks a certain imaginative presence which Stowe is better able to provide. Take for example this description of the road to Legree's plantation, from the opening lines of "Dark Places," the first chapter that draws heavily upon gothic conventions in her novel:

> It was a wild, forsaken road, now winding through dreary pine barrens, where the wind whispered mournfully, and now over log causeways, through long cypress swamps, the doleful trees rising out of the slimy, spongy ground, hung with long wreaths of funereal moss, while ever and anon the loathsome form of the moccasin snake might be seen sliding among broken stumps and shattered branches that lay here and there, rotting in the water. (*Uncle* 312)

The description is not particularly precise, but it adroitly evokes the South and imbues it with a gothic atmosphere. Stowe evokes the region by citing specific features, in terms of geography (barrens and swamps), and flora and fauna (pine, cypress, and moccasin snake), and chooses her accompanying adjectives for their atmospheric effect. Characterizing the landscape of slavery as "doleful," "funereal," and "loathsome," a decayed and rotting garden, she signals that this section of the novel will take place in a fallen world. The choice to make out Legree's plantation as a hellish place *before* any acts of violence have been perpetrated there is strategic, because Stowe sees herself, unlike Weld and the Grimkés, as fettered by the imperative to produce a work that is not overwhelmingly painful, but pleasurable to her readers. She chooses the gothic as particularly suitable to this end, as it provides a means by which she can signal and point toward the horror of slavery without overwhelming her readers in the manner of *American Slavery*.

Stowe famously explains in the opening pages of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* why slavery cannot be properly depicted by a work of art:

> The writer acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery; and it is so, necessarily, for this reason,—that slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read. And all works which ever mean to give pleasure must draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed. (*Key* 5)

Stowe, who reported that she slept with a copy of *American Slavery As It Is* under her pillow while writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, here asserts that a work representing slavery "as it is" "could not be read." Taken out of context, the sentiment might suggest that squeamishness prevents Stowe from attempting a full portrait of slavery. But as we have seen, Stowe was an adroit and active close reader, and she was likely fully aware of the irony of the tract's title. Furthermore, she directly ties art to pleasure, and having surely been aware of the reactions to *American Slavery*, Stowe must have realized that her novel would have to proceed in a different fashion in its depiction of slavery to evoke its horrors without overwhelming the reader with them. Finally, the metaphor of the veil is noteworthy. As I previous pointed out, Stowe was cannily aware of how coverings could register things covered over. I think she draws her veil strategically in the gothic passages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which stage a fictitious gothic narrative in order to give spectral presence to an "unspeakable" narrative they supposedly cover over.

The site of one of the central horrors of Stowe's novel is the garret of Simon Legree's plantation house, itself an embodiment of the "utter decay" (314) which characterizes the fallen world of the plantation. Over this horror, Stowe explicitly draws a veil:

> a negro woman, who had incurred Legree's displeasure, was confined there for several weeks. What passed there, we do not say; the negroes used to whisper darkly to each other; but it was known that the body of the unfortunate creature was one day taken down from there, and buried; and, after that, it was said that oaths and cursings and the sound of violent blows, used to ring through that old garret, and mingled with wailings and groans of despair. (364)

Notice the use of parataxis in the long sentence above, which is highly unusual in Stowe's writing, but indicative of the passage's refusal to make a narrative. It is as if the story of the "negro woman" is itself resistant to the devices of novel-writing. The four clauses of the sentence follow this pattern: suppressed narrative incident, suppressed discussion of the incident, conclusion of the incident, gothic aftereffects of the incident. The fate of the woman and the slaves' ostensibly frank discussion of her plight while locked in the garret are both covered up, while the results—her corpse and the gothic legends it inspires—are left uncovered. This strategy is of a piece with the way Stowe precedes throughout the novel, which frequently registers the *effects* of violence while expunging descriptions of that violence from the narrative. Stowe believes that art "must draw a line somewhere," and in the above passage we can clearly see that line of demarcation, which runs between the horrific event and its aftermath. Such a strategy seems in itself to be problematic. Parataxis turns the woman into a corpse as if by magic, without cause and hence (following the grammatical logic, at least) culpability, and the legacy of this non-event registers only as explicitly supernatural gothic effects which implicitly arise from superstition. The novel never directly reveals what happened in the garret. However, it *does* in fact give presence to the event through the character of Cassy.

Cassy is one of the more controversial figures in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; some critics describe her as just another gothic effect as a demonized rather than human presence, while others have emphasized her heroic role in doing what Tom is incapable and unwilling to do, as she defeats Legree and saves herself and Emmeline by effecting their escape from the plantation. It is worth noting that Cassy is one of the most rhetorically savvy characters in the novel. While Stowe's narrative voice occasionally contributes to the depiction of Cassy as demonic, it is more frequently she who consciously creates this persona for herself. To some degree, all the characters who have spent any time on Legree's plantation are demonized, including the overseers Sambo and Quimbo—"no unapt personification of the powers of darkness"—and most consistently, Legree himself—"perfectly demoniacal" (*Uncle* 325-6, 324). This strategy is in keeping with Stowe's overall depiction of the plantation as hell. Cassy appears in a diabolical light more frequently because to do so gives her power over Legree. Uneducated, superstitious, and possessing a troubled conscience due to memories of his mother who died after he abandoned her, Legree is vulnerable to suggestions of the supernatural. Cassy has better access to Legree than any of his other slaves, having been forced to cohabit the plantation house with him, and as a result evinces a keener understanding of his psychology. She uses this insight to her advantage by controlling Legree through fear:

> "Simon Legree, take care!" said the woman, with a sharp flash of her eye, a glance so wild and insane in its light as to be almost appalling. "You're afraid of me, Simon," she said, deliberately; "and you've reason to be! But be careful, for I've got the devil in me!"
>
> The last words she whispered in a hissing tone, close to his ear.

> “Get out! I believe, to my soul, you have!” said Legree, pushing her from him, and looking uncomfortably at her. (337)

Cassy claims devilishness rather than having it imposed upon her. The deliberate nature of her statement suggests that the “wild and insane” glance she casts upon Legree is calculated as well. She hisses in his ear to effect the serpentine cadences of devil she purports to possess. In short, everything about this performance is calculated to make her demonic in the eyes of Legree, and the strategy pays off: he is “secretly uneasy” afterward because “Cassy had an influence over him from which he could not free himself” (337). Later on then, Stowe is disingenuous, if not outright ironic, when the narrator states that, “It had suddenly occurred to Cassy” to play upon Legree’s “superstitious excitability…for the purpose of her liberation” (364). She has already been doing just that.

But Cassy is more than a merely demonic presence, and appears not only in a gothic register but also as a sympathetic figure. Specifically, the personal history she narrates to Tom in “The Quadroon’s Story” falls clearly into the tragic mulatta genre. She tells her story of early love and hopes of marriage, followed by betrayal and misery as her children are sold into slavery. She succumbs to fits of madness, gets passed from owner to owner who sexually abuse her, and kills her own child rather than letting him grow up into slavery. As she tells Tom, “I was sold, and passed from hand to hand, till I grew faded and wrinkled, and I had a fever; and then this wretch bought me, and brought me here,—and here I am!” (335). Cassy asserts her presence; coming as it does at the end of her narrative, this assertion establishes Cassy as an embodiment of the violence perpetrated against female slaves such as herself. Cassy functions for Stowe as the writers of slave narratives did for Northern abolitionists, as a sort of rhetorical device: she gives voice to the experience of having suffered seemingly every possible abuse that a woman can in slavery.

Except that of dying. It takes no stretch of the imagination to assume that Legree would have purchased Cassy to replace the woman whom he killed in the garret. In some sense, then, Cassy already occupies that woman's place in the house before she literally does so in the garret, and this fact explains, beyond Cassy's machinations, why Legree fears her. It also elucidates Stowe's strategy: she puts Cassy, who is the most full-voiced slave on Legree's plantation, in the place of the slave whose voice she feels compelled to withhold. When Cassy removes herself and Emmeline to the garret, and employs various gothic effects to haunt Legree—creating shrieks by sticking the neck of a wine bottle into a knot-hole, and entering his room at night covered by a sheet, for example—she acts out a fictive gothic episode from the site of an actual scene of violence. But rather than to undermine that original scene of violence by replacing it with the machinations of the gothic, the effect of this strategy is to keep the reader continuously focused upon the site of what Stowe judges to be an unspeakable horror. As we have seen in examining Stowe's reading practices in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she was keenly aware of the power of suggestion, and that a covering could reveal what was beneath it: the shrieks of Cassy's gothic scheme echo those of the slave whose murder has been suppressed but is here brought back into the novel. Hence, Cassy is able—to a limited degree—to articulate one of the horrors of slavery she has not experienced, and Stowe is able to evoke the horrors of slavery beyond the curtain that she has drawn for the sake of her art.

The final gothic chapter of the novel is entitled "An Authentic Ghost Story." It would be merely ironic if it described Cassy's haunting of Legree, but it does not. That haunting ends when Legree, dreaming of his mother wrapped in her funeral shroud, awakens to find Cassy, draped in a sheet, standing by his bedside. Stowe narrates that as a result, Legree "fell down in a swoon" (385). This is the first of two swoons in the chapter. Travelling north on a steamer bound for Cincinnati, Cassy hears George Shelby and Madame de Thoux discussing the wife of George Harris, who turns out to be her daughter. Upon making this discovery, Cassy "fell insensible on the floor of the cabin" (389). It is the latter of these two incidents, obviously, that is the "authentic" ghost story. Cassy's own life story, a narrative of sexual violation, familial alienation, despair, madness, and infanticide, articulates as far as Stowe considers it fit the horrors suffered by women under the system of slavery. By making Cassy the subject of an authentic ghost story, Stowe encourages her readers to make out the horrors of Legree's garret that resist a less spectral articulation in her novel.

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William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* differs from the other texts discussed in this chapter in several important ways. Foremost among these differences stands the fact that Brown wrote his novel while living in England, and primarily addresses the work to a British audience. This fact is especially pertinent, as I will show, in regards to Brown's use of the gothic. The story of Ellen and Jane Morton, two grand-daughters of Thomas Jefferson who are raised as white only to be revealed as enslaved mulattas upon the death of their father, is the most traditionally gothic of all the episodes examined in this chapter, evoking Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in both style and content. At the same time, it seems to be the least committed to presenting slavery with any sheen of verisimilitude. Then, Brown's novel is the only work of fiction written by a former slave studied in this chapter. The novel is prefaced by an autobiographical narrative, written in the third person, which quotes frequently from Brown's first-person *Narrative of William W. Brown*, published in 1847. This prefatory narrative both acts as and challenges the traditional authenticating document, usually written by a white abolitionist, which precedes a slave narrative; Brown's self-authenticating narrative also raises questions and establishes themes which the subsequent novel will return to. While the primary gothic episode in Brown's work occurs almost two-thirds of the way through the novel, the stakes of the gothic imagination in regards to slavery and emancipation have already been carefully laid out in the prefatory narrative. Finally, *Clotel* differs from the other texts examined in this chapter in that it is the most ironic. Like Weld and the Grimké sisters, Brown appropriates and recontextualizes others' language describing and debating slavery (including, famously, Weld's own writing from the opening pages of *American Slavery*). Like Douglass, Brown simultaneously provides descriptions of the gothic atrocities of slavery and points to the difficulties that such descriptions entail. Like Stowe, Brown at times makes his artifice plain to the reader. Writing the tragic narrative of the slaves Ellen and Jane as a traditional, highly literary gothic constitutes an implied critique of language's ability to authentically represent the actuality of slavery. But at the same time, Brown makes clear his belief that the gothic, even self-consciously written and read as such, has the power to frighten or horrify his readers in productive ways through spectacular descriptions of slavery's violence.

Brown was widely renowned as a skillful orator, and it was mainly in the capacity of lecturer that he found himself in England during the period in which he composed and published *Clotel*. He was an innovative stage presence on the abolitionist circuit. In addition to more traditional talks in which Brown recounted episodes from his life and made moral, social, and economic arguments against the institution of slavery, he also put the machinery of stage drama to work to maximize the rhetorical effect of his appearances. His *Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of An American Slave*, published in 1850, described a huge canvas panorama depicting twenty four scenes of slavery that Brown used as a backdrop for a series of lectures to British audiences[14]. Later, he would turn his life story into a one-man play, *The Escape*, which attracted crowds that might not have materialized for a more traditional antislavery lecture—as Brown wrote, "People will pay to hear the Drama that would not give a cent in an anti-slavery meeting." Indeed, numerous critics have pointed out the various ways in which *Clotel* is informed by Brown's predilection for the dramatic[15]. Geoffrey Sanborn characterizes the novel as "in essence, a variety-show 'Drama' in which abolitionist material rides on a broken, rippling stream of stylistic gestures" (76). In an important sense, then, *Clotel* can be examined as another piece of antislavery rhetoric in Brown's generically diverse array of dramatically-inflected texts produced to persuade audiences of Britain and the American North during the 1850s to join the abolitionist cause. Without downplaying other literary and expressive goals that Brown may have striven to achieve in writing the novel, one of its main functions was simply persuasive, and the genre is as much a carefully chosen rhetorical technology—audiences will pay to read novels that would not give one cent for a pedantic tract—as it is a literary end in itself.

Keeping this rhetorical situation in mind can help to explain one curious feature of the prefatory narrative featured in *Clotel*: throughout, Brown tends to privilege the witnessing of violence upon slaves, rather than the experience of that violence, as the central horror of slavery. As we have seen, this strategy has been frequently pointed to as a persistent, problematic feature of antislavery testimonials written by whites, such as those featured in *American Slavery as it Is*. Brown first describes witnessing violence at the outset of the preface:

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[14] Robert Levin points out this fact in his annotations to the novel.

[15] Paul Gilmore has examined the ways that the novel engages with "the abolitionist platform and the minstrel stage," each of which "attempted to invoke the 'reality' of the Southern plantation by capturing and reproducing the 'truth' of black life in the slave South." Brown's own comparison of his stage dramas versus lectures was first pointed out by Robert Farrison in his 1967 annotations to *Clotel*.

> When about ten years of age, the young slave's feelings were much hurt at hearing the cries of his mother, while being flogged by the negro driver for being a few minutes behind the other hands in reaching the field. He heard her cry, 'Oh, pray! oh, pray! oh, pray!" These are the words which slaves generally utter when imploring mercy at the hands of their oppressors. The son heard it, though he was some way off. He heard the crack of the whip and the groans of his poor mother. The cold chill ran over him, and he wept aloud; but he was a slave like his mother, and could render her no assistance. He was taught by the most bitter experience, that nothing could be more heart-rending than to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured by unfeeling men, and to hear her cries, and not be able to render the least aid. (49-50)

Two features immediately stand out from this passage. Brown emphasizes that his initiation into the knowledge of slavery's horrors comes exclusively from a position of aural spectatorship. The passage repeatedly positions Brown as listener ("hearing," "heard," "heard," "heard," "hear") and his mother as speaker ("cries," "cry," "utter," "imploring," "groans," "cries"). Then, it emphasizes the pain felt by Brown, rather than his mother. While the pain of the driver's lash is only implied by the cries of Brown's mother, we are told explicitly that Brown's "feelings were much hurt" and that "nothing could be more heart-rending" than to *witness*, not *experience*, such scenes.

The passage stages the horrors of slavery as an aurally witnessed spectacle that produces sympathetic pain in the listener, and I think Brown's intention is to stage the response that he desires from his reading audience. There is a much smaller imaginative gap to bridge between *hearing* slavery's horrors and *hearing about* them, than between experiencing those horrors and imagining that experience. Notice how Brown enumerates the stages of his response to hearing his mother's whipping. First, the "cold chill ran over him," denoting a visceral response of horror; an emotional response soon follows as Brown "wept aloud." This response has two immediate results. It forces Brown to examine his position in relation to slavery, and to assess his ability to respond to it. He draws the unfortunate conclusion that, being a slave, and hence powerless to act, he can "render [his mother] no assistance." Finally, the passage moves from cataloging Brown's reaction to this specific instance of slavery's cruelty, to expressing his conviction that the central horror of slavery in general is essentially gothic, resembling the specific dynamic of horror and powerlessness characteristic of a nightmare: "to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured by unfeeling men, and to hear her cries, and not be able to render the least aid." The reader of this passage, like the listener at Brown's lecture, is asked to form a sympathetic imaginative bond not with the enslaved sufferers described, but with the speaker, Brown himself. In fact, the reader is invited to replace the specific sufferer—Brown's mother—with a female relative in the abstract, allowing the reader to personalize Brown's experience as his or her own. As history, or as a descriptive text aiming at rendering the actuality of slavery, this move would prove highly problematic. But as troubling as we may find Brown's strategy, it is rhetorically pragmatic and effective. The reader is invited to feel pain upon witnessing the horror of slavery, pity the slave and empathize with Brown, and hopefully, like Brown, examine his or her relation to slavery and ability to combat it.

Indeed, it is not an experience, but an act of the imagination, that finally motivates Brown to escape from slavery in the prefatory narrative. This fact suggests the power that Brown attributes to such acts, and it is no coincidence that the scene imagined is again gothic. While traveling up the Mississippi toward Louisville on a steamer, Brown imagines a future of freedom should he run away, but he remains indecisive until he thinks of the situation of his family:

> If he could only be assured of their being dead, he would have been comparatively happy; but he saw in imagination his mother in the cotton-field, followed by a monster task-master, and no one to speak a consoling word to her. He beheld his sister in the hands of the slave-driver, compelled to submit to his cruelty, or, what was unutterably worse, his lust; but still he was far away from them, and could not do anything for them if he remained in slavery; consequently he resolved, and consecrated the resolve with a prayer, that he would start on the first opportunity. (60)

It is not the actuality of slavery that convinces Brown to escape, but an imagined vision that is founded upon that actuality. The images his mind creates are not fantasy, because their plausibility is established by the earlier incident of his mother's whipping. Once again, Brown's text is self-authenticating. If Brown's primary purposes in writing *Clotel* is persuasive, the subtext of this passage becomes clear: if imaginary, representative horrors of slavery provide enough motive force to compel Brown to endure the risks and hardship of an escape attempt, they must also possess force enough to motivate passive dissenters against slavery to take action. The passage also forecloses the possibility of characterizing passive, pietistic dissent as action: Brown prays, but his "start" occurs afterward.

Later in the narrative, Brown provides a confirmation of his persuasive strategy. As I have shown, the previous passages move from an aurally-focused description of Brown's personal experience, to a visually-oriented imagined gothic spectacle of slavery, to an ultimate resolve to take action against slavery. This exact sequence appears again in an excerpt of an address presented to Brown by the ladies of Bolton, Lancashire (where he had lectured in 1850) which he incorporates into his narrative. The ladies declare that, "having heard the story of your personal wrongs, and gazed with horror on the atrocities of slavery as seen through the medium of your touching descriptions, we are resolved, henceforward, in reliance on divine assistance, to render what aid we can to the cause which you have so eloquently pleaded in our presence" (74). The actual and imagined are arranged in the same discursive formation, in which the actual authorizes the imaginary (yet representative), and the imaginary allows the listener to experience sympathy (Brown's descriptions are "touching"). To motivate sympathetic responses, and martial "aid…to the cause," Brown must employ the most rhetorically effective register of the imaginary, that which produces spectacular images that elicit horror and fear—in short, the gothic.

One other point is worth making at this juncture, before turning to the main text of Brown's novel. While *Clotel* is a fiction, Brown's rhetorical strategy in the novel, and especially its preface, can help us understand that of other writers during the era of abolitionism. It is not uncommon to find in slave narratives a register not only of the slave's own sufferings, but also those of others whom the slave has witnessed. Brown's experience of hearing his mother whipped is similar, to name one prominent example, to that of Frederick Douglass as he views the whipping of his Aunt Hester in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Teresa Goddu has argued that, among other things, that scene functions "to critique the white reader's role in viewing" Hester's punishment from a safe vantage point, with no imperative to take action in response (138). I would suggest that Douglass's text must be taken in its historical and rhetorical context, as a politically motivated piece of writing calculated to persuade a white, Northern audience to take action against slavery. It makes little sense for a writer to critique his target audience for reading the very text that he proffers them, and while Douglass pursues that strategy in his speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?", it seems like more of a stretch to claim that the pathos he carefully cultivates in the scene from his autobiography are undercut by a critique of the very position of witnessing in which he is attempting to establish the reader. The scene should be taken, I suggest, not as a critique, but as an exhortation. The response of the Bolton ladies' club to Brown's similar descriptions of the spectacular violence enacted under slavery suggests that such scenes were taken in just such a way by the audiences to which they were directed.

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Brown's rhetorical strategy of employing the gothic in the prefatory narrative to *Clotel* helps explain one of the more puzzling passages in the novel. While Brown aggressively employs pastiche, he usually does so on the level of textual borrowings (or plagiarism, a term whose etymological root of *plagiarius*, "kidnapper," has fascinating connotations in terms of Brown's technique). In a few cases, Brown introduces very obvious and even jarring stylistic shifts, as in Chapter XII, "A Night in the Parson's Kitchen," which draws heavily on the tradition of minstrelsy. Another such a stylistic shift occurs in Chapter XXIII, "Truth Stranger Than Fiction," which moves from a realistic description of an outbreak of yellow-fever to a gothic narrative describing the deaths of two tragic mulatta figures, Ellen and Jane Morton. The narrative is both ironic and earnest; it clearly fails to escape the category of the fictive, but at the same time gives dramatic presence to an especially disturbing aspect of American slavery.

The long description of the pathology of the yellow fever that opens the chapter is lifted practically verbatim from John R. Beard's *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Negro Patriot of Haiti*, published the same year as *Clotel*. Brown prepends a comment on the nature of tropical maladies addressed specifically to his British audience, explaining that the "inhabitants of New Orleans look with as much certainty for the appearance of the yellow-fever, small-pox, or cholera, in the hot-season, as the Londoner does for fog in the month of November" (195). The analogy is designed to emphasize an incongruity, rather than a resemblance: the appearances of yellow fever and the fog are similar only in that they are seasonal occurrences, whereas making out the appearance of deadly diseases as an orderly and mundane seasonal occurrence dryly characterizes the tropics, and New Orleans specifically, as a place of death. Brown thus emphasizes the distance between where his narrative is set and where it is written and read. This distance is not unimportant when thinking about the rhetorical situation of Brown's text and how he incorporates the gothic. If one of the distinguishing features of the American gothic is that it frequently does not displace its narratives to settings that are temporally or spatially remote, then Brown is working in a more traditional mode, with New Orleans taking the place of Italy or Spain. But because Brown is a native of the American South, his descriptions play out less as gothic fantasy than as a sort of demonic travel writing.

The narrative of Ellen and Jane Morton is a textbook tragic mulatta story: the girls, grandchildren of Thomas Jefferson, are daughters of the white Southerner Henry Morton and Althesa, his slave whom he thinks he has freed and married. The parents die of yellow fever, and when the girls' uncle comes down from Vermont to settle his brother's estate, which is in disorder due to speculation in land and stocks, he is shocked to learn that his nieces are slaves. White and refined in appearance, they are begged as an "extra article" by creditors and auctioned off. Here again, Brown emphasizes an incongruity by way of an analogy, describing the sale of Ellen and Jane as "two of the softer sex, accustomed to the fondest indulgence, surrounded by all the refinements of life, and with all the timidity that such a life could produce, bartered away like cattle in the Smithfield market" (197). The London cattle market is compared to the New Orleans slave market to underscore once again the distance between them not only in spatial terms, but in terms of the reality of life; London has fog and bartered beef, while New Orleans has plague and human beings for sale.

Ellen, realizing that she has been purchased not as a housekeeper, but a concubine, Ellen commits suicide with poison. Jane's story is written as gothic, in the creakiest sense of the descriptor. One way the gothic has traditionally been identified (but not defined) has been by its stock features: even critics who haven't ventured to offer an essential character of the gothic have had little trouble pointing out common patterns in narrative structure, archetypal characters, and scenery. Jane's gothic narrative begins when she is purchased by "a dashing young man" who is clearly described as a gothic villain:

> The very appearance of the young Southerner pointed him out as an unprincipled profligate; and the young girl needed no one to tell her of her impending doom. The young maid of fifteen was immediately removed to his country seat, near the junction of the Mississippi river with the sea. This was a most singular spot, remote, in a dense forest spreading over the summit of a cliff that rose abruptly to a great height above the sea; but so grand in its situation, in the desolate sublimity which reigned around, in the reverential murmur of the waves that washed its base, that, though picturesque, it was a forest prison. (197)

Gothic hallmarks abound, from the stock phrases—"unprincipled profligate," "impending doom"—to the lofty sea-side setting. In fact, the latter half of the passage, beginning with the third sentence, is taken almost verbatim from a description of a Jewish burial ground in Italy, in a *Chamber's Journal* article entitled "A Peep Into the Italian Interior." Jane, apparently, is imprisoned by a gothic villain in an isolated Italian villa, and one "constructed" upon a burial ground, at that!

I find it hard to imagine that Brown was not thinking specifically of Ann Radcliffe when he wrote Jane's story. Like Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Jane is a foreigner who bears a markedly British surname, whose happy childhood comes to an abrupt conclusion upon the death of her father, when she is taken from her home and ends up imprisoned in a remote location, at the mercy of a passionate and sexually threatening man. Like Emily, she has a French lover—in Brown's narrative, the law clerk Volney Lapuc—whom she hopes to escape with. And finally, like Emily, Jane frequently sits at her window, inevitably on a "bright moonlight [sic] evening" (198), hoping that help will come. Stylistically, the passage resembles eighteenth-century gothic more than it does later work. It is pictorial more than psychological in its focus, and both the objects named—"forest," "summit," "cliff," "sea," "sublimity"—and the adjectives used to describe them—"singular," "remote," "dense," "great," "grand, "desolate," "picturesque"—seem "gauged much more for effect than meaning," as George Haggerty characterizes Radcliffe's descriptive language in *Udolpho* (23). It is because the language favors creating mood over describing with any specificity that Brown is able to appropriate a description of Italy and move it to Louisiana's gulf coast, for it is a generic gothic landscape the passage describes. Jane's fate is not happy like Emily's, but the conclusion of her brief story is also unmistakably gothic: Lapuc stands beneath the window of the high room in which Jane is imprisoned, and receives a note from her; he returns the next night with a rope ladder, by which she lowers herself down. Her master returns at this moment from a hunting trip, and shoots Lapuc, at which Jane faints in a fit of delirium. She recovers only to die of a broken heart and receive unceremonious burial in the back garden. Brown concludes Jane's story with a direct address to the reader:

> This, reader, is an unvarnished narrative of one doomed by the laws of the Southern States to be a slave. It tells not only its own story of grief, but speaks of a thousand

> wrongs and woes beside, which never see the light; all the more bitter and dreadful, because no help can relieve, no sympathy can mitigate, and no hope can cheer. (199)

After such a highly literary passage, it seems odd that Brown would characterize Jane's story as an "unvarnished narrative." His method of composition makes the claim even more curious: Jane's narrative is mostly taken from Lydia Maria Child's short story "The Quadroons," which has been only lightly retouched (or varnished?) to add a gothic flair.[16] One explanation would be to read this passage as another literary irony, calling attention to the inevitably mediated nature of descriptive writing. Brown frequently problematizes the notion of authenticity in his prefatory narrative and novel, and this fact has been addressed by several critics. Lee Schweninger notes that "Brown seems to undermine his apparent attempts to authenticate the novel" (23) through a variety of strategies, including frequent historical incongruities, while Jennifer Schell and William Andrews both note the significance of role-playing and adoptive personae or masks in Brown's work. While I agree that his engagement with notions of authenticity is one of Brown's points in this postscript, it has several further significances.

To make sense of this curious postscript to Jane's story, it might help to think about Brown's strategy in the prefatory narrative of describing both his personal experience and spectacular, gothic images of slavery that allow the reader to participate imaginatively in viewing the system's horrors. Brown's postscript makes two assertions, as I see it. First, by claiming a gothic tale as an "unvarnished narrative," Brown more explicitly than any other author in this study ties the reality of slavery to the literary gothic. The word "gothic" is rarely used to describe literature in the mid-nineteenth century, but when it is, the texts referred to are eighteenth-century gothic novels like *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Old English Baron*, both of which, not coincidentally, self-identify as "gothic" in their title material. By closely mimicking this mode of the gothic, Brown tacitly suggests the connections between gothic novels and slave narratives that literary critics would not point out for another century and a half. Second, by claiming that Jane's story "speaks of a thousand wrongs and woes beside," Brown again emphasizes the power of gothic spectacles of slavery to make slavery *visible* to a sympathetic witness without actually *describing* the experience of it. Supporting the rhetorical strategy of soliciting the audience's imaginative participation in witnessing scenes of slavery, the gothic offered a literary method of eliciting fear and horror that would be comprehensible and even familiar to many readers—especially British ones. In other words, while many previous critics have pointed out how the gothic suits the subject matter when employed to depict slavery, I would further argue that it is also chosen for its legibility to the audience. The story of Ellen and Jane intimates that authorized kidnapping, imprisonment, rape, suicide, murder, and madness are all parts of the range of plausible experiences for female slaves. Just as his "touching descriptions" of slavery allowed the women of Bolton to feel sympathetic pain and roused them to action, Brown's gothic narrative in *Clotel* is designed to motivate an historically specific audience, composed largely of British women, by way of a complex combination of pity, empathy, and moral outrage, to join the fight for the liberation of American slaves.

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[16] In fact, it appears that Brown used language from Child's *Authentic Anecdotes of Slavery* as well. When the planter shoots Volney, Brown's novel reads, "At this moment the sharp sound of a rifle was heard and the young man fell weltering in his blood." The first half of the sentence is taken verbatim from "The Quadroons," in which the slave Xarifa can hear but not see her lover's death; the second half of the sentence describes a slave who slits his own throat in *Authentic Anecdotes*. The suture is imperfect: why state that the "rifle was heard" when there is no logical hearer listening in on the scene?

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The abolitionists' use of gothic conventions to build a rhetorically strategic, powerful emotional response to slavery did not go unnoticed by writers who supported the institution. In Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride*, the protagonist, Southern slaveholder Russell Moreland, peruses a handful of abolitionist tracts proffered to him by his future father-in-law, the Northern antislavery “fanatic” Mr. Hastings. Moreland is dismayed to find the pamphlets a gross admixture of truth and exaggeration:

> The articles were well written, and calculated to give an impression of extreme candour and philanthropy. There was much truth in them, but the true was so ingeniously woven with what was false, none but the most experienced eye could detect the tinselry from the gold. There were facts, too, but so distorted, so wrenched from their connexion with other extenuating facts, that they presented a mangled and bleeding mass of fragments, instead of a solid body of truth. (Hentz 29)

Moreland notes first the literary and rhetorical skill of the pamphlet’s author, whose tenor of “candor and philanthropy” helps sell his supposed blend of fact and fiction. The partial truths of the pamphlet are subtly blended with lies, and it is Moreland’s close reading (“none but the most experienced eye” could detect the author’s chicanery) that exposes the supposed hypocrisy of the tract’s author, whose candid style belies his actual distortion of the reality of slavery in the South. The tract is a semi-literary piece of writing designed to fulfill a political purpose, persuading readers to adopt an antislavery stance. Its success is predicated upon the rhetorical skill of its author, his ability to present his depiction of slavery as truthful and delivered in the spirit of philanthropy. We can assume the content of the tract likely includes descriptions of the violence done to slaves by their masters and overseers, but in Hentz’s own tract it is the literary production that is “a mangled and bleeding mass of fragments, instead of a solid body of truth.” Rather than taking on the representation of violence in the tract, Hentz suggests that such representations are in themselves acts of violence.

She does so to further several rhetorical ends in her own novel. First, as a response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and other antislavery writings, Hentz’s primary aim in her text is to challenge the veracity of those depictions of the South. Then, by characterizing the pamphleteer's writing specifically as an act of violence, Hentz makes out abolitionists to be dangerous fanatics. The literary violence of their tracts foreshadows the literal violence which Hentz argues will inevitably follow, as poisoned relations between the North and South could lead to war, or emancipation of the slaves to civil and social upheaval of an apocalyptic nature.

It's significant that Hentz's metaphor for literary misrepresentation is gothic: the "mangled and bleeding" corpse where a healthy "body" of truth should be found. For it is the gothic element of antislavery writing that she critiques. Hentz explicitly compares abolitionist's gothic writing to that of the original Gothic Revival and faults the former for willful dishonesty. "Were [the abolitionists] speaking of the dark ages of the world, over whose sanguinary archives the dim and mouldering veil of antiquity is floating, we might not wonder", she writes, "but that such misrepresentations should be made of our own times, of our own country, by those who might inform themselves of the reality, is indeed incredible" (Hentz 29). Hentz sees the gothic as a speculative historical mode that can appropriately take as its subject only past eras for which the historical record leaves space for gothic fantasies. When applied to the supposedly verifiable present reality, the gothic becomes a mode of creating "misrepresentations." Like many critics of gothic writing, Hentz suggests that the gothic passages in abolitionists' depictions of slavery do not represent or reflect their historical moment, but instead expose the perversion of the abolitionist psyche. In the afterword to her novel, Hentz characterizes the searching out of stories of slavery's atrocities (the practice of Weld, the Grimkés, and Stowe particularly) as "groping in dark by-lanes and foul dens for tales of horror, which might gratify a morbid and perverted taste" (209). She applies the same criticism to the approving readers of abolitionist texts. Fellow anti-Tom novelist Mary Eastman asserted that Stowe's novel sold well because "the mass of readers are fond of horrors" (271), and Hentz goes even further in *The Planter's Northern Bride*, depicting an audience of Northerners whipped into a sexualized frenzy by the gothic descriptions of slavery furnished by the Methodist minister, Reverend Brainard. She plays upon the ambiguity of what is meant by the "wild and *thrilling* eloquence" (203, emphasis mine) of Brainard's gothic rhetoric, suggesting that the audience feels as much voyeuristic pleasure as it does actual horror.[17] That audience is described as "painfully excited. Ladies were passing little bottles containing the spirits of ammonia from one to the other, and covering their faces with their white handkerchiefs; men groaned audibly" (203). The implicit critique in this scene points in two direction. By depicting their exaggerated and seemingly performative expressions of horror, Hentz suggests that the audience members share abolitionist writers' perversion in their susceptibility to and apparent relish of gothic descriptions of slavery. At the same time, Hentz displays distrust of the power of Brainard as a "splendid orator." As in many attacks on political speech dismissed as "mere rhetoric," Hentz targets not only the substance of Brainard's speech, but the very power of rhetoric to move an audience. Brainard's rhetorical force—derived, to a large degree, from his use of gothic conventions—is portrayed here as a dangerous weapon, just as the rhetorical savvy of the abolitionist tract was earlier described as a sort of violence.

Indeed, in an earlier scene in the novel, in which Brainard reveals his plans to return to the North and sully the protagonist Moreland's reputation, the abolitionist gives good reason to take his rhetoric as a weapon. He declares to Moreland,

> Yes! I will go back to the North, and deliver such lectures on the South as will curdle the blood with horror. No matter what I say—I'll find fools to believe it all. If I pour falsehoods hot as molten lead down their throats, they will believe them all, and smack their lips with delight. Take care, Master Moreland! the devil shall be an angel of light

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[17] Interestingly, here again Hentz anticipates some modern critics of the gothic elements in abolitionism-era writing.

> compared to the foul demon I will represent you to be—you, and all your tribe. Thank Heaven for the gift of eloquence! Oh! I'll rave of blood-marked chains, of flesh torn from the body with red-hot pincers, of children roasted alive, of women burned at the stake! They'll believe it all! The more horrors I manufacture the more ecstasy they will feel! (Hentz 192)

This passage highlights virtually all of the ways that gothic rhetoric was used by abolitionist writers to promote their cause: imbuing readers with horror at the system of slavery through descriptions of spectacular violence, inviting pity for the victims of that violence (here, women and children specifically), and demonizing the perpetuators of slavery to engender a negative identification. The passage also neatly sums up the pro-slavery response to abolitionists' gothic depictions of slavery. Rather than being a well-intentioned philanthropist motivated by his desire to abate the suffering of the slave, Brainard is a passionate and unscrupulous, self-serving charlatan specifically motivated by a malicious desire to revenge himself upon Moreland, who has foiled Brainard's attempt to stir Moreland's slaves to violent insurrection. In this way, the passage again ties the "violence" of abolitionist rhetoric to literal violence and revolt. Brainard also identifies the perverted taste of Northern audiences, who will "smack their lips with delight" and feel "ecstasy" at descriptions of Southern atrocities. The rhetorical force of Brainard's eloquent use of gothic conventions, in this scene, highlights the failures of judgment, sensibility, and morality in both speaker and audience, suggesting that the gothic is a dangerous and inappropriate rhetoric if used as political speech.

The apparently unintended irony of this critique is that Brainard is himself a gothic villain. Like Matthew Lewis's Ambrosio or Ann Radcliffe's Schedoni, Brainard falls into a long line of gothic villains who conceal their lust, corruption, and sin behind the preacher's mild mask of sanctity and good-will. The inclusion of such a character goes against the compositional principles that Hentz claims to have followed in writing her novel, which she claims to be based upon “what we have seen and known, without the intention of enhancing what is fair or of softening what is repulsive” (210). Asserting that her work is based upon her direct experience of the South, unadorned by exaggeration, Hentz basically describes literary realism as the predominant mode of her work. As such, she attempts to claim a rhetorical neutrality to her writing, unlike the supposedly biased and untruthful polemic of the abolitionists. In Hentz’s novel, the Southern sympathizer Dr. Darby, following Brainard’s blood-and-thunder speech to the Northerners, claims himself to be “a plain, blunt man” who is “as deficient as the Roman Anthony in the graces of oratory and the flowers of rhetoric” (206). Hentz claims just such a role for herself in opposition to the eloquence of Harriet Beecher Stowe and other abolitionist writers. But that move is itself, of course, rhetorical, and Darby wins over his audience with his eloquent denial of eloquence. Hentz’s claim to realism is a rhetorical move, and what’s more, the inclusion of gothic conventions in her largely realistic text (in terms of style, not substance) exactly recreates the mixture of “tinselry” and “gold” that she so strongly decries and denounces in the abolitionist political tracts that Hastings forced upon her protagonist.

While anti-Tom novelists like Hentz and Mary Eastman offered their work as correctives to the misrepresentations of life under slavery, often depicted via gothic conventions, in the work of abolitionists, the pro-slavery writers frequently employed the gothic themselves. This circumstance suggests the degree to which gothic rhetoric was thought to be effective in the literary skirmish between North and South that preceded the Civil War. In the case of Brainard, we can see that Hentz clearly identified abolitionists’ use of the gothic with a dangerous eloquence and rhetorical force, but despite denouncing the strategy, she found it too effective to exclude from her own political writing. Despite the various problems entailed by using the gothic to describe the horrors of slavery—the way gothic conventions could make historical realities read as fictional, the exclusion of the voices of many victims of slavery, the strategy of focusing on the horror of witnesses, both primary and vicarious—gothic writing proved rhetorically effective, and so was put to work by many pragmatic, results-oriented writers who produced works with concrete political ends. As Sereno and Mary Stretter wrote to Theodore Weld in 1838, the year before the publication of *American Slavery At It Is*, "Horror already seizes my inmost soul at the thought of those deeds of blood which it now becomes your painful duty to spread before the public…. They will now serve as the needful and [I] may add the needed stimulus exciting to prompt and vigorous action" (*Letters* 733). While the abolitionists effectively mined "the literature of terror" in their campaign against slavery, it would be their former opponents in the South who, after the Civil War, put gothic conventions to use with staggering effectiveness in the growth of the Ku Klux Klan.

Chapter 2

Questionable Shapes, Invisible Empires:

The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan

In the previous chapter, I argued that gothic conventions were consciously deployed by writers in the debate over the abolition of slavery to achieve a variety of rhetorical effects. Writers such as Theodore Weld, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and William Wells Brown wrote in the gothic mode not because the reality of slavery was essentially gothic, but because gothic conventions offered the most effective means of dramatizing slavery in a manner calculated to engage the imaginations of and elicit pity from white Northern readers, thus enlisting their support for abolitionism. Following the Civil War, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee and then throughout the South furnishes another striking example of the way that the gothic was deployed in a moment of political crisis. While it was widely understood at the time, and even for decades afterward, that the Klan's use of the gothic, including costumes, pranks, warnings, and ghost stories, was primarily intended to frighten superstitious freedmen, what has been overlooked is how the Klan strategically employed the gothic to mobilize and unite Klansmen, cast doubt upon the group's existence, and promote a narrative of the freedmen's credulity that would bolster the myths of white supremacy. In other words, gothic writing about the Klan was less invested in accurately representing the response of the freedmen to the Klan than it was in mobilizing its Southern readership—just as abolitionists' gothic writing had done in the North.

Unlike the abolitionists, Southern writers used a strategic mixture of traditional gothic tropes and those of the sportive gothic, a comic twist on the traditional gothic narrative brought to prominence in American writing by Washington Irving. As a result, early writing about the

Klan is at times truly frightening and at times absurd. Stylized and clearly fictive accounts of the Klan tended, as the historian Elaine Frantz Parsons observes, to make the organization sound like a “literary construct,” and writing about the Klan was characterized by a pervasive “slippage between parodic or comic accounts of Klan violence and those that were intended to be serious but gestured to comic elements” (73). I would argue that this slippage is made possible by the gothic conventions the Klan employed, the gothic being, as Cannon Schmitt describes it, “that genre in which definition is in doubt” (3), and hence well-suited to fostering tonal fluidity. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine a number of early writings about the Klan, focusing especially on writings from the Southern press in the Reconstruction era and documents produced by the Klan itself. I will show how the gothic allowed the organization to spread rapidly throughout the South, while also enshrouding the organization by making it sound like a literary construct just as it was coming into actual existence. But the relationship between the actual and literary incarnations of the Klan did not end with the “redemption” of the Southern states in the 1870s. The Southern Democratic narrative of the Klan would be repudiated in historical novels written by Albion W. Tourgée, the “carpetbagger judge” of North Carolina, then later defended by white supremacists such as Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas Dixon, Jr., who were sympathetic to the cause of the Reconstruction-era Klan. Dixon’s novels, and the film they inspired, D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, constituted one of the main inspirations for the revival of the Klan in the twentieth century. So in a real sense, the relationship between literary and actual incarnations of the Klan was mutually constitutive. Gothic writing helped to foster the Reconstruction-era organization, and that group’s actions were then depicted, via gothic conventions, in novels that would ultimately lead to a revival of the group. I will trace this complex relationship and show how the gothic was integral to its development. Because the gothic was so essential to the Klan's strategy, the question arises as to whether or not it could be used against the organization. I will conclude this chapter with a brief examination of a newspaper article by William Wells Brown that successfully combats the literary strategy that the Ku Klux Klan used so effectively.

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On Friday, March 29, 1867, a short article printed in the local page of the *Pulaski Citizen* of Pulaski, Tennessee asked, "WHAT DOES IT MEAN?" The paper's local editor, F. O. McCord, collected miscellany ranging from police blotter reports to crop yield announcements to fill the page, and among such notices on this day, he innocently solicited information as to "What is a 'Kuklux Klan,' and who is this 'Grand Cyclops' that issues his mysterious and imperative orders?" (*Pulaski Citizen* 29 Mar. 1867). McCord purported to have found and printed a "Take Notice" order which had been slipped under the paper's office door. It instructed Klan members to "assemble at their usual place of rendezvous, 'The Den,' on Tuesday night next, exactly at the hour of midnight, in costume and bearing the arms of the Klan." This article was the first in a series that followed over the course of the next few months, each new entry usually adhering fairly closely to the formula of a mystified, comic-gothic introductory narrative by the editor followed by a notice from the Klan itself.

One can only imagine the effect such a notice had upon the citizenry of Pulaski. The Klan had been meeting semi-secretly in a cyclone-damaged house on the western outskirts of the town for some months prior, posting sentries outside the meeting-place who wore the "fantastic regalia of the order and bore tremendous spears as the badge of their office," as founding member J. C. Lester recounted several decades later (62). That there was a costumed secret society organizing and meeting at regular intervals must have been fairly well known by this time; the group's tenor and intentions, however, would likely have been difficult to discern. But the timing of the first notice (March 29) is significant, coming as it does in the issue of the weekly paper published closest to that favorite holiday of masquerading pranksters, April Fool's Day.

The consensus seems to be that the Ku Klux Klan was originally founded as a secret social club, not unlike an Elk's Lodge (the first of which appeared around the same time, in 1868), and only later transformed into an organized group of regulators that would end up spreading throughout the South. The historian Allen Trelease puts the date of the organization's inception some time around May or June of 1866, less than a year before McCord first mentioned the Klan in print. But if the Klan began without a particular agenda, it must have quickly developed one: the group held a meeting with state-wide implications around the same time that Tennessee Democrats convened in Nashville on April 13, 1867, to discuss how to resist the Unionist government led by governor William Brownlow. By this time, the Pulaski Klan had developed an intricate set of procedures, stated values, and organizational hierarchies. The timing of McCord's article is thus ironic: just as the Klan had fully transformed from a social club to a well-organized, politically-motivated secret militia (or terrorist organization), just as it became a serious and deadly force, the *Citizen* first put the Klan into printed existence as an ambiguous joke. F. O. McCord was a founding member of the Klan and Grand Cyclops of the Pulaski den.

At the same time that McCord wrote about the Klan—its first mention in the press—his colleague, the former Confederate general George W. Gordon, privately composed "The Prescript of the * *," a sort of constitutional document that was printed and then distributed at the Klan's meeting at the Maxwell House in Nashville that coincided with the Democrats' general political gathering. While the Prescript is for the most part businesslike in its delineation of procedures, offices, and duties, each page is headed and footed with Latin proverbs, the title page quotes from *Hamlet* and Robert Burns' "Ode to the Deil," and the document closes with a few lines from Philip James Bailey's mystical epic poem, "Festus." That Gordon would ornament the Prescript with quotations from not only classical but also gothic literature should not surprise when we consider the gothic trappings of the organization's very nomenclature. The organization's name was likely derived from that of the University of North Carolina fraternity Kuklos Adelphon, but J. C. Lester suggests the corruption of Kuklos ("circle") to Ku Klux was effected for its macabre sonority: "Let the reader pronounce it aloud. The sound of it is suggestive of bones rattling together!" (56). Furthermore, the names chosen for the various offices of the group—Wizard, Genie, Dragon, Hydra, Titan, Fury, Giant, Goblin, Cyclops, Night Hawk, Magi, Monk, Turk, and foot-soldier Ghoul—derive from the monsters of Homer, *1001 Nights*, and oriental mythology. Gordon seems to have had one eye on the pragmatic side of organizing and structuring the Klan, and the other on creating a mythos around the group that could be exploited for several tactical purposes.

For all the emphasis placed upon mystery in Gordon's Prescript (inductees had to swear not to reveal "any intimation, sign, symbol, word or act, or…any of the secrets, signs, grips, pass-words, mysteries, or purposes" of the group), it is *ambiguity* that is key to both his document and McCord's writings in the *Pulaski Citizen*. On the one hand, it is in a sense style alone that gave substance to the Ku Klux Klan by differentiating it from other groups of vigilante regulators. But on the other hand, that style dematerialized the Klan, imbuing it with the air of a myth, or alternatively, a joke. McCord appended real Klan notices to his humorous newspaper articles, and Gordon assigned fantastical names to an expertly delineated militaristic hierarchy in his structure of Klan power. In this way, the Klan's use of gothic literature and its tropes was not incidental but essential to its strategy. Its gothic vestments enshrouded a ruthlessly pragmatic political aim, while also enabling extra-political violence by the organization's members. The gothic style of the Klan made it recognizable and appealing enough to grow the organization rapidly, mainly through coverage in sympathetic Democratic newspapers, while also obscuring its methods and aims, covering real acts of violence with ghost stories and pranks.

To trace how and why the Klan coopted gothic conventions for its own purposes, it is helpful to look at how the gothic itself developed. The question of origins has been of persistent interest to gothic critics. Arising almost simultaneously with the novel of sentiment, the gothic novel seemingly challenged the developing genre by eschewing the accumulation of detail and particularity of character, time, and place that Ian Watt identifies as its hallmarks. Instead, with its archetypal characters and castles and monasteries located at obscuring temporal and geographical distances, the gothic novel hearkened back to the medieval romance. But many other concrete literary-historical influences have been suggested, including graveyard poetry, oriental mythology, and Shakespearean drama. David Punter notes that Horace Walpole used the example of Shakespeare to defend his "mixing of kinds and genres" in *The Castle of Otranto* (51), and further traces the Bard's influence on the novels of Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe. Markman Ellis takes the Shakespeare-Walpole connection even further, arguing that the tone of *Otranto* mimics "the heightened passions, elemental situations and stylised poetic techniques of Elizabethan tragedy" even as the five chapters of the novel are structured upon a Shakespearean paradigm which presents alternating plots for the first four chapters (acts) that are united and resolved in the fifth (31). Shakespeare populated plays as diverse as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* with monsters, fairies, and ghosts that would influence the gothic novelists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

As such, it is in the strictest literary-genealogical sense that the founders of the Ku Klux Klan turned to the same material that shaped and then constituted the origins of the gothic. The first words below the title on the front page of Gordon's "Prescript" come from *Hamlet*:

> What may this mean,
> That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
> Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
> Making night hideous; and we fools of nature,
> So horridly to shake our disposition,
> With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls? ("Prescript")

The quote comes from Act One, when Hamlet first lays eyes upon the ghost of his father. Gordon could easily have chosen this passage merely for its evocation of mystery, fear, and the supernatural, the very material in which the Klan chose to enshroud itself. But beyond its congenial style, the passage works as a theorization of the group's purpose. Another popular name for disguised nighttime regulators in the Reconstruction era was "The Knights of the White Camellia," a name that evinces the widespread notion of a modern chivalric code among those who had been the landed aristocracy of the antebellum South. Hamlet's initial reaction to the spectacle of his father's ghost is ambivalent, a mixture of fear and desire, as he seeks to determine whether the "questionable shape" (1.4.43) be returned for good or evil. Of course, the dead king has returned in his martial garments—"complete steel"—both because he was presumably interred in full regalia, and because his purpose is to repulse, via his son, the unjust usurpation of the kingdom by his brother. In the context of the "Prescript," this scene very easily reads as an allegory of the federal occupation of the South after the Civil War. Like the dead King's ghost, the Klansman was to be striking and ambiguous, "a spirit of health or goblin damn'd" (1.4.40), come back for vengeance. Gordon therefore uses this gothic passage from Shakespeare to create a narrative in which the "questionable shape" of the ghostly Klansman represent the just return of the Old South, wrongly vanquished by a Northern usurper.

Gordon was neither the first nor the last Klansman to appropriate from the Bard when he included lines from *Hamlet* in his "Prescript." According to J. C. Lester, the early Klan's initiation ceremony involved blindfolding inductees, telling them that they were being dressed in rich ceremonial garbs, and then removing the blindfold to reveal the ears of an ass—part of the costume of Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And at least one Klan notice picked up by the press (this one also published on April Fool's Day, in 1868) quoted extensively from *Macbeth.*[18] These details are no aberration from the generally theatrical nature of the early Klan. There was no standard uniform for the Reconstruction-era Klan, and the earliest members tended to wear ornate and widely varied costumes. "No particular color or material were prescribed" for early disguises, according to J. C. Lester. "These were left to the individual's taste and fancy, and each selected what in his judgment would be the most hideous and fantastic, with the aim of inspiring the greatest amount of curiosity in the novice" (58). White robes were popular because they were easy to fashion from bed sheets, but black proved to be a popular color as well as it made the night riders more difficult to see. These robes were often ornamented, featuring "horns, beards, and occasionally long flannel tongues" (Trelease 53). Fake blood stains might be splashed around the mouth hole of the garment, and elaborate trim was often appended as well.[19]

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[18] The notice appeared in the *Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor*. Perhaps following after McCord's example, the notice mixes comedy—"Offended ghosts, put on your skates, and cross over to mother earth!" it exhorts—with serious threats to "niggers" and "low Whites" (qtd. in Trelease 54-55).

[19] For more on Klan costumes, see Elaine Frantz Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan," William Randel Peirce, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy*, and Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*.

These costumes suited a variety of pranks practiced by early Klansmen, pranks that would appear to have been ineffectual in the immediate sense of frightening their victims, but ultimately proved essential to the defense of the Klan as an institution. The earliest and most persistent of these pranks was for Klansmen to claim that they were ghosts of the Confederate dead (perhaps suggesting to Gordon the passage from *Hamlet* he selected) returned from their anonymous battlefield graves. J. C. Lester claims that this practice began at the earliest stage of the Klan's inception, when sentries were posted outside the group's meeting-place. If a passer-by were to question the identity of the sentry

> In awfully sepulchral tones the invariable answer was: "A spirit from the other world. I was killed at Chickamauga."
>
> Such an answer, especially when given to a superstitious negro, was extremely terrifying, and if, in addition, he heard the uproarious noises issuing from the "den" at the moment of a candidate's investiture with the "regal crown," he had the foundation for a most awe-inspiring story. (73)

While the scenario is obviously a fantasy, some version of the sentry's response appears in a wide variety of both historical and fictional accounts of the Klan, with members claiming to be ghosts from Shenandoah and Gettysburg on a regular basis as well. This identification closely ties the organization to the Confederate Army, a fact that in itself has a variety of consequences. For the largely grass-roots and decentralized Klan, it suggests a larger structural coherency than it actually possessed; for white Southerners who accepted only grudgingly, if at all, the defeat of the Confederacy, it suggests a continuation of the war beyond its putative end; and for an organization that trucked in disguises and lopsided numbers in its violent encounters—and hence cowardice—it suggests bravery and valor. In short, the seeming jest of claiming to be an army of ghosts at once imbued the Klan with military and political legitimacy and provided a veneer of humor behind which to disavow that claim to legitimacy.

Equally or more important to the group's strategy was the way this prank allowed the Klan and its supporters to portray the "superstitious negro" as credulous and childish. One of the central conceits of the early Klansmen was that they were frightening blacks not through violence, but rather by way of the effects of their costumes and pranks. In the passage above, Lester claims not only that the spectacle of a Klan sentry would prove "extremely terrifying" to a black witness, but also that he would then spread "a most awe-inspiring story" to the black community. The supposed use of ghost stories to control blacks was a Southern cultural myth that predated the rise of the Klan. It was a common trope in anti-Tom novels, used to explain the order maintained by a small group of whites over a larger population of black slaves on the antebellum plantation. By depicting slaves as superstitious and easily frightened, anti-Tom novelists could cover over the brutal violence used to enforce plantation discipline, while also naturalizing a supposedly benevolent paternalistic structure in which childish slaves needed to be controlled and cared for by white masters. In his pro-Klan novel *In the Wake of the War*, published in 1900, Vernon S. Pease explicitly makes the connection between the myth of plantation paternalism and Klan pranks used to frighten blacks. Two Klansmen, strategizing how to enforce order and promote a good work ethic among the lawless black population, agree that it would be best "to make up ghost stories, as we have done a hundred times," but are stuck only on how to circulate their narrative. "When the negroes were under our hands we could do that," says one, but then he goes on to wonder how, with the blacks emancipated and under the influence of the Union League, the task can still be performed (349). The answer comes in the form of the Klan, whose members both disseminate stories and create them through the performance of pranks.

In Pease's novel, the most spectacular Klan prank has the story's protagonist appear in blackface as the ghost of a man named Pleas who has supposedly been eaten by a monster and subsequently returned from hell. He purports to feel a supernatural thirst and, by means of a funnel and hose beneath his clothing, gulps down several buckets of water. Thomas Nelson Page's Klansmen in his novel *Red Rock*, published two years earlier, perform the same trick, only in Klan disguise instead of blackface. This prank was supposedly performed by the real Klan in the late 1860s, as part of "a small repertory of practical jokes which they performed to amuse themselves and the white public, and to frighten the supposedly gullible blacks" (Trelease 56). William Peirce Randel and others describe a variety of tricks, involving false skeleton hands offered in jestingly conciliatory handshakes, the delivery of warnings and messages on false coffin lids, and a stunt "reminiscent of Irving's headless horseman: a false head, commonly an outsized gourd with a mask attached, could be removed and offered to a Negro to 'hold for a while'" (9).

Randel's reference to Washington Irving's tale "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," from *The Sketch Book*, points toward one major way the Klan employed calculated gothic effects to its advantage. As Pease noticed, these pranks can be traced to pre-war myths of black gullibility. They also trace, like the name "Ku Klux," back to the origins of the group as a diversionary masquerading club, and they register the Klan's appropriation of material from college Greek organizations. As this genealogy suggests, the pranks were in the most literal sense sophomoric. In other words, they deliberately mixed humor with more straightforwardly sinister gothic elements. While the mixture of comedy and terror is not a distinctly American configuration, and arguably exists to some degree even in the writings of Walpole,[20] it was Irving who solidified a genre characterized by the early twentieth-century critic Henry Pochmann as the "sportive gothic." If gothic writing in its usual form is meant to instill fear in the reader, the sportive gothic instead leads readers to draw a distinction between themselves and the victim of a tale's false frights. As Donald Ringe describes it, in the sportive gothic "the usual Gothic devices are converted by knowing characters into the kind of practical joke that reveals the credulity and superstitious fears of those taken in by them" (93). Despite the presence of a pervasive humor in Irving's sportive gothic tales, Ringe reads them as a serious project which ultimately reaffirms the reader's rational understanding of the world, as the tales continually demonstrate that gothic terrors are only the product of faulty perception. So the reader of a sportive gothic comes out feeling doubly superior to the tale's victims, as a rational spectator of the credulous and the duped.

This result of the sportive gothic tale proved essential to Klan strategy. While Klansmen quickly realized that their pranks were not fooling or frightening their targets, stories of those pranks proved extremely useful to the narrative the Klan was subsequently able to tell about its methods and intentions. Those stories brought enjoyment to Southern Democrats and their political sympathizers, both for their narratives and the stereotypes those narratives reinforced. Allen Trelease writes that "[t]he myth of superstitious Negro terror before the Klan represented in truth a prevailing white superstition about Negroes. It was largely false, but it nonetheless performed a valuable psychological service for white men. Reflecting and reinforcing the stereotype of Negro inferiority which was itself an article of faith and a buttress of white self-esteem, it carried on the game of one-upmanship which white supremacy always demanded"

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[20] The "supernatural explained" is a persistent trope in early gothic novels, and the imagined terrors of lower-class characters such as Jacintha in *The Monk* are often played for laughs in a fashion similar to that of the sportive gothic as it is described here.

(58). Trelease tangentially notes the twofold way in which Klan pranks constituted performances. Their immediate audience was the bemused blacks upon whom the pranks were practiced, but their secondary and rhetorically more significant audience was the white supremacists who consumed the spectacle of negro superstition and gullibility. The pranks were purportedly used to control blacks, but in reality their purpose was to influence white attitudes *about* blacks.

While a handful of historians have noted this consequence of the stories told about Klan pranks, they have not noted the way that the sportive gothic genre shaped responses to these stories in the South and beyond. The dismissive responses of readers of Klan hijinks were shaped by racist attitudes toward blacks and a belief in their superstition and credulity. But those dismissive responses were also shaped by the genre through which Klan pranks were reported, showing how the gothic was clearly put to use for a concrete rhetorical purpose. The main point of the sportive gothic tale, as explained by Ringe, is to force readers to make a distinction between their own true, rational perspective on the narrated events, and that of the credulous victim who perceives the world incorrectly. In the more traditional, fear-driven, affective gothic mode, the reader's perceptions tend to synchronize with those of the protagonist, but the sportive gothic specifically pushes readers to do just the opposite, lest they become dupes as well. The fact that sportive gothic tales are often still unironically frightening (a fact to which the long history of straight-faced adaptations of "Sleepy Hollow" can attest) makes this effect more powerful rather than less so—to read the tale rightly and laugh at the hapless victim of the gothic effects, I must suppress or deny the frisson of fear I feel myself, or in other words, the part of me that sympathizes with the victim from the narrative or shares his perspective. Just so, newspapers reporting Klan pranks that read like sportive gothic tales invited readers emphatically to dismiss the Klan’s victims and to identify themselves imaginatively in opposition to them. In this sense, newspaper reports of Klan pranks created a readership that formed the basis for a nation that was an imagined community defined by a white supremacist perspective—as Thomas Dixon would acknowledge decades later when he retitled *The Clansman*’s film adaptation as *The Birth of a Nation*.

The first of these reports of Klan activity appeared in Southern newspapers beginning in the spring of 1867, which was a crucial season in the Reconstruction era, as the federal Reconstruction Acts passed by a Radical Republican congress legislated the creation of Radical governments in the Southern states election in contests that enfranchised the freedmen while denying the ballot to Confederates who were disqualified from taking the Ironclad Oath. This political upheaval created an atmosphere of paranoia and fear among Southern whites, according to the historian George Rable, who writes that “conservatives believed vile conspiracies were being hatched against them in Washington” (10). Indeed, that opinion was not held by Southerners alone, and the sensationalist author and publisher C. W. Alexander put out a gothic novella in 1868 entitled *The Masked Lady of the White House* which posited that the Klan was run by Northern radicals intending to stir up enough outrages in the South to justify martial law. The ballot, given to the freedmen, was also seen as an attack upon Southern honor, according to the white Southern viewpoint, its purpose being not to ensure political equality but to humiliate the South. In Tennessee, the Unionist government of William Brownlow was established especially early in the Reconstruction period, and perhaps this fact explains why vigilante activity against the freedmen and the federal government became organized earlier than in other areas of the South. And it was in Tennessee, in Pulaski, the birthplace of the Klan, that F. O. McCord and his newspaper articles about the Klan first appeared.

Both historians and the Klansmen themselves agree upon the significance of the Southern Democratic press in the growth of the group. Of McCord's first articles about the Klan, J. C. Lester explains:

> Every issue of the local paper contained some notice of the strange order. These notices were copied into other papers, and in this manner the way was prepared for the rapid growth and spread of the Klan which soon followed. …[T]he young men from the country, whose curiosity had been inflamed by the newspaper notices, began to come in and apply for admission to the Klan. (68-9)

Numerous historians confirm Lester's account. Michael J. Martinez asserts that favorable press coverage not only brought the group widespread publicity, but helped create its "mythic status in the eyes of many whites" (20), while Allen Trelease claims that "the primary role in spreading the Ku Klux Klan was played, not by General Forrest and his cohorts, but by the Southern Democratic newspaper press" (62). As McCord's articles were picked up and republished by other newspapers, they grew to be more than mere tools for recruitment, inspiring entirely new dens to form across the South, often in areas with no direct connection to the Klan as originally organized. In this way, the Klan's initial presence in much of the South was textual. Ghost stories and gothic conventions didn't just adorn the Klan, they *were* the Klan to a large degree as literary representations preceded and were partially responsible for the formation of actual dens. This phenomenon proved to be just the beginning of a longstanding mutually constitutive relationship between textual depictions of the Klan and historical incarnations of the group, as we shall see.

That the Klan largely spread not through grassroots organizing, but through gothic representations in the popular press, reveals a curious irony about the group. J. C. Lester, F. O.

McCord, George Gordon—in fact, basically all early members who wrote about the group—emphasized *mystery* as the Klan's defining characteristic. This conceit was affected through the dens' out of the way meeting places, the elaborate costumes, and references to signs, signals, handshakes, and passwords that were all secrets ostensibly to be revealed only to the initiated. Gordon refuses to enumerate these secrets even in the privately printed and distributed "Prescript of the * *." Yet, even if these supposed rituals of the Klan existed, they could not have been disseminated to newly forming dens which grew from the ground up. In fact, what was essential to the Klan's identity was exactly what *wasn't* mysterious—the images and actions of the group that were publicly disseminated by the press. There were groups of regulators—vigilante enforcers—before the Klan in most of the South; it was the adopted vestments (both personal and organizational) that made these groups into Ku Klux dens. Writing in the 1890s, J. C. Lester insisted, "*No single instance occurred of the arrest of a masked man who proved to be—when stripped of his disguises—a Ku Klux*" (106). A Klansman divested of the garment and the name became simply a regulator or an outlaw.

If there was any mystery to the Klan, it arose from the uncertainty engendered by the tone of the press that wrote about the group. It is worth looking in some detail at the early articles written by McCord, which consistently employ the configuration of humor and fear characteristic of the sportive gothic. Compared with Irving's tales, McCord's take on the sportive gothic is underdetermined: it is unclear whether we are being prompted to take the gothic conventions employed as cues to feel fear, or to laugh at them as clichés—or both. McCord achieves this effect by further complicating his use of the sportive gothic by deploying multiple voices in his articles, which frequently consist of a narrative told from McCord's editor-character point of view and an appended note ostensibly composed by the Grand Cyclops of the Pulaski den of the Klan.

McCord's fourth "notice" about the Klan, published on April 19, 1867, provides a fine example of his strategy. It begins with the following narrative:

> On last Wednesday night, precisely at the hour of midnight, while we were sitting in our office conversing with several friends, we heard a tap at the door, and in response to our invitation to come in, one of the strangest and most misterious looking specimens of humanity ever seen by mortal man or woman opened the door and solemnly entered our sanctum. It occurred to us at once that this must be the Grand Turk of the Kuklux Klan. We laid hold of the shooting stick and at once placed ourself in a position of defence. Our visitor appeared to be about nine feet high, with a most hideous face, and wrapped in an elegant robe of black silk, which he kept closely folded about his person. He wore gloves the color of blood, and carried a magic wand in his hand with which he awed us into submission to any demand he might make. In a deep coarse voice he inquired if we were the editor. In a weak timid voice we said yes. We tried to say no, but a wave of his wand compelled us to tell the truth. (A wicked printer in the office suggested that we ought to have a wand waving over us all the time.) Whereupon the mysterious stranger placed his hand under his robe and handed us the communication given below, and without uttering another word bowed himself out. (*Pulaski Citizen* 19 Apr. 1967)

It's easy to see how such a notice would, as J. C. Lester suggested, "inflame" the curiosity of the *Citizen*'s rural readership. McCord's depiction of the Grand Turk is based almost entirely upon evocative gothic description, rather than action. McCord emphasizes both the style of the Turk, and the reaction he produces from the editor himself. His description also focuses more—about two to one in terms of word count—on the costume of the Turk than on his personal attributes. And the style of that costume is gothic. The midnight entrance, the black silk robes (silk suggesting the strain of orientalism apparent in the title of "Turk" itself), the deep voice and magic wand, all combine to produce this passage's gothic effects. The description also evokes a strong erotic subtext in which the Turk sexually overawes the "weak timid voice" of the editor by a wave of his "magic wand," which he manipulates as he "place[s] his hand under his robe." But at the same time that the passage clearly delivers all the cheap thrills, both supernatural and sexual, of a gothic tale, it is written in a broadly comic style. McCord depicts himself as a comically grandiloquent buffoon, awkwardly affecting the royal "we" ("placed ourself in a position of defence") and failing, despite the precaution of a firearm, to repel the intruder. He goes beyond irony, in the aside about the "wicked printer," to make quite explicit the fact that the story should be taken as a joke. The passage seems calculated to elicit the reader's interest, but not his sympathy or fear.

There are several important results of this use of gothic conventions in a sportive mode. First, it allows McCord to demarcate the Klan from other vigilante groups in terms of style, and establish that style as the basis for the textual entity "the Ku Klux Klan." Both the style of the Turk's costume and the description of that costume fulfill conventional requirements of the gothic. Then, while "the editor" describes the scene in a seriocomic manner, and plays the fool in the sportive gothic scene, that foolish reaction is itself calculated. The winking tone of the passage prompts the reader to position himself in opposition to the attitude of the buffoonish editor. The editor is "awed…into submission" by his visitor, whose fantastic garments work strongly upon the editor's imagination. Having provided himself with a firearm, he is incapable of putting it to use or defending himself in any way. This response both draws upon and likely helped to shape racist depictions of black superstition, cowardice, and incompetence. As we have seen in Vernon Pease's *In The Wake of the War*, it is a frequent strategy in white supremacist fiction to depict blacks as highly susceptible to suggestions of supernaturalism, which can be used to negate their agency, as happens in a comic manner to the editor in this passage. Black cowardice was another cultural myth perpetuated by white supremacist literature, a common trope of which was to see freedmen, armed and emboldened by the supposedly sinister Union League, throw down their weapons and run away when faced with any resistance from whites, usually former Confederate soldiers.[21] McCord's article begins to lay the groundwork for the larger cultural narrative in which the Klan derived its power from its use of suggested supernaturalism rather than violence, and in which its victims were fools suffering from imagined terrors, rather than men and women suffering real abuse.

Yet another result of McCord's sportive use of gothic conventions was virtually to erase the Klan from the historical record at the very moment of its inscription. McCord's writing takes advantage of a contradiction that proved problematic for former slaves attempting to write their stories. As Teresa Goddu has pointed out, "by signifying the event of slavery through narrative effects, the gothic both registers actual events and turns them into fiction" (132). The use of gothic conventions allowed former slaves to articulate extreme experiences of terror and pain, but also made them sound like fiction because those conventions had so long been associated with a literature of fantasy. That Dr. Flint sounds so much like a Radcliffean sexual predator proves problematic for Harriet Jacobs, who, as a result, must insist upon the veracity of her story with special emphasis. What proved problematic for Jacobs was highly advantageous for McCord and for the Klan in general. That there were elaborately costumed Klansmen meeting and carrying out raids around Pulaski at the time McCord's article was published, there can be little doubt—McCord himself was one of them! The gothic conventions McCord uses to describe the Grand Turk registers the Klan's existence, but makes it sound like fantasy. Furthermore, the sportive gothic proved particularly effective, in that it not only made the Klan sound like a fantasy from a gothic novel, but also allowed readers to dismiss its actions as jokes or pranks.

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[21] *The Birth of a Nation* furnishes perhaps the most prominent example of this scenario.

For all of the humor in McCord's narrative, appended to it is a real notice from the Klan. Addressed to "the public," the notice builds upon the gothic descriptions of the Grand Turk from the preceding narrative. "True, we hold our meetings in secret places," it reads. "WE have our reasons for that; and we have our secrets, signs, costumes, and mystic rights, and we entrust those to faithful breasts only. We have our reasons for that, and, doubtless, 'the public' can appreciate the importance of the Klan pursuing such a course." These sentences could almost come from the preceding narrative, emphasizing as they do the aspects of the Klan that derive from gothic literature and collegiate societies. But unlike that narrative, which undercuts and deflates its gothic effects with humor, the Klan notice insists upon its seriousness: "This is no joke either. This is cold, hard earnest. Time will fully develop the objects of the 'Kuklux Klan.' Until such a development takes place, 'the public' will please be patient." The two parts of McCord's article therefore depict the Klan in similar terms, as a secret society decked out in gothic trappings, but contradict one another as to the attitude with which the reader is to receive the Klan's warnings. The narrative insists the gothic nature of the Klan shows that it is a joke, while the notice insists upon the gravity of its undertaking. The former is a fictional depiction of the Klan in the sportive gothic mode, the latter an actual order to an actual den. This discrepancy is itself a strategic rhetorical ploy. McCord almost certainly wrote both parts of the article. When the notice insists that the Klan has its reasons for carrying on with its "signs, costumes, and mystic rights [sic]," there is no doubt that the claim is true—these hijinks give a plausibility to

McCord's comic tone that would be impossible to establish otherwise when describing a group practicing violent vigilantism. McCord's article "both registers actual events and turns them into fiction," as Goddu has it, only rather than being a problem, that is the exact purpose of his and the Klan's use of gothic effects. And furthermore, the configuration of the fictive and actual in his article shows that with the Klan, the reverse of Goddu's formulation was also true—gothic, fictional representations also directly inspired actual events.

McCord's use of gothic conventions (including that of the interpolated document, one of the hallmarks of much gothic fiction) paired with a comic tone proved to be of great use even when the novelty of the gothic mysteries wore off and the joke grew old. This inevitable decline proved to have rhetorical value in and of itself. If a major purpose of the Klan's gothic style had been to promote the organization while also dematerializing its existence, the inevitable waning interest in that gothic narrative helped manage this careful balance between publicity and secrecy. By the time the Pulaski den of the Klan had grown enough that too much public comment upon it would not be in the group's best interest, the source of the public's interest was no longer worth commenting upon. We can see this phenomenon in the changing nature of McCord's notices in the *Citizen*. By late May of 1867, McCord had claimed to have received Klan notices in a variety of manners: mysteriously slipped under the door late at night, delivered by supernatural messengers, precipitated magically out of thin air. Perhaps his imaginative faculties wore out, or perhaps he sensed that his audience no longer needed the comic-gothic prefatory narratives that accompanied all Klan notices. In either case, as the Klan lost its novelty and became a known entity in Pulaski, McCord ceased to write his gothic prefaces. On May 24, 1867, beneath an announcement about a crop of "VERY FINE STRAWBERRIES," McCord ran a Klan notice which had been, he explained, “received through the post office, yesterday morning” (*Pulaski Citizen* 24 May 1867).

Gothic literary depictions of the Klan had played out in Pulaski, but they continued to appear in the Southern press through the end of the 1860s and into the following decade. Calls to assembly, parade announcements, warnings to enemies, and other missives functioned to transact Klan business and inspire the formation of new dens. They also briefly created a nationwide sensation, as Klan nomenclature and imagery appeared in advertisements, popular songs, and other disparate bits of popular culture (Parsons, “Klan Skepticism” 814). More exposure in popular media led to the existence of more dens, and those dens in turn created more fodder for the press. It is important to note that those new dens were frequently unassociated with any overarching Klan power structure. They improvised their costumes, rites, and secret handshakes, no doubt. But rather than inventing these protocols from whole cloth, it was instead largely out of newspaper copy that they were made. The editorial writer from the *New York Times* who in October of 1870 lamented that “literary gentlemen” had “started armed bands in all directions through the newspaper woods, dragged out newspaper negroes from newspaper homes and, tying them to trees of the mind, lashed their newspaper backs till the blood ran down, awful to behold,” was faulty in his analysis of the relationship between the press and the Klan. Liberal papers in the North did bring Klan atrocities to the public attention, in a manner similar to that employed by the abolitionists with the atrocities of slavery before the Civil War; their efforts were dismissed by Democrats as “waving the bloody shirt” in an attempt to sway elections. But rather than generating fictions about the Klan to create opposition to the group, the press was originally used for just the opposite purpose—to generate, from fictive, gothic descriptions and accounts of the Klan, a widespread “empire” of very real Klansmen under very real cloth. This relationship between the fictive and actual incarnations of the Klan would continue for more than half a century. Just as the Reconstruction-era Klan was dying out in the late 1870s, the next major literary depiction of the group appeared, and it was from one of the fiercest critics of the newspapers' version of the Klan. That critic was the famed "carpetbagger judge" of North Carolina, Albion Winegar Tourgée.

❖

Tourgée bitterly notes in *Bricks Without Straw* that the press' depiction of the Klan "was wonderfully funny to far-away readers, and it made uproarious mirth in the aristocratic homes of the South." However, Tourgée distinguishes between the laughter of the "far-away" Northern reader and that of the Southerner: the former laughs at the comic depiction of the superstitious and frightened freedman, and the latter "at the silly North which was shaking its sides at the mask he wore" (250). There is a sense in *Bricks Without Straw* that the North has been duped when it comes to the Klan, that it simply doesn't see the real, awful violence beneath the gothic mask. Tourgée was keenly aware that Northern racism and indifference to the plight of Southern blacks—most memorably articulated in Horace Greeley's proclamation that they should be left alone to "Root, hog, or die"—was one reason that reports of Klan activity did not cause more of an uproar (*Undaunted Radical* 58). But Tourgée's analysis also shows him to be a savvy reader of the Southern press, for from the start F. O. McCord had set the tone for just such a deception.

Tourgée would directly challenge the Southern-Democratic-white supremacist portrayal of the Klan that was first developed in the Southern press and ultimately forged into a history by Philadelph Van Trump in his minority report from Congress' Joint Committee on the Ku Klux Conspiracy. But critically, while Tourgée strongly contested the facts of the pro-Klan narrative, insisting that real, brutal violence, not pranks, was used to terrify and control the freedmen, he did not interrogate or contest the style of that narrative. In fact, he frequently employed gothic conventions himself when depicting the Klan and its violent actions. As I have shown, the Klan's use of gothic literature and its tropes was both integral to its identity and strategic in a variety of ways. In particular, the variety of gothic voices employed by the Klan, exemplified in F. O. McCord's notices in the Pulaski *Citizen*, display how the gothic could be used at once to erase the Klan from the historical record by making it sound like the dream of gullible victims, and also to energize its supporters and engender actual historic events. Tourgée was able to make Klan violence fleetingly visible through his narratives of murder, lynching, and abuse. But the gothic style of those narratives opened them to the opposing dangers of either sounding like fantasies themselves, or inadvertently solidifying the very myths they intended to dispel. Certainly, Tourgée provided one of the most full-throated rebuttals to Southern white supremacist depictions of the Reconstruction era. His novels of Reconstruction offer a unique and compelling view of the South during that era from the perspective of a so-called "carpetbagger." There is no doubt that at the time he had a significant impact upon public perception of the Klan. His books sold over 200,000 copies, and *A Fool's Errand* was compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But his depiction of the Klan proved to be easily coopted by Thomas Dixon, Jr. a few decades later, who captured the early twentieth-century white imagination with his own highly influential (and approving) depiction of the organization. By examining some of the gothic episodes in *A Fool's Errand* and *Bricks Without Straw*, we can see how Tourgée succeeded and failed in his "battle of the books" with the Klan.[22]

Like the gothic writings about the Klan that appeared in the Southern press, Tourgée's literary depictions of the Klan both represented historical events and in doing so aimed to reshape history. In his biography of Tourgée, Otto Olsen describes an instance of brutal Klan violence: “About midnight of February 26, 1870, a large body of robed horsemen bodily took over the county seat of Alamance County and hanged the leading Negro Republican in the county, Wyatt Outlaw, from the branch of a huge oak tree, whose branch pointed in silent mockery toward Judge Tourgée’s courthouse less than a hundred feet away” (161). Outlaw’s corpse must have proved a ghastly sight, as he had been tortured and his lips had been slashed before he was lynched. The incident clearly made an impression on Tourgée, who knew Outlaw personally, and he thinly fictionalized it when he made it the basis for the lynching of the character Jerry in his 1879 novel, *A Fool’s Errand*. The circumstances of Outlaw’s lynching suggest the impression made upon Tourgée was intended. As Olsen notes, the lynching was carried out in Graham, the seat of Alamance County, and the tree upon which Outlaw was hung was in such close proximity to the courthouse that it suggested “silent mockery” of both Tourgée and the federal government which he symbolically represented. With one act of vigilante violence, the Klan was able to strike simultaneously at Outlaw, Tourgée, and the federal government, and Olsen clearly reads the rhetorical import of the way in which Outlaw was killed. The Klan was in a strong sense a terrorist organization. Jeffory Clymer, elaborating on the claim of Alex Schmid and Jenny de Graaf that terrorism is “a violent communication strategy,” argues that terrorists “traffic in the symbolism evoked by who, what, when, and where they strike” (15). In short, the rhetorical import of a terrorist attack—the symbolism created through violence—is directed at a different, often larger audience than the direct victims of that violence. Tourgée makes a similar claim in *A Fool’s Errand*, asserting that when the Klan struck, it “was not the individual negro, scalawag, or carpet-bagger, against whom the blow was directed, but the power—the Government—the idea which they represented” (255).

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[22] The historian William Peirce Randel gave this name to a chapter in his history of the Klan that examined various literary depictions of the group in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

There are several serious problems with Tourgée's claim. It is debatable whether or not the Klan was a coherent enough organization to assign a political motive to it as a bodily whole. During the federal hearings on the Klan in 1872, it was a frequent tactic of the group's most socially prominent members to draw a contrast between "official," politically-motivated Klan actions and the scatter-shot, personally-motivated violence perpetrated by Southern men from all classes of society behind Klan regalia. The truth is that no such dividing line can be convincingly drawn. In fact, Nathan Bedford Forrest's "General Order No. 1" of 1869, which officially disbanded the Klan, was issued not in hopes of actually breaking up the organization, but rather to give cover to prominent Klansmen who had come to realize they had little to no control over the organization (Wade 59). Furthermore, by characterizing Klan violence as purely political, Tourgée tacitly disavows the personal motives of the perpetrators of that violence, and turns the freedmen who were lynched—such as Wyatt Outlaw—into mere figures of violent rhetoric in a "conversation" between Southern resistors and the federal government. The more complicated truth is that Klan violence mixed political *and* personal motives that are ultimately inextricable from one another. Tourgée acknowledges that very point in *The Invisible Empire*, his companion-piece that attempted to authenticate *A Fool's Errand* in the style of Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (46). Perhaps, in the interest of streamlining his narrative, Tourgée simplified his position, but in doing so he inadvertently diminished the agency of the freedman Jerry and victims like him. Erasing that political agency was at the very heart of Klan politics: the group attempted to disarm Southern blacks and divest them of the rights to education, property, and the franchise, hence rendering them as politically obsolete as they had been under slavery.

Otto Olsen explains that the murder of Outlaw "was soon covered over with a veil of obscurity and distortion," as white Democrats and their sympathizers spread stories purporting that his death resulted from his engagement in wife-swapping, theft (from the much-hated Union League itself), and violent action against the Klan. One of Tourgée's aims in bringing Outlaw's story into *A Fool's Errand* would seemingly have been to combat this obscurity—to remove the veil of misinformation and expose the actions of the Klan as violent, illegal, and cowardly. It is worth questioning how well Tourgée succeeded. Jerry seals his fate when he publicly denounces the killers of the white Republican John Walters, but he does so in a manner that is inflected with the supernatural: recounting what he has heard of Walters' death, Jerry "painted as by magic the scene of the murder, and gave the very tone and manner of each of those engaged in it, though he had never seen them" (*Fool's* 227). While removing the charges of immorality and lawlessness, Tourgée imbues Jerry with an uncanny clairvoyance that again obscures rather than exposes Outlaw, Jerry's template who presumably had no such visionary powers. And furthermore, Tourgée's subsequent description of the Klan raid during which Jerry is lynched reinforces the group's own mythology in a few key ways.

The scene begins just after midnight on "a chill, dreary night" in which "the moon was at the full" (*Fool's* 228). The Klan's masked riders appear to be "some magic statuary with which the bleak night cheated and affrighted the eye," and a white observer of the raid relates that the group "came like a dream, and went away like a mist" (*Fool's* 228, 230). In the former quotation, the use of a gothic turn of phrase—"the bleak night"—may be intended to create a sinister atmosphere, to imbue the reader with the same fright felt by witnesses of an actual Klan raid. But, paired with the gothic setting of the scene (full moon, midnight, dreary), this trope functions to re-present rather than revise previous depictions of the Klan. Tourgée writes in his introduction to the novel that its “pictures are from life” (7). This picture of the Klan is not from life, but rather from previous literary representations of the group. Considering the complex and dynamic relationship between the real and literary lives of the Klan, this slippage is not surprising. But it is damaging to Tourgée’s project. To describe Klansmen as “magic statuary” who can ride in like a “dream” is to reinforce the group’s mythology rather than to remove it, and in this sense the scene unintentionally draws “a veil of obscurity and distortion” right back down over the killing of Wyatt Outlaw.

We often read today of “media narratives” by which political parties and figures attempt to shape and control the way their stories are delivered to the public and subsequently discussed. In a sense, the difficulties Tourgée encountered in attempting to dramatize the lynching of Jerry as a stand-in for Wyatt Outlaw result from the inevitability of running into a media narrative the Klan had long been fostering. Tourgée himself had an eye turned toward his reading public, as he was deeply concerned with the affective power of fiction, arguing that it was romance, not realism, that could mobilize a readership to take action. But because the Klan had already established a literary narrative that was itself romantic, relying especially upon gothic conventions and effects, Tourgée’s work became much more difficult to carry out. The gothic style of the Klan tended at once to make its real actions sound fictitious, and make fictitious descriptions of the organization de facto additions to its lore. As a result, anybody attempting to represent the Klan via gothic conventions faced a double-bind. Gothic depictions of the Klan could be dismissed as fantasies by skeptics while simultaneously bolstering the group’s mythic quality to believers in the cause. After all, the Klan had been a popular culture sensation in the early era of its existence, and soon would be again. It was a great miscalculation to note the power of the Klan’s mask in popular culture and yet to leave it firmly in place.

Employing the same style that Klansmen like F. O. McCord used to veil Klan violence, Tourgée is doomed from the start to reinscribe the cultural myth he seeks to erase. Gothic writing abounds in the second half of *A Fool's Errand*, often intermixed with more sober historical description and analysis. For instance, after enumerating the targets of Klan violence, Tourgée follows with this gothic passage:

> Only the terrible, mysterious fact of death was certain. Accusation by secret denunciation; sentence without hearing; execution without warning, mercy, or appeal. In the deaths alone, terrible beyond utterance; but in the manner of death—the secret, intangible doom from which fate springs—more terrible still: in the treachery which made the neighbor a disguised assassin, most horrible of all the feuds and hates which history portrays. (251)

Tourgée has a few strong points to contend in this passage: first, as a lawyer and jurist, he is appalled by the workings of vigilante justice. Coming directly on the heels of the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Klan's extralegal system of "denunciation," "sentence," and "execution" cruelly divested the Southern freedmen of the legal right to due process they had so recently been granted. Then, Tourgée underscores the uncanny nature of the "neighbor" as "a disguised assassin," reinforcing the point that Klan violence could not be purely calculated and legalistic since its victims were known to their assailants and that this violence was underscored by feuding and personal hatred. These two points make a strong critique of the notion that the Klan represented law and order and dispensed with anything resembling justice. But the style of the passage undermines much of what its logic achieves. Coupled with previous descriptions of Klan riders which employed gothic conventions, to describe Klan violence as "the secret, intangible doom from which fate springs" erases the local, tangible nature of violence enacted by neighbor upon neighbor and rewrites it as mysterious and profound. Just prior to this passage, Tourgée describes the Klan as being “as secret and as fatal in its proscriptions as the Thugs of India” (232). Taken together, these descriptions make the Klan out to be a mysterious and exotic force, further solidifying the group’s mythology rather than dispelling it.

Tourgée was committed to romance for its affective possibilities, but his romantic depiction of Comfort Servosse, carpetbag lawyer, also reinforces gothic tropes that form the core of Klan lore. Tourgée claimed realism to be “art of the sort that should make angels weep, not because it inclines men to do evil, but because it does an infinitely worse thing in inclining them to do nothing” (“Realism” 387). From this perspective, the exciting possibilities of romance, employed by those who “paint life as they see it, feel it, believe it to be” (388), could be put to work to make the reader do good. This theory of writing is not dissimilar to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who employed a combination of the logic of exposure and sentimental appeal to exhort her Northern readership to action in her abolitionist novels. Tourgée was an insightful reader of Stowe’s novels, writing that the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

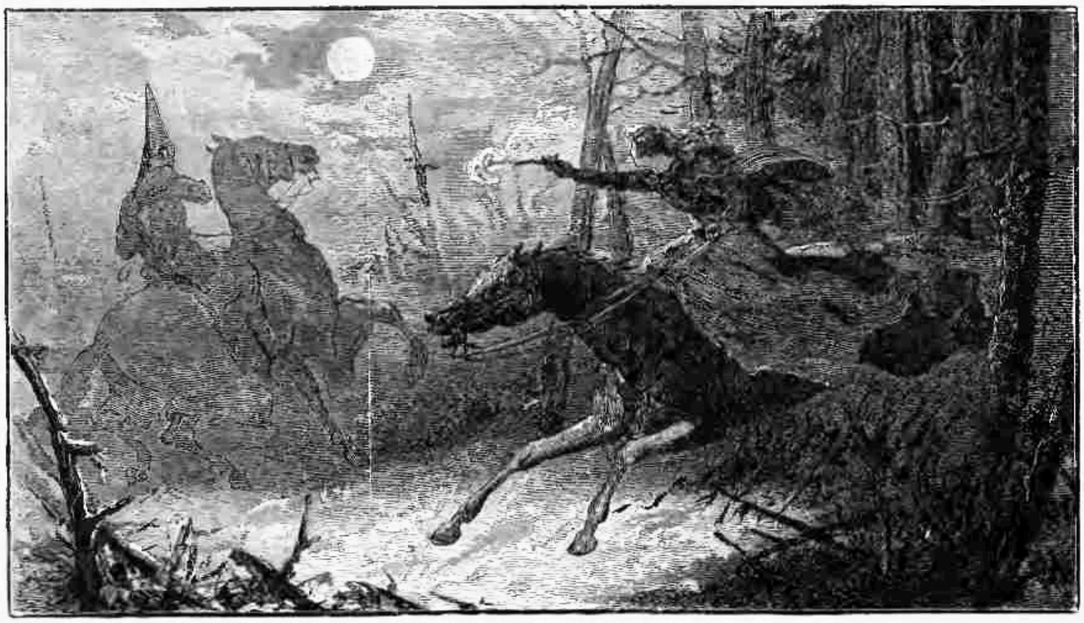
> was largely dependent on its non-realistic character. It portrayed a slavery which the free man could understand and appreciate. If it had been absolutely ‘realistic’ in its delineation of the master and the slave, it would have been to a degree incomprehensible to those who did not, and do not yet, comprehend the moral and legal character of the ‘peculiar institution.’ (*Undaunted Radical* 233)

This assessment largely accords with my argument in the previous chapter that Stowe’s depiction of slavery should be understood in terms of the rhetorical ends she aimed to achieve by it. But Tourgée’s situation differs from that of Stowe in a key way. Stowe’s pro-slavery counterparts wished to veil the horrors of the system they defended, usually by way of highly sentimental depictions of the South. For the Klan, however, not sentimentality but the gothic was the veil behind which it operated.

To further examine the effect of employing the gothic to portray the Klan, let's turn to the romantic centerpiece of Tourgée's novel. This comes when Servosse's daughter Lily receives a mysterious note that warns of a Klan raid upon a judge with whom Servosse has plans to meet. Realizing that the lynching party will likely kill her father as well as Judge Denton, Lily sets off on a frantic moonlit ride on her father's fastest and wildest horse in hopes of reaching Servosse before the Klansmen do. Before we examine that setpiece, it's worth noting that Lily is several times in the novel described as a product of her environment, both mentally and physically: the excitement and tension of Servosse's relations with the community "had ripened her mind with wonderful rapidity," and her figure is imbued with "that softness of outline, delicacy of color, and ease and grace of carriage which the free, untrammeled life, and soft, kindly climate of that region, give in such rich measure to those reared under their influences" (261). Toward the end of the novel General Gurney, a socially prominent member of the Klan, exclaims, "Ding my buttons if she ain't more Southern than any of our own gals!" (371). In short, Tourgée's depiction of Lily plays into many elements of the myth of Southern exceptionalism, showing the environmental benefits of exposure to Southern culture and climate alike. This circumstance is especially odd considering Tourgée's insistence that the main source of unjust Southern ideas and social tenets is the toxic influence of slavery on the region's culture.

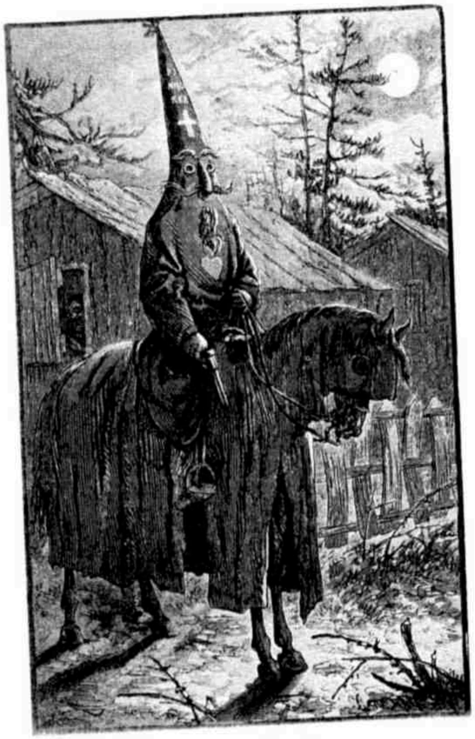
Lily's status as an adopted Southerner becomes more problematic still in the scene of her race against the Klan. For, galloping through the moonlit woods on a foaming, dark steed, cloaked and hooded, armed with a revolver, and steeled to execute her mission, which is beyond the power of official authorities to accomplish, Lily resembles nothing so much as the gothic figure of the mythical Klansman. The image is so striking that it was made into an illustration that became the frontispiece for the novel. A glance at this illustration reveals a number of noteworthy details. First, it is hard to miss the "full moon" (275) lighting the scene, just as it does on the night the Klan lynches Jerry. Lily's billowing cloak drapes her horse's body just as sheets cover that of the Klansman, and the chiaroscuro lighting effect of her steed emerging from the woods furthers its resemblance to the other animal. Entitled "The Ride for Life," the image tells an ambiguous story about whose life is in jeopardy. The Klansman reins in his horse while bringing his right arm up and across his body in a defensive posture, while Lily strains fully forward toward him and discharges her pistol. The reader of the novel is given a vivid and exciting depiction of Lily's narrow escape from the Klan. But it's hard to miss how her "wild, mad race with the evening wind" (275) trucks in precisely the same economy of night-riding and vigilante heroics that the Klan employed. The frontispiece to *The Invisible Empire*, which depicts a revolver-wielding Klansman on his horse beneath a full moon, further underscores this point in its visual similarity to the depiction of Lily. As does Lily herself: she hums Walter Scott's "Lochinvar," a chivalric poem, as she flees the Klansmen and nears the town where she will rescue her father. The twist in this scene—that the night-rider and practitioner of Southern chivalry is a young woman—does not diminish the affective power of the gothic tropes Tourgée employs, tropes that were closely associated with the representation of the Klan that would retain its popularity into the following century.

Katherine Hamilton Warren argues for the significance of what she calls "empathetic persuasion," a strategy by which one imagines the culturally determined viewpoint of others before attempting to persuade them of one's own views, in *A Fool's Errand*. In a sense, the novel

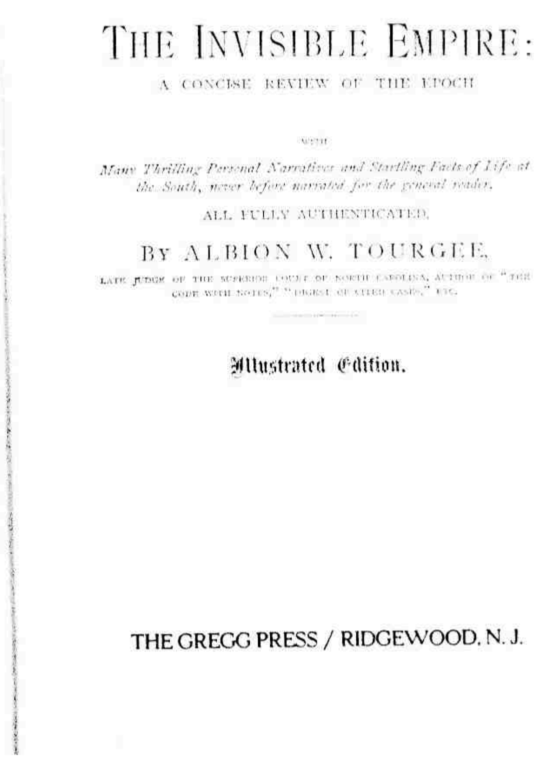


THE RIDE FOR LIFE.

Fig. 1. *The Ride for Life*. Lily Servosse as night rider from *A Fool's Errand. New, Enlarged, and Illustrated Edition*; New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1880; PDF file.



THE MASKED SENTINEL.



THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE:

A CONCISE REVIEW OF THE EPOCH

WITH

Many Thrilling Personal Narratives and Startling Facts of Life at the South, never before narrated for the general reader.

ALL FULLY AUTHENTICATED.

BY ALBION W. TOURGEE,

LATE JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA; AUTHOR OF "THE CODE WITH NOTES," "DIGEST OF CITED CASES," ETC.

Illustrated Edition.

THE GREGG PRESS / RIDGEWOOD, N. J.

Fig. 2. *The Masked Sentinel.* Klansman from *The Invisible Empire: A Concise Review of the Epoch. Illustrated Edition*; Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1968; Print.

argues that the conflict between the North and South is less about good versus bad men than good versus bad culturally determined worldviews. Tourgée and his characters both frequently attempt to see things from the side of their opponents; for instance, Melville Gurney only comes to realize the barbarity of the Klan's plan to lynch Judge Denton when he imagines it from the perspective of Lily Servosse, whom he is trying to woo. But while empathy has its uses when approaching a conflict as entrenched as that between the former Confederates and the federal authorities, it also has its drawbacks: Rebecca Skidmore Biggio argues that because such a strategy relies upon "the goodwill of the white community," it is therefore weakened by Tourgée's "inability to see the paradox of placing his hope of justice for the freedmen in the hands of white men, Klan members and Radical Republicans alike" (91). She points to the fact that the novel forgives Klan members such as General Gurney and his son as it draws the former into a friendship with Servosse and the latter into a romance with Lily. The limited amount of reconciliation that is achieved between North and South in the novel therefore takes place exclusively between whites and at the cost of forgiveness of violence against freedmen. I would argue that Tourgée's use of gothic conventions to depict the Klan is a further illustration of the limits of empathetic persuasion, in that he depicts the Klan not as experienced or described by its actual victims, but rather in the very terms the group employed to depict itself. Tourgée did not see the paradox of attempting to dispel cultural narratives about the group while employing the same conventions and tropes out of which those narratives are built. As the testimonies of Klan victims, especially freedmen, would show in *The Invisible Empire*, those who suffered violence at the hands of the Klan did not tend to invest their attackers with gothic mysticism, nor did they attempt to draw excitement or romance out of nighttime encounters with the group.

Such testimonies, which Tourgée excerpted from the Joint Congressional Committee on the Ku-Klux Conspiracy's report, may well have suggested the perspectival shift that he would employ in his next novel, *Bricks Without Straw*. Like its predecessor, this novel includes a central North-South reconciliation romance, this time between the Southerner Hesden Le Moyne and the Northern schoolteacher Mollie Ainslie, but, especially in the early chapters, it focuses upon the freedmen, in particular the tobacco planter Nimbus Ware and his crippled friend Eliab Hill. The novel takes a more sophisticated approach to the use of gothic conventions, the depiction of the Ku Klux Klan, and the relations between both Northern and Southern whites and the freedmen than does its predecessor. Like *A Fool's Errand*, it tends to employ gothic conventions when describing Klan violence, but it also adapts the gothic inheritance narrative to create an allegory about the foundations of American racial inequality that indicts North and South alike. Unlike the previous novel, *Bricks Without Straw* incorporates multiple voices to describe the Klan from different perspectives and employing different idioms, hinting at a way to combat the rhetorical strategies the group had long employed. But because the novel continues to employ gothic conventions to describe Klan violence, Tourgée's work reinforces some of the myths it purports to dispel, and ultimately gives up in frustration its project of telling a progressive, romantic narrative about the South from a black perspective.

Bricks Without Straw certainly registers its author's awareness of the manner in which the Klan had been represented in the press. With bitter irony he describes "the grotesque pictures in illustrated journals of shadowy beings in horrible masks and terrified negroes cowering in the darkness with eyes distended, hair rising in kinky tufts upon their heads, and teeth showing white from ear to ear, evidently clattering like castanets," and the reception of these images by Northerners as "wonderfully funny" (250). Despite his almost incessant use of irony, Tourgée's clear analysis of the Klan's rhetorical use of the sportive gothic comes through here, as he sees the group's media portrayal as making out its actions to be mere "jest," which are "designed only to induce the colored man to work somewhat more industriously from apprehension of ghostly displeasure" (251). Taken together, these depictions of Southern blacks reinforce cultural myths that were key to the white supremacist ideology, namely black cowardice, superstition, and laziness, and the need for a paternal white discipline to keep them in line. As in *A Fool's Errand*, here Tourgée attempts to show that the "horrible masks" that terrify the comic black in the newspapers should be taken seriously.

The freedmen in *Bricks Without Straw* seem best to understand that to combat the Klan, they must take its presence seriously, but not the "horrible masks" its members wear. Tourgée explains that while the rest of the country enjoyed the comic exploits of the Klan as depicted in the media, Nimbus Ware and his community of freedmen "did not laugh" (252). The depiction of this Southern black community is itself offered in contradiction to the white supremacist depiction of freedmen. Nimbus is a slave who runs away to the Union army and excels in the military during the Civil War, at the close of which he establishes a highly profitable tobacco-growing business. The community he establishes on his land, Red Wing, is peaceable and well-organized, and includes both a church and a school. Klan interference at Red Wing is effected not to "induce the colored man to work somewhat more industriously," but rather to frustrate his industry and keep him out of competition with his white neighbors. The inhabitants of Red Wing universally see that the Klan aims to disenfranchise them and divest them of the gains in wealth and education their labor affords them. But at the same time, this community shows little regard for the gothic styling of the organization. Nimbus and his cohorts refer to Klansman as "Kluckers," deflating the supposedly mystical name of the organization and suggesting it is just so much senseless noise, like the clucking of a chicken. Nor are they impressed with Klan pranks, dismissing its warnings as “merely the acts of mischievous youngsters who desired to frighten them into a display of fear” (254). But Nimbus does not dismiss the threat of actual violence, nor shrink from it, declaring that “ef enny on ‘em comes ter Ku Klux me I’ll put a bullet t’rough dem! I will, by God! Ef I breaks the law I’ll take the consequences like a man” (264). In this way, Nimbus strikes a well-calculated balance between rejecting the gothic vestments of the Klan both as a joke and as a serious threat, and preparing himself to take seriously any actual violence the group might attempt.

In light of this depiction of Nimbus and the black community at Red Wing, it is curious that Tourgée again deploys gothic conventions in describing a Klan raid upon that community. The scene, which like Lily’s ride in *A Fool’s Errand* serves as a central set-piece of the novel, exposes cruel and unscrupulous Klan violence, as the raiders attack both women and children. It also serves as a direct challenge to the newspaper image of the “terrified negro.” In the chapter entitled “The Beacon-Light of Love,” a group of Klansmen raid Red Wing, burning down the church which also serves as school-house and rousing and then abusing Nimbus’s wife, Lugena, and their children as the party searches for Nimbus and then Eliab Hill. Finding that Nimbus is away attending his former master’s funeral, the group converges on the cabin of Hill, who is both disabled and defenseless. Tourgée describes the scene from Hill’s perspective:

> As he pressed his face close to the flame-lighted pane, and watched the group of grotesquely disguised men rushing toward his door, his eyes were full of wild terror and his face twitched, while his lips trembled and grew pale under the dark moustache. (273)

The tableau is identical to that of the newspaper image, in which “shadowy beings in horrible masks” instill terror in a victim whose face is distorted with fear, except the effect is not comic.

Tourgée effectively dismantles this aspect of the Klan's narrative, replacing the prankster with ruthless practitioners of violence, and the comic victim with a pathetic figure well-calculated to elicit the reader's sympathy. Carolyn L. Karcher notes another way the scene revises depictions of the Klan: Lugena's abuse at the hands of the Klansmen turns the trope of the rape of the South against the group, suggesting it is black women, not white, who are imperiled. The sexually-charged image of Lugena rolling naked on the ground, her "round black limbs glistening in the yellow light" (272) as her attackers strike at her, makes a more explicit connection between Klan violence and rape than the mere suggestion that appears in *A Fool's Errand*. Taken together, the sexual and physical abuse the Klan directs against Lugena, her children, and the disabled Eliab Hill comprise a depiction of the Klan in action that directly contests the group's own narrative of peace-keeping in which its actions were solely directed toward disarming dangerous men for the safety of the general public.

Yet, even as Tourgée contests the action of the Klan's narrative, stylistically he repeats many of its conventions. The raid on Red Wing takes place at midnight, beneath a "gibbous moon" hanging "over the western tree-tops" (268). Tourgée stages the opening of the scene from a third-person omniscient perspective that does not align with that of any of the actors described, relating that "strangely draped figures might have been seen" emerging from the woods and descending upon the church which also serves as schoolhouse. Once the structure is ablaze, Tourgée describes "the light playing on [the Klansmens'] faces and making them seem ghastly and pale by reflection," and then he relates that "one…clad in the horribly grotesque habit of the Ku Klux Klan, stood at the detached bell-tower" and "solemnly tolled the bell" as the building burns (269). While most of the testimonies in *The Invisible Empire* are told from the perspective of the victims who relate them, and hence tend to draw few pictures of the Klansmen besides what could be glimpsed from enclosed spaces, in this passage Tourgée creates a broad stage upon which the Klan performs its theatrics. In other words, he reconstructs the very theatrics that the Klan so effectively used to create its mythic status, even though no character in the novel witnesses this spectacle, nor does the narrative logic necessitate it. This perspective once again most closely resembles literary depictions of the Klan written by or in support of the group. The freedmen themselves do not witness a clearly-drawn picture of the Klan's theatrics; instead, "from half-opened doors and windows they took in the scene which the light of the moon and the glare of the crackling fire revealed" (270). Tourgée notes the limited perspective of the freedmen and yet still privileges a perspective closely resembling that employed in sympathetic literary depictions of the Klan. As the schoolhouse burns, "the perfect light of freedom" which the freedmen attempt to reach through education is replaced by "a solid spire of sheeted flame" (269). The dream of black advancement is overtaken by the gothic image of a burning Klansman's hood (*sheeted* flame; the Klansmen's hoods are "spire-pointed"). The narrative registers the Klan's unjust action but repeats its spectacular gothic imagery, hence making it out to be awful but also awe-inspiring.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the raid on Red Wing is Tourgée's depiction of justified and even heroic violence perpetrated by freedmen against white attackers. Such a depiction had little if any precedence in American romantic fiction written by a white author. Once again, however, Tourgée's achievement is tempered and complicated by the gothic conventions that he employs to render the scene. Not a particularly innovative stylist, Tourgée draws upon biblical allusion, gothic conventions, and even language previously used to describe the Klansmen as he depicts Nimbus and Lugena in violent confrontation with their attackers. After describing the attack on Hill from the preacher's own point of view, the perspective switches back to third-person omniscient as Nimbus arrives back at Red Wing and confronts the invaders. He's described as "a giant form which leaped from the waving corn and sprang in the back door" (275) of his cottage. This sort of language pervades the passage—Nimbus is "a huge black form" and a "dusky giant" who we see "leap from the porch and bound toward" the Klansmen (276). When Lugena joins her husband in his defense, she is "a woman's naked figure, that seemed to rise from the ground" (276), then an "unclothed form" and "the unclad figure" (276, 277); as the couple pursues the Klansmen they are "the two black forms." Unfolding in the "lurid fire-light" of a burning brand, the scene is rife with uncanny gothic imagery as Nimbus and Lugena are cloaked in language that makes them dark and menacing "forms" rather than the characters we've become familiar with. Interestingly, Tourgée seems to draw some of this language from his depiction of the raiding Klansmen themselves, who are "strangely draped figures" in black (269) who "seemed to spring out of the ground" (270), from Eliab Hill's perspective, when they attack his cabin.

I think the similarity in language between Tourgée's descriptions of the Klansmen and their freedmen antagonists arises less from a deliberate comparison of the two than from a representational necessity. Like the several full moons of *A Fool's Errand*, the same conventions appear repeatedly in *Bricks Without Straw* as Tourgée attempts to represent fearful scenes of violence. Because there was no literary model to draw upon in depicting Nimbus and Lugena's resistance, Tourgée instead repurposes the strategies he uses to depict the Klan, strategies that were first employed in the group's literary origin. The substance of the clash between freedmen and the Klan differs from typical Southern accounts, but Tourgée's writing still abounds with heavily freighted gothic language. As the attack subsides, Berry Lawson joins Lugena and they witness the "ghastly spectacle" of a Klansman whose face has been split in half by an axe-blow

(280). That man, too, is described as a “prostrate form” and then staggering “figure,” only semi-human in his disfigured state that Lawson reacts to with “chattering teeth.” In this short coda to the Klan attack on Red Wing we can see the representational problem central to the whole episode. By representing the Klan attack and the freedmen’s defense as a series of ghastly spectacles, Tourgée may succeed in setting his readers’ teeth chattering. But doing so works against his project of replacing the newspaper image of the comic freedman with teeth “clattering like castanets.” Those chattering teeth produce only so much meaningless noise, a strategic bulwark built into the very name “Ku Klux.” Tourgée’s strategy takes the comic element out of his depiction of the Klan, but retains the gothic vestments that, “grotesquely marked” in their literal incarnation, hide “all the outline of the figure” disguised beneath (270).

A curious aspect of Tourgée’s problematic use of the gothic when describing violence perpetrated by and against the Klan is that elsewhere in the novel he is so keenly aware about the power of genre and affect to manipulate the way that narratives are received and interpreted by their audiences. Specifically, it is because Mollie Ainslie becomes swept up in her own romance with Hesden Le Moyne that she becomes deaf to the (literal) cry of the freedmen for her assistance. As Ainslie rides toward Red Wing shortly after the Klan attack, Nimbus calls to her from the side of the road:

> Once, she thought she heard her name called. The tone was full of beseeching. She smiled, for she thought that love had cheated her, and syllabled the cry of that heart which would not be still until she came. She did not see the dark, pleading face which gazed after her as her horse bore her swiftly beyond his ken. (300)

Ainslie mistakes Nimbus’s call for the imagined voice of her lover from whom she has separated to visit Red Wing. It seems that Tourgée critiques his use of the reconciliation romance in *A*

Fool's Errand: the Northerner Ainslie is so wrapped up in her own love-affair with Le Moyne, a Southerner, that the imploring voice of the freedman goes unheard, just as the Servosse-Melville love story brought together whites from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line while ignoring Southern blacks. Here, Tourgée notes not only the significance of what happens—Nimbus calls to Mollie—but also how that action is received and interpreted by its intended audience. The framework of the reconciliation romance doesn't have room for Nimbus's cry, and so Ainslie interprets it wrongly—the love-story itself seems to cause this misinterpretation. What Tourgée seemingly fails to realize is that something quite similar occurs when he employs the gothic to represent the Klan and Nimbus's violent defense of Red Wing against it. It is the use of gothic conventions that obscures the nature of Klan violence, and simply rearranging those conventions will not produce a clearer depiction. The gothic narratives out of which the Klan constituted itself resist Tourgée's critique, just as Ainslie's love-drunk ears resist Nimbus's cry.

Perhaps frustrated by the difficulties he encountered in rendering this scene, Tourgée shifts the focus of the novel after the attack on Red Wing to Ainslie and Le Moyne, never returning at length to the freedmen's perspective. The end of the novel focuses on a *House of the Seven Gables*-like subplot in which Le Moyne discovers that Ainslie is the rightful heir to Mulberry Hill, as she is a distant relation whose mutual ancestor was treacherously murdered by his brother. The entire family, Le Moyne learns, is descended not only from respectable Huguenots, but also Revolution-era pirates and slave-traders. The deed that leads to these revelations is found when Le Moyne cuts through a wall and discovers it in the interstice, where two houses have been joined into one. This is Tourgée's allegory of the nation, in which both North and South are ultimately guilty of creating and perpetuating the system of American slavery and the wrongs it continued to produce after the war. But despite this more sophisticated analysis of regionalism, race, and culpability than that offered in his previous novel, Tourgée is again unable to imagine a conclusion to his narrative or solution to the problems it dramatizes that involves a black voice or perspective. He describes Nimbus as a “desert lion” as he fights off the Klan attackers who have raided Red Wing. While Nimbus can fight like a lion for his family, his inarticulate roar ultimately has no place in Tourgée’s discussion of political policy. The last glimpse of the freedmen in *Bricks Without Straw* sees them moving West, to Kansas, where their industry can thrive without the threat of Klan violence. Nearly twenty years later, the Klan would return with a vengeance in a spate of novels that contested Tourgée’s account of Reconstruction and the Klan, but also reused and built upon many of the gothic conventions and images that he employed when depicting the group in his novels. No writer did so in such a direct manner as Thomas Dixon, Jr.

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By the end of the nineteenth century, the Southern states that had been under federal rule during Reconstruction were long redeemed, and the crisis of that period was several decades in the past. The literary depiction of the South during Reconstruction that seems most typical of this later period is defined by sentimentalism and nostalgia, removing the violence and strife of both the antebellum era and, to a degree, that of Reconstruction. Two prominent examples of this sort of writing are the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris and the collected tales of *In Ole Virginia,* by Thomas Nelson Page. Not coincidentally, these two writers also produced literary accounts of night riders and the Ku Klux Klan. Looking at the decade beginning in 1898, when Page published his Reconstruction novel *Red Rock*, we can see a small proliferation of novels that partially or fully developed new, sometimes revisionary accounts of the Klan. Some built directly upon the sportive gothic narrative of the Klan as a group of pranksters who operated through appeals to the credulity of superstitious freedmen. All characterized the Klan as a response to a threat of violence and disorder engendered by Northern empowerment and armament of the freedmen, a response that was limited, tactical, and short-lived. Perhaps the most influential depiction of the Klan from this period was developed by Thomas Dixon, Jr., in his Reconstruction Trilogy, made up of the novels *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), *The Clansman* (1905), and *The Traitor* (1907). The literary genealogy of Dixon's Klan traces back more easily to George Gordon's militaristic, self-serious "Prescript" than to the comic accounts of the group from Southern newspapers. Rather than attempting to cover over the violence of Reconstruction with sentimentalism and humor, Dixon embraced a version of the Klan in many ways similar to that depicted by Albion Tourgée, the most salient difference being that Dixon saw the group's actions as justified.

As we have seen, one of Tourgée's goals in depicting the Klan was to offer a rebuttal to the comic depictions of the Klan and its victims that had proliferated in the press and allowed Northern readers to laugh at pranks which were used to cover over the actual violence suffered by freedmen. Tourgée's spectacular, gothic depictions of violence are designed to remove that comic mask and expose a truly terrifying Klan. Nearly two decades later, with the South no longer in the crisis of Reconstruction, Harris and Page wrote novels that did much to replace that comic mask. Their depictions of the Klan reinscribe many of the central tenets of the Southern narrative of the Klan from the Reconstruction era: that the group operated mainly through pranks to frighten superstitious blacks, that it arose only in response to a violent threat against the South, that it existed for only a short period in order to disarm dangerous freedmen armed and emboldened by a sinister Northern influence, and that any atrocities committed under Klan disguise were the work of imposters unaffiliated with the true organization.

Harris's nighttime regulators in *Gabriel Tolliver: A Story of Reconstruction* (1902) appear in response to a threat to the peace of Shady Dale, the nostalgically drawn hamlet in which the novel is set. His depiction of the Knights of the White Camellia, as he calls them, perfectly parallels the old white supremacist narrative that it was pranks, not violence, that regulators used to discipline the freedmen. In the novel, Gilbert Hotchkiss, a Northern carpetbagger and fomenter of discord, founds a branch of the Union League in Shady Dale and uses it to espouse "lessons in race-hatred and incendiarism" (182) to the freedmen. One night shortly thereafter, the novel's eponymous good son of the South, Gabriel Tolliver, is drawn to the unusually silent negro church, which Hotchkiss has repurposed that evening for a presumably political Union meeting. Observing the church from his perch in an adjacent tree, Tolliver sees a group of thirteen white-draped riders emerge from the woods and encircle the building. After parading around the church and chanting about blood and misery, the group disappears back into the darkness. Tolliver's perspective gives an ideal vantage point for making out the visit as a gothic spectacle, and despite the young man's sensible nature, the narrator relates that "Gabriel rubbed his eyes. For an instant he believed that he had been dreaming. If ever there were goblins, these were they" (252). The church quickly empties as the terrified freedmen run into the woods, except for the Rev. Jeremiah Tomlin, who opts to take the road. The regulators return and surround him, and in his fright he mistakes the breath of the lead regulator's horse for a supernatural flame applied to the back of his neck, and suffers further terror upon seeing that each rider "appeared to be carrying his head under his arm" (255). The Knights do no actual violence, but their ghostly parade does prevent Hotchkiss from moving forward with his insurrectionary schemes. Harris's depiction of the Klan-like Knights is remarkable in its fidelity to the stories about the Klan told by Southern whites during Reconstruction.[23] He makes out the regulators as a gothic spectacle to be consumed as truly terrifying by its primary, black audience, but as gently comic from the perspective of the undeceived reader. The appearance of regulators in the novel is brief, coinciding only with the threat of politically motivated violence stirred up by a Northern influence. Harris doesn't add anything new to the narrative he takes up, his only innovation being to transfer that narrative from oral or journalistic traditions to literary fiction, which would, along with the so-called Dunning school of history that emerged around the same time, create a lasting historical narrative about Reconstruction and the role of regulators therein.

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[23] See the historians Wyn Craig Wade, Allen Trelease, and William Peirce Randel.

Published four years earlier, Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* also takes up and reinforces many conventions of the traditional Southern narrative of the Klan. As in *Gabriel Tolliver*, the Klan arises in response to a pressing threat of violence. The unscrupulous Northern instigator this time is named Jonadab Leech. A Freedman's Bureau agent, he teams up with a shrewd former overseer and scalawag named Hiram Still, and together they work to take possession of the county through the imposition of exorbitant taxes and other large-scale frauds. Leech raises and arms a large militia composed of freedmen in order to overawe the local whites. In response, the local daredevil and former war hero Steve Allen organizes a Klan raid that disarms the entire black population of the county in a night, without a single casualty. The Klan moves with "perfect organization," hearkening to militaristic accounts of the group, and relies on the effect of "awful forms wrapped like ghosts in winding-sheets" to terrorize its victims into surrendering their firearms (237, 238). The raid has just the effect upon the freedmen population that Klan pranks of old were purported to have:

> The negroes were paralyzed with terror. Many of them believed that the riders were really supernatural, and they told, with ashy faces, of the marvelous things they had done. Some of them had said that they had just come from hell to warn them, and they had

> drunk bucketfuls of water, which the negroes could hear "sizzling" as it ran down their throats. (239)

Numerous histories of the Klan mention the water-drinking prank, which must have been familiar to a large portion of Page's reading audience. As such, this account of hell-spirits and their supernatural thirst falls clearly into the category of the sportive gothic, and per Donald Ringe's analysis of that genre, readers are obviously invited to identify themselves against the credulous victims of the Klan. But in the context of Page's novel, the most significant function of faithfully reproducing the exact details of Reconstruction-era stories may be to produce nostalgia. The novels of Tourgée, the Joint Committee Report on the Ku Klux Conspiracy, the "bloody shirt" waved in the Northern press throughout much of the 1870s—all of this Harris and Page merely ignore, matter-of-factly repeating in their novels the exact comic gothic stories of the Klan that were central to the Southern conversation about the organization from the earliest days of its inception. Logically, the reader of *Red Rock* might question if the freedmen were terrorized, not by the ghostly winding-sheets, but by the appearance of armed men (and former slave masters) in their cabins in the middle of the night. But the gothic conventions employed by those night visitors were so familiar, especially to a Southern readership, that they signify humor and nostalgic familiarity, resisting an analysis of the freedmen's fear.

Page employs gothic effects in other capacities besides the nostalgic sportive gothic pranks in *Red Rock*. He begins to develop a trope that would be more fully realized in the novels of Thomas Dixon, Jr., in which, as Sabine Sielke describes it, "the presumed sexual violation of white beauty by black beast figured the 'rape' of the South during Reconstruction and legitimized retaliation through lynch violence" (1). In his white supremacist tract *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem*, Page laid out a vision of the South after the Civil War that was essentially founded upon horror. He defended lynch law in the South as a necessary response to an overwhelming epidemic of sexual violence perpetrated by black men against white women. He writes that the central horror of Southern existence was

> the unnamable brutality with which the causing crime was, in nearly every case, attended. The death of the victim of the ravisher was generally the least of the attendant horrors. In Texas, in Mississippi, in Georgia, in Kentucky, in Colorado, as later in Delaware, the facts in the case were so unspeakable that they have never been put in print. They simply could not be put in print. It is these unnamable horrors which have outraged the minds of those who live in regions where they have occurred, and where they may at any time occur again, and, upsetting reason, have swept from their bearings cool men and changed them into madmen, drunk with fury and the lust of revenge. (99)

Like the Abolitionists writing about slavery, Page employs a gothic lacuna as a rhetorical figure for the inexpressible horror of rape. The brutality and horrors are “unnamable,” the facts “unspeakable,” resisting the print medium entirely. In *Red Rock*, Page deals with the unspeakability of the rape of a white woman by a black man by merely intimating the crime’s existence without explicitly bringing it into his narrative. The black “trick doctor” Moses waylays the young Northerner Ruth Welch on a narrow path in the woods, and in attempting to pull her from her horse enacts a metaphorical rape:

> He gave a snarl of rage and sprang at her like a wild beast; but her horse whirled and slung him from his feet and he missed her, only tearing her skirt. It seemed to Ruth at that moment that she heard the sound of a horse galloping somewhere, and she gave a scream. (358)

It's not difficult to read the torn skirt as a metonymical stand-in for a sexual violation of the virginal Welch, whose resistance causes Moses to flee before Steve Allen can come to her rescue. The scene creates a template for the literalized rape that occurs in Dixon's *The Clansman* seven years later, especially in the way Page depicts Moses as a snarling "wild beast" when he attacks Welch. Page also removes Moses's punishment from the narrative proper, only relating second-hand at the end of the novel that, having emigrated to another state after fleeing the vicinity of Red Rock, Moses was hanged by a lynch mob in retaliation for an undisclosed "terrible crime" and the confession other "heinous" deeds (582). Page employs gothic conventions and effects in more varied applications than does Harris, whose sportive gothic visitation of the Knights of the White Camellia appears in a novel that depicts Reconstruction of a time of ultimately surmountable troubles. Page's vision of Reconstruction is darker, although not as grim as that of Dixon. *Red Rock*'s proliferation of gothic conventions, including a subplot involving a stolen bond hidden behind a family portrait that draws from Hawthorne far more explicitly than Tourgée does in *Bricks Without Straw*, evinces Page's understanding of the rhetorical flexibility of those conventions. Like Harris, his sportive gothic depictions of Klan pranks are designed to elicit not only humor but nostalgia. But his intimation that the central horror of Reconstruction was an unnamable sexual violence also drew heavily on gothic tropes, and ultimately set the stage for the most influential depiction of the Klan of the era.

There is a series of productive contradictions associated with the gothic effects employed by the Klan. The grotesque costumes made members invisible, yet were themselves the visible sign of the group. Gothic descriptions in newspapers drew white readers' interest and effectively promoted the group, while also giving those readers the opportunity to laugh at the Klan's supposedly gullible black victims. And while these sportive gothic stories dematerialized or covered over the serious, violent nature of the group, gothic conventions also helped shape and organize that serious, militaristic aspect. Genii and ghouls fell into hierarchical rank, and the parade was at once a carnivalesque show and demonstration of military might. The gothic mask, Janus-like, effectively functioned in both a comic and serious mode when draped over the face of the Klansman. I have argued that these contradictions limited the effectiveness of Tourgée's attack upon the comic mask of the Klan, as he inadvertently repeated and reinforced spectacular, awe-inspiring images of the mythic Klansman. The jester is replaced by the ghostly Confederate soldier, and as such falls in line with a tradition tracing back to the Pulaski den's guards masquerading as the dead from Chickamauga, and the ghostly passage from *Hamlet* placed at the front of George Gordon's "Prescript to the * *." It is to this tradition (which is both historical and literary, as the previous examples show) that the writings of Thomas Dixon, Jr. belong. In his first novel of Reconstruction, *The Leopard's Spots*, Dixon writes that the Klan's "appeal to the ignorance and superstition of the Negro at once reduced the race to obedience and order" (155). While this quotation would indicate that pranks, and hence a sportive gothic version of the Klan, are the group's main instrument of control in Dixon's novel, that is not the case. In fact, the quotation is a non sequitur. For as the immediately preceding passage reveals, it is undisguised, ruthless violence that the Klan employs. Dixon does not attempt to cover over Tourgée's depiction of the Klan, but in fact builds upon it.

The passage in question marks the first appearance of the Klan in *The Leopard's Spots*, when it lynches a black man named Tim Shelby. The lynching is closely modeled upon the lynching of Jerry in Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand*, with a few significant alterations. As we have seen, Tourgée relied on a number of gothic conventions to depict the ghostly Ku Klux riders take over the town, just after midnight, beneath a full moon. Jerry becomes a target by testifying against the murderers of the Republican John Walters, and it is a speech act that gets Shelby into trouble as well. But as will continuously be the case in Dixon's writings, the political act is replaced by a sexual one—Shelby propositions a white woman, Mollie Graham, for a kiss when she seeks a teaching position from him. Shelby has been depicted as a corrupt politician throughout the novel, a right-hand man to Simon Legree (resurrected from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an unscrupulous Northern carpetbagger), but it is the sexual impropriety for which he is explicitly punished. Dixon redeploys many of the gothic conventions used by Tourgée as he narrates the Klan's attack upon Shelby after his proposition to Graham:

> The next night at twelve o'clock two hundred white-robed horses assembled around the old home of Mrs. Gaston, where Tim was sleeping. The moon was full and flooded the lawn with silver glory. On those horses sat two hundred white-robed silent men whose close-fitting hood disguises looked like the mail helmets of ancient knights. (151)

The "magic statuary" of Tourgée's Klansmen have been replaced by "ancient knights" in armor, but in all other respects the scene is identical. Gothic spectacle is again the central representational strategy. While very little of the raid's action is narrated—most notably, the act of lynching itself is not represented—the reader is presented with a gothic tableau that makes the ghostly Klan riders look menacing, but also martial, even regal in their resemblance to the knights of old, popular figures in a South that saw itself as chivalric and cherished the novels of Walter Scott. And the similarities to *A Fool's Errand* do not end here. They continue with the description of Shelby's lynched body:

> When the sun rose the next morning the lifeless body of Tim Shelby was dangling from a rope tied to the iron rail of the balcony of the court-house. His neck was broken and his

> body was hanging low—scarcely three feet from the ground. His thick lips had been split with a sharp knife, and from his teeth hung this placard:
>
> *"The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to Negro lips that dare pollute with words the womanhood of the South. K. K. K."* (151)

Rather than covering over the spectacular violence of *A Fool's Errand*, Dixon amplifies it. The body hanging in a tree near the courthouse is now suspended from the building itself. Jerry's "peaceful face" (229) is now Shelby's mutilated visage and broken neck. Tourgée, perhaps taking a page from Harriet Beecher Stowe and drawing a veil for the sake of his art, expunges the worst details of Wyatt Outlaw's lynching in his representation of Jerry, including the mutilation of his lips. In Tourgée's analysis, Jerry's corpse is a rhetorical figure, a message to the federal government from Southern resisters. The exclusion of the slashed lips removes the fact that it was also rhetoric—a political voice that had previously been denied the freedmen—for which Outlaw was punished. Dixon, whether aware of Tourgée's source material for Jerry's lynching or not, reintroduces this detail in the attack on Shelby. The mutilation itself is a piece of gothic rhetoric, using the ghastly spectacle of the slashed lips to warn against speech that violates the political and social rules the Klan will enforce. Dixon calculated that this ghastly spectacle would be seen as justified by his readers, and judging from the popularity of his work, his judgment was sadly astute. It is worth noting that the premise of this lynching—Shelby is a political crook as well as seducer, and his punishers heroic knights—prepare the reader to accept the result. The demarcations of good and evil, dark and light, barbarism and civilization, are drawn in high relief in Dixon's novels, which depict a Reconstruction extreme and unambiguous in its conflicts. This vision of the era is in many ways an exaggerated version of that seen in Page's *Red Rock*.

In that novel, as we have seen, Page gestures toward a rape and subsequent lynching without including these actions in his narrative. In *The Clansman*, his follow-up to *The Leopard's Spots*, Dixon makes explicit what Page had only intimated. The embodiment of the black threat to Southern civilization in Dixon's novel is the former slave Augustus Caesar, known simply as Gus. Just as Shelby's political crimes are avenged under the guise of a sexual violation, the metaphorical "rape of the South" will be literalized by Gus. Dixon's trope for these violations is the black hand on a white throat. When radical Reconstruction sweeps in a House of Representatives composed almost entirely of freedmen, Dixon describes the sounds echoing in Congress as "the death-rattle in the throat of their beloved state, barbarism strangling civilization by brute force" (267). This gothic metaphor is made concrete when Gus attacks the white youth Marion Lenoir later in the novel. Marion and her mother, Mrs. Lenoir, are alone in their cottage when Gus and a handful of other black soldiers burst in upon them. As his accomplices bind the mother, Gus, "his sinister bead-eyes wide apart gleaming ape-like," attacks Marion: "A single tiger-spring, and the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat and she was still" (304). While Dixon's metaphors of strangulation clearly tie together what he sees as parallel tragedies in the Congress and the Lenoirs' home, the conventions he employs to render Marion's rape also tie the scene to a number of literary predecessors. The most direct is Moses' attack on Ruth Welch in *Red Rock* in which he "sprang at her like a wild beast"; Page also describes Moses as a "hyena" with a "feline quality" to his voice in that scene (357). But the attack also echoes Tourgée's description of Nimbus, the "desert lion" who we see "leap" and "bound" toward the raiders of Red Wing in *Bricks Without Straw*. My point here is not that these writers share similar views of the freedmen of whom they write, which is not the case. Rather, I am interested in the way the conventions common to all of these depictions shape the meaning these scenes produce. Tourgée's decision to characterize Nimbus as a "desert lion" in one way points toward a familiar trope of bravery, the lion-heart. But by Africanizing that trope ("desert") and emphasizing Nimbus's animal physicality, Tourgée inadvertently reinscribes some of the stereotypes he attempts to oppose, a victim less of unclear thinking than a representational vocabulary that is stacked against the rhetorical purpose he aims to achieve. Conversely, an extreme, even gothic depiction of rape such as the one that Dixon presents in *The Clansman* may have been naturalized by previous writings such as those of Tourgée. While Dixon's vision of Reconstruction is probably the least closely tied to historical events of any that I have examined in this chapter, it is constructed out of repurposed literary tropes and conventions from earlier writing, tropes so familiar that they carry a certain naturalized credibility in and of themselves.

Earlier, I suggested there was a mutually constitutive relationship between textual and actual incarnations of the Klan. Dixon's writing is a perfect illustration of my point. Gothic writing about the Klan in Southern newspapers helped grow the organization in the early post-war period. The reign of terror the organization produced was then registered in Tourgée's novels. Later still, Page and Harris responded to that account of Reconstruction by attempting to paint a gentler and more comic picture of the Klan, drawing upon tropes from the earliest stories about the group. Dixon purports to present historical fiction in *The Clansman*, in which he claims to have taken no "liberty with any essential historic fact." But he frequently draws, not from history, but from previous literary representations of the Klan during Reconstruction. When he describes his Klan "moving like figures in a dream, and vanishing in mists and shadows" (342), it is *A Fool's Errand*, not the actual Klan, that is his source and referent. *The Clansman* is a historical novel, in a sense, especially since real and thinly-disguised figures such as Abraham

Lincoln and Thaddeus Stevens (as Austin Stoneman) appear in the work. But it draws many of its characters, actions, images, and other tropes directly from previous fiction about the Klan.

And yet, despite their deep imbrication in a series of literary depictions, *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, as the basis for D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*, became perhaps the most influential sources for the rebirth of an actual Klan. Dixon had a knack for spectacle, and his revisions of Klan protocol and regalia were taken up almost wholesale by the new Ku Klux Klan that arose in the early twentieth century. The fiery cross, the white uniform bearing a cross in a scarlet circle—in other words, the central iconography of the modern Klan—first appeared in Dixon's novels. Just as the Southern press presented literary images of the Klan that engendered the formation of actual dens during Reconstruction, Dixon's novel and then *The Birth of a Nation* provided a fictional template from which the actual group was created. When Klansmen deposit Gus's body on the doorstep of Silas Lynch in Griffith's film, they perform an action that traces back through Dixon's Reconstruction Trilogy, through the novels of Thomas Nelson Page and Albion Tourgée, through the lynching of Wyatt Outlaw and countless other freedmen, through Klan threats posted on lynched bodies, on coffin lids, in Democratic newspapers, to the violence of the Reconstruction-era Klan. Afterward they light the fiery cross to rally their fellow Klansmen. On Thanksgiving Day of 1915, William Joseph Simmons swore in the first members of the newly reconstituted Ku Klux Klan atop Georgia's Round Mountain, in the light of a fifteen-foot tall fiery cross (Wade 145).

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It may seem that I have argued that, once enshrouded in a mantle of gothic style, there was no way to attack the Klan on the literary front. This is not the case, and I will conclude this chapter by briefly examining a piece of writing that early on in the Klan's existence took the fight to the group on the very ground where it first asserted its presence. In 1871, as William

Wells Brown toured Kentucky in support of the temperance movement and Negro education, he was abducted by and subsequently managed to escape from the Ku Klux Klan. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* published Brown's account, and the story was then reprinted by other New England newspapers. As Brown relates the incident, he is overtaken while walking on the road by a group of mounted, unmasked men, who bind his hands and conduct him along while discussing his imminent hanging. Hearing the cries of an ill acquaintance of theirs from his cabin, the men stop to attend to him. Brown recognizes the ailment as delirium tremens, and, secretly equipped with a syringe of "acetate of morphia" that will ease the sufferer, he requests entry to the cabin, where he proceeds to cure the sick man through what he claims to be supernatural means. Impressed with his skill, the leader of the group allows Brown to attempt a cure of his sciatica of the hip, at which time Brown puts the man to sleep with a double dose of his medicine. Under the influence of a jug of brandy, the remainder of the group either falls asleep or disperses, vowing to return and hang Brown later, and he effects his escape. Brown's brief, alternatingly terrifying and comic account of his encounter with the Klan evinces a sophisticated understanding of the group's use of the press and directly challenges and undermines the narrative the Klan had constructed for itself. It does so by challenging cultural myths upon which the Klan's narrative was built (sometimes even inverting these myths), and also by directly attacking the gothic vestments in which the Klan textually clothed itself.

As Tourgée would later do in *Bricks Without Straw*, Brown counters the myth of black superstition and cowardice by depicting a Klan that operates not by pranks but by violence. The Klansmen of Brown's narrative dispense even with regalia and are identified as members of the group by the actions they take rather than the style that they affect (and by simply being named as such by Brown). Rather than playing upon the fears of superstitious blacks, it is the Klan members themselves whose superstition is played upon, as the quick-witted Brown devises a plan whereby to avert his lynching. Sizing up the “desperate set of men” who have kidnapped him, Brown decides “to impress them with the idea that I derived my power to relieve pain from some supernatural source.” Brown tells the Klansmen that he deals with the devil, knowing that “[n]othing so charms an ignorant people as something that has about it the appearance of superstition,” and hence he’s eager to disguise the cure he plans to administer via syringe. Brown turns the tables on the Klan’s narrative of its methods of controlling blacks, making out its members as the ignorant dupes and their black victim as the one who suppresses (white) violence through his superior intellect: Brown not only has a better grasp of medicine than the Klansmen, but speaks better than them as well. Clearly, Brown suggests, the topics he had gone to the South to lecture upon—temperance and education—would be as beneficial to Southern white supremacists as the blacks they purported to be superior to.

Brown also systematically attacks the image that the Klan and its sympathizers disseminated in the press, an image that, as we saw earlier in this chapter, preceded and engendered the actual presence of the Klan throughout the South. That Klan is defined on the one hand by mystery, terror, and intimations of the supernatural, and on the other hand by a sportive, comic version of the same. Brown attacks these portrayals of the Klan on both fronts. Unlike the comic gothic Klansmen of F. O. McCord’s notices, Brown’s attackers wear no disguises and make no attempt at gothic theatrics, instead frankly admitting that they intend to kill their captive. Neither do their actions accord with the popular representation of the Klan. Theirs is no midnight abduction; in fact, the leader of the group complains of the late hour before eleven o’clock, desiring to go home because his sore hip is bothering him, and the rest of the group is too intoxicated to stay awake until midnight. They do not move silently and communicate via secret signs, but rather, as Brown notes, they "talked freely amongst themselves" as they take him towards the lynching tree. All of this raises the question: How is the reader to identify this chatty, rather careless lynch mob as representatives of the mysterious Ku Klux Klan?

The answer is the simple fact that that is what Brown calls them. The article serves as a challenge to the notion, exemplified by J. C. Lester some twenty years later, that once the mask has been removed, there is no Klansman—that the disguise constitutes rather than hides the Klan. Brown's article suggests that there are *two* Klan disguises, one made of cloth and the other of language. Rather than wielding a saber at the former as Nimbus does in *Bricks Without Straw*, Brown tears away the latter. Historically, the linguistic move of renaming regulators as Klansmen was strategic, as the mystery of the name elevated and obscured the actions of the men to whom it applied. Brown reverses this strategy; by insisting that his attackers be associated with the name of Ku Klux, he diminishes the appellation's value. Brown contests not only the Klan's account of its actions, but also the style in which that narrative is told. He suggests that Klan violence was not different in kind from that of any other regulators, vigilantes, or outlaws, that is was not mysterious and uncanny, nor were its perpetrators chivalric heroes or supernatural apparitions of the Confederate dead. In a sense, what Brown does is shift the referent of the group's name from its style to its actions and describe those actions from a vantage point that registers their seriousness without granting them the affective power of gothic spectacle. Brown seems to be keenly aware that, like F. O. McCord and other writers who used the press to create and spread the Klan throughout the South, his act of writing about the Klan is creative rather than descriptive. In this way, he turns the group's methods against them, and presses his attack against them in a forum where they had achieved such a wide measure of success.

Chapter Three

Gothic Acts of Reading in the Literature of the Nadir

The reappearance of the Ku Klux Klan in the early twentieth century brings into question the notion that significant progress had been achieved in race relations since Reconstruction. One of the few accomplishments of that era was the establishment of schools for freedmen in the South, and literacy remained one of the most important new tools for African Americans after the "redemption" of the Southern states, disenfranchisement, and the denial of many rights briefly promised by the Civil War amendments. But as the previous chapter suggests, reading and literacy revealed a landscape in which the press and popular novels were largely used as tools to disseminate the ideology of white supremacy and spread contumely upon blacks in a campaign meant to deny civil and social rights. The extraordinary rhetorical savvy of an author like William Wells Brown, whose writing about the Ku Klux Klan worked to explode and even reverse the pernicious stereotypes that group spread about African American character, was deployed in an uphill battle against the overwhelming opposition of the mainstream white press.

African American readers and writers therefore had a number of challenges to overcome as consumers and producers of writing, from both the press and the publishing house: the dissemination of pernicious stereotypes and of the horrific violence of lynching, as well as untruthful depictions of race relations in the South that were calculated to bolster states' rights and diminish Northern interest in the freedman's plight. Addressing the former, Ida B. Wells excerpted racist justifications of lynching from what she dubbed "The Malicious and Untruthful White Press"; for example, an article from the *Memphis Daily Commercial* characterized black men en masse as criminals who were merely awaiting the opportunity for "the consummation of a devilish purpose" with vulnerable white women (Wells-Barnett). The Southern, and indeed the national press, just as it had proven essential to the implementation of white supremacist designs in the Klan era of Reconstruction, recklessly disseminated the image of the black rapist to justify lynch law. The narrator of Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* notes this phenomenon in the example of Sandy Campbell, a black servant accused and then exonerated of the charges of theft, rape, and murder. Campbell's alleged crime is reported by the Associated Press as "another dastardly outrage by a burly black brute,—all black brutes it seems are burly" that is soon to be followed up by his "impending lynching with its prospective horrors" (152). But while this "highly sensational" news is "displayed in large black type on the front pages of the daily papers," the subsequent retraction of the story "received slight attention, if any, in a fine-print paragraph on an inside page."

There was more for African American activists to do than just refute negative stereotypes and campaign against the horrors reported in the press—horrors of mob violence and vigilante murder. It is important to keep in mind that those stereotypes were attendant upon essentialist distinctions (used to bolster white supremacist race policies) such as those identified "In Plain Black and White" by Henry W. Grady, which had the authority not only of cultural history and political power on their side, but also that of scientific racism. One way to oppose the essentialist position is to refute, as activists such as Wells did, racist stereotypes and provide different, positive descriptions of African American character. Another method is to undermine such descriptions by suggesting that Grady's black and white distinctions were specious. Grady's case was built upon the notion that there were essential biological differences between the races expressed in a "race instinct," without which "there might be a breaking down of all lines of division and a thorough intermingling of whites and blacks. This once accomplished, the lower and weaker elements of the races would begin to fuse and the process of amalgamation would have begun" (911). Grady's use of the conditional perfect tense to suggest that racial amalgamation was counterfactual to the actual state of race relations in the South is representative of the faulty assumptions underlying racially essentialist arguments, and opponents of Grady's position attacked those assumptions. Because the "breaking down of all lines of division" had largely failed legislatively—the Civil Rights Act of 1875 had been ruled unconstitutional in 1883, and separate but equal would be upheld in 1896—a powerful tactic for African American authors was to challenge those lines in print, revealing the ambiguities that eroded any "plain black and white" depiction of the race line.

Novels that addressed the complicated interracial genealogies of Southern families, along with the phenomenon of racial passing, directly contested the black-and-white view of essentialists like Grady. One of the main questions such works raise is: If racial distinctions are not determined by biology or other innate characteristics, then how are they arbitrated? This question motivates a gothic view of identity that I will trace out in Pauline Hopkins' novel *Hagar's Daughter*. Gothic writing is well known for its ambiguity and uncertainty, and in this sense it is well-suited to the purpose of writers attacking essentialist notions of identity. But it is also associated with a conception of identity that is social rather than private, that privileges the surface over the interior. The "reading" of texts and bodies overlaps in Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's understanding of gothic character. "In the Gothic view," she writes, "individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original and private" (256). The analogy between the written character and the character of a person is made literal in that markings upon flesh are used to "read" personal identity. This conflation leads to a rudimentary language inscribed upon the flesh of characters in gothic novels, but the fact that it is rudimentary also makes such a language imprecise: the “diacritical axes” it presents allow “unbounded confusions of identity” between characters with shared features. The result of such a language is that distinctions that don’t fit into its code “will become unavailable” as they are “vitiated by the fascination of the code” (263). It takes little stretch of the imagination to see the similarities between this gothic “language” of character and that of racial character imposed by the notions of race essentialists. Furthermore, Sedgwick’s conception of gothic identity recognizes external signifiers of identity beyond the flesh. Specifically, it is frequently heirlooms and other tokens—the locket discovered by Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example—that determine identity. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine how potent external signifiers of identity, especially money, as well as legal documents such as bills of sale and family wills, are read and interpreted to produce readings of racial distinctions in Hopkins’ novel.

But there is another, perhaps more straightforward sense in which the act of reading was depicted through gothic conventions in African American writers during the nadir. In Sutton Griggs’ *Imperium in Imperio*, the character Viola is killed by a book. Convinced by John H. Van Evrie’s *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination* that mulatto degeneracy will destroy African Americans, she commits suicide rather than marry the mixed-race man that she loves. Griggs updates the widespread trope from gothic and romantic literature in which a shock brought on by a revelation or disclosure causes a physical reaction, often illness or madness, in a character. In this sense, reading can literally be deadly. The second section of this chapter will examine how Griggs dramatizes the dangers literacy posed to African Americans, from the effects of white supremacist writing upon the black psyche to the specter of lynching connected to social “improprieties” that included acts of reading. But even as he dramatized the gothic dangers of reading, Griggs realized that the press and the publishing house were important forums in his fight against injustice. Much of the action in his novel *The Hindered Hand* consists of reading interpolated political tracts and listening to speeches discussing race relations in the South, suggesting the power Griggs ascribed to such work, which he hoped could become a "bond of union" between the races (*Wisdom* 178). In his own political tracts, Griggs borrows a tactic from the abolitionists when he employs gothic spectacles of violence to energize a response to lynching through horror. Even as there existed gothic horrors associated with the act of reading, Griggs still effectively deployed the tropes of the gothic in his own writing.

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William Wells Brown's influence can be found in both the narrative substance and rhetorical intent of Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-2), her first work to be serialized in the *Colored American Magazine*. Brown famously inaugurated Hopkins's literary career when as a teenager she won a cash prize for an essay in support of temperance that she submitted to a contest Brown organized. But the intellectual relationship between the two writers and race activists goes far beyond their personal acquaintance. Hopkins's ascent as a novelist and editor occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, at a time marked by both a shift in black leadership (Brown had died in 1884, and Frederick Douglass passed away in 1895, the same year Booker T. Washington's star rose on the reputation of his Atlanta Compromise speech) and a continued record of racially motivated violence and Jim Crow law that has led the period to be labeled the nadir of American race relations. Hopkins characterized the violence of the era as another "rise of slave-power" resulting from the fact that after the Civil War "the serpent was scorched, not killed; so we have lynch-law and a black Postmaster Baker murdered in cold blood and neither redress nor protection from the Federal Government. We have the Convict-lease system and the word of influential Southerners that in it they have 'a better thing than slavery, for them'" (*Daughter* 30). Given that the spirit of slavery still existed in the twentieth century, Hopkins argued that Washington's tactics of conciliation would not work, and in fact that the wealth of Tuskegee, rather than providing a testament to the African American worth, would be viewed by Southern eyes with "jealous spite" (*Daughter* 109). Instead, she thought that a new generation of black abolitionists in the mold of Brown and Douglass were called for, and lamented in a short biography of Brown from the *CAM*: "How many of us today can occupy and fill their vacant places?... Alas, how few, when we consider our advantages" (*Daughter* 39). Clearly, Hopkins saw the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company, which published her first novel, *Contending Forces*, and the *CAM* as vehicles for forwarding a new generation of black political activism that would oppose the injustices of Jim Crow as had the black abolitionists the institution of slavery. Hazel Carby characterizes Hopkins's vision of "the black inhabitants of the North as the inheritors of a New England tradition of liberty, and as a Northern black intellectual she could contribute to, if not create, a political climate of agitation, a new abolitionist fervor" (xxxvi). To achieve such a fervor meant boldly critiquing social and political race policies in a way that conciliationists led by Washington were loath to do, and she undertook just such a critique in *Hagar's Daughter*.

Carby and many other critics have noted that by setting *Hagar's Daughter* in Washington, D.C., Hopkins takes her story of clandestine black heritage to the "heart of the white power structure" (xliii).[24] The specific location of that heart, however, has not been commented upon extensively. To summarize briefly the novel's (distinctly difficult-to-summarize) plot: The story opens in 1860 with the secession of the South, supported by the profligate playboy St. Clair Enson and a notorious slave trader named Walker. These two journey to the ancestral Enson hall in Maryland upon hearing about the marriage of St. Clair's elder brother, Ellis, to Hagar, a daughter of the neighboring estate. Walker proves that Hagar is in fact a slave, owned by him, and in the ensuing uproar Ellis apparently commits suicide, while Hagar is sent to the slave markets in Washington, D.C., where she jumps from the Long Bridge with her infant in her arms. The post-bellum section of the novel opens in Washington in 1880 and follows a series of seemingly unrelated characters who virtually all prove to be actors from the original narrative. St. Clair Enson is now General Benson, an executive in the Treasury Department, while Walker returns as a wealthy mining speculator, Major Madison. Hagar is now Estelle Bowen, married to the self-made millionaire Senator Zenas Bowen. Ellis Enson has become Chief Henson, the director of the Secret Service. The narrative follows the labyrinthine plots of love and intrigue as Jewel Bowen, the senator's adopted daughter who turns out to be Hagar's lost child, Cuthbert Sumner, a wealthy undersecretary at the Treasury, and Aurelia Madison, the Major's daughter, are caught up in a series of domestic plots energized by Benson and Madison's quest to gain the Bowen millions. One question I seek to answer here is: Why did Hopkins choose the Treasury, rather than Congress, the Supreme Court, the office of the President (an obvious choice given her novel's debt to Brown), or the Departments of War or Justice, as the setting for her narrative? It is not only Benson's high position in that office that motivates my question. Sumner is an employee of the Department, as are Henny Sargeant and (indirectly) Isaac Johnson, former slaves from the Enson plantation. One plot revolves around the murder of Elise Bradford, a stenographer in the Department. And in 1880, the main function of the Secret Service was not to protect the president—a work detail that would follow the assassination of President McKinley in 1901—but to investigate counterfeiting and currency fraud, making Henson an employee of the Treasury as well.

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[24] Of course, the failure of the federal government to enforce the Civil War amendments, leaving Southern states to regulate the civil and political rights of their African American citizens, somewhat complicates Carby's description of Washington D.C.

Hopkins's interest in the Treasury must be understood in terms of the overlapping concerns of that institution and the narrative of her novel. Critics of the novel have not failed to notice that it tells a story about race and the law. But these concerns are intertwined with those of money, especially as a special kind of fiction, as well as writing, that is integrally connected with both race and law. While the gap between the two sections of the novel's plot encompasses the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the gap between the end of the plot and the novel's publication marked an era in which America was obsessed with questions about the nature of race and of money, and as Michael O'Malley has shown, those questions were closely related. At issue was the notion of essentialism that was so prized by both white supremacists and supporters of specie-backed currency. Historical circumstances bound these two concerns in such a way that discussing them together goes far beyond analogy. The first large-scale issuance of greenback dollars—paper money deriving its value from legislative decree rather than specie—was enacted to fund the Union's war effort and hence end slavery and free Southern blacks. In turn, the Fourteenth Amendment made the freedmen citizens in the same way that greenbacks were endowed with value—by fiat. One of the driving arguments behind an expansion of paper currency after the war was to provide money for an expanded citizenry. But the existence of greenback dollars and newly-minted African American citizens raised uneasy questions about the nature of value: was it social and cultural authority alone, or worse, that spectral substance known as "confidence," that arbitrated the worth of things? Was there no absolute authority, either natural or divine, to which one might appeal? The answer to such questions, according to O'Malley, "was the gold (and silver) fetish, the nineteenth-century political economy's insistence on a specie economy and the intrinsic value of precious metal. The essential value of specie, like the essential character of certain races or occupations, helped resolve the ambiguity of identity in public by a resort to 'natural facts'" (370). O'Malley's argument helps us to understand why the Treasury makes an ideal setting for Hopkins's novel. For as he points out, "[t]he height of the nineteenth-century gold and silver debate—1896—came as Southern whites were establishing formal racial segregation and disfranchisement" (380), including the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.[25] Hopkins saw that the renegotiations of race and property that occurred within the timeframe of her novel, as slaves moved from economic objects to political subjects and federally-guaranteed greenbacks replaced state-backed currencies, were still actively shaping the lives of African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century. But where to start with an investigation of money, race, and the law in the hugely complicated plot of Hopkins' novel? I would suggest that her interest in money, like her investment in the political novel and her use of the tragic mulatta trope, comes from her readings of and appropriations from the writings of William Wells Brown.

A number of critics, including Lois Brown, Holly Jackson, and Hanna Wallinger, have noticed that Hopkins steals a page from Brown's methodology of composition by literally stealing several pages from his writing. As I discussed briefly in my first chapter, and as Geoffrey Sanborn has documented at great length, Brown's fiction frequently resembles a bricolage of other texts that he freely samples without attribution. Paired with his frequent assertions of authenticity, claims of eye-witness status, and appeals to the reality of his fictions, these textual borrowings constitute one of the most fascinating aspects of Brown's writing as they raise questions about the nature of authority and the status of fiction. As William Andrews writes of *Clotel*, "Instead of clarifying distinctions between the real and the fictive in his text, the narrator leaves the reader to ponder the bases on which one distinguishes between the real and the fictive in any text" (32). For example, the famous Long Bridge scene in that novel is largely plagiarized, as Holly Jackson has shown, from a newspaper article by the abolitionist Seth M. Gates. Gates asserts his status as eyewitness to the incident. In the concluding pages of *Clotel*, Brown writes that "Some of the narratives I have derived from other sources" (226), partially admitting to his practice of procuring not only the "narrative" but also verbatim language of Gates's article. By the fourth version of the novel, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine. A Tale of the Southern States*, there is no admission that outside sources have been employed, and Brown describes Clotelle, the fictional mulatta based in part upon the slave Gates saw jump into the Potomac some two decades previous, and her lover Jerome as "real personages" (4). Brown plays upon the fact that the term "personage" denotes the antonyms of (real) person and (fictional) character. It is just such disruptions of the boundaries between natural and fictive discourse that Andrews characterizes as most significant to Brown's contribution to the African American narrative voice.

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[25] Homer Plessy's lawyer, the novelist Albion Tourgée, addressed the currency debates in *The War of the Standards: Coin and Credit versus Coin without Credit* (1896).

Literary discourse is not the only arena, however, in which Brown blurs the lines between reality and fiction. In his *Three Years in Europe* (1852), Brown describes his establishment of a wildcat bank in Monroe, Michigan, in 1835. The historian Stephen Mihm explains that wildcat banks were "institutions founded by unscrupulous financiers in remote areas for the express purpose of making it difficult, if not impossible, for the notes to be exchanged for gold and silver" (8), during an era in which thousands of state-chartered banks issued unique currencies and the amount of counterfeit money on the market in some areas neared fifty percent. Brown freely admits to the lax conditions that allowed him to become a banker, when a wildcat bank could issue "notes for four times the sum raised" to start up, and that sum often consisted of borrowed money held only long enough to display for inspectors (66). Hildegard Hoeller calls the Shinplasters, or small-denominated currency, that Brown issues "a precariously backed semifictional money of his own making" (116) and relates it to another fungible commodity: his "fiction that resembles shinplasters, half real and half counterfeit." Indeed, Brown engages with the very question of the source of value that so perplexed essentialist thought about both money and race in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, he finds a "sound basis" not in specie, but in circulability. After a business rival makes a run on Brown's bank, Brown learns to send out his own notes in exchange for others so he may thus "keep cashing [his] own Shinplasters." But Hoeller's description of the Shinplasters as "semifictional money" is not quite fitting. After all, the value of money is always designated by fiat, so the real question is not *whether* it is fictional or not, but *whose* fiction endows it with worth. As the literary critic Wolfgang Iser has shown, the opposition between the fictional and the real is a false one. Fictions, after all, are real. They exist in law as well as in literature. Iser compliments the commonplace but misleading binary by introducing a third term, the imaginary.[26] For him, reality is not a stable, fixed concept. Instead, the imagination employing the fictional can help bring new realities into being. Money serves a similar function. It facilitates social relations through trade and thus alters the makeup of society and has the potential to promote the economy. Wildcat money, like all money, is fictional. That is not to say that no counterfeit money exists, but what makes it counterfeit is not that it is a false representation of money that is "real." Materially, counterfeit money is as "real" as *authentic* money. The difference is not material, it lies in the authorizing power behind the production of money. Authentic money is authorized by a legitimate source, counterfeit is not. David R. Johnson has argued that the fundamental issue in debates about monetary policy is always power, and that who controls money is a question of "the power to coerce"—in short, sovereignty (xiii). That fact, in turn, raises the question of legitimacy, and legitimacy is, as Brown forces us to see, a question of power. Similarly, determinations of race are also questions of who has the legitimate power to define what constitutes race.[27] It is within the historical context of a counterfeit culture, in which uncontested real money (i.e., specie) commingled with state-backed paper currencies, wildcat shinplasters, counterfeit notes, and phantom bank notes (notes that did not counterfeit those of other banks, but simply did not correspond to any legally-backed currency), that Brown is able to appropriate this economic power. Hence, this incident provides a couple of significant takeaways. On the one hand, it highlights Brown's skill as an entrepreneur and industrious, self-made man, just has his writing does. On the other, it exposes the contradictions of legal fictions that delegate value, as when he cashes in his Shinplasters with "the most worthless of the Wild Cat money that I had on hand, but which was a lawful tender" (68). Brown can operate within legal fictions of value while also showing that legally fixed value can be at odds with the social agreements that allow money to circulate.

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[26] For an extended explanation of Iser's conception of the real, fictive, and imaginary, see Brook Thomas, "*The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, or, What's Literature Have to Do with It?"

The analogy between Brown's practices as wildcat banker and professional writer becomes clearer, and more significant, when the Shinplaster incident reappears in the "Narrative of the Life and Escape of Williams Wells Brown" that prefaces his 1853 novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*. For here again, Brown uses the practice of circulation, or recirculation more accurately, to appropriate power that traditionally devolved to an established white authority. The "Narrative" replaces what would traditionally be an authenticating preface written by a white abolitionist—a role that Edmund Quincy takes on in Brown's 1847 autobiography. I would argue that it is the density of intertextual citation that establishes the authenticity of the "Narrative," which quotes from the 1847 autobiography, *Three Years in Europe*, and *Panoramic Scenes* to create a sense of factuality and unquestionable authority. A surprising result of redeploying the same pieces of writing again and again is that they seem less fictional each time, more real as they are presented via the conventions of citation, as they are named, dated, enclosed in quotation marks, and so forth. Here there is an interesting connection to counterfeit bills, phantom currencies, and suspect Shinplasters, which gained value as they continued to circulate successfully. William Graham Sumner recommended that, when facing a questionable bill, one should "scrutinize the worn and dirty scrap for two or three minutes, regarding it as more probably 'good' if it was worn and dirty than if it was clean, because those features were proof of long and successful circulation" (qtd. in Mihm 360). But there is a more serious point here as well. Brown's inclusion of the Shinplaster story, where money's (fictional) value is delegated by his own authority and confirmed through circulation, in an authenticating preface that functions in an identical fashion with writing, raises questions about the relationship between financial and literary fictions. Marc Shell writes about this relationship in *Money, Language, and Thought*:

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[27] The link between these issues is illustrated in the career of novelist and lawyer Albion Tourgée. The same year he defended Homer Plessy before the Supreme Court by pointing out the arbitrary nature of black and white racial distinctions, and arguing that reputation as a white man was a form of owning, as earning power, he intervened in the currency debates. Earlier, in *A Fool's Errand*, he points out that the term 'carpetbagger' originated during the days of wildcat money. Able to produce money with no need to have an actual bank where people could go to redeem it, wildcatters carried their bills in carpetbags. With the onset of Reconstruction, one such carpetbagger used the label to describe him pejoratively Northerners going south after the war. As Tourgée's etymology demonstrates, as in money and race, so in language meaning is often decided by who has the power of naming. Brown, in his fiction, tries to appropriate that power.

> Credit, or belief, involves the very ground of aesthetic experience, and the same medium that seems to confer belief in fiduciary money (bank notes) and in scriptural money (created by the process of bookkeeping) also seems to confer it in literature. That medium is writing. The apparently diabolical "interplay between money and mere writing to a point where the two be[come] confused" involves a general ideological development: the

> tendency of paper money to distort our “natural” understanding of the relationship between symbols and things. (7)

Shell’s point that both money and literature function upon the same fictional foundation—call it credit, belief, or confidence—and through the same medium, writing, is exemplified in Brown’s “Narrative” and the novel that follows it. The inherent gap Shell describes between symbols and things provides one site where Brown is able to achieve the disruption between natural or authentic and fictive discourses, as described previously by William Andrews. The point ramifies not only in terms of the symbolic economy of literary writing, but also that of race. As Michael Germana keenly observes, “Brown…likens the recycling of debt to the perpetual deferral of linguistic meaning. In the process, he hints that race, like any other sign, is an empty cipher whose significance is inseparable from the economy in which it circulates—an economy of differences and values attributed to them by social contract” (11). Personhood, race, writing, and money commingle and become interchangeable in the auction of Clotel that occurs in the first chapter of the novel, where it is not just her looks that make her valuable, but a piece of paper “certifying her moral character” and describing other desirable aspects of her personality (87). And alluding back to the Shinplaster currency which could be issued at four times the amount of clear backing currency presented, Brown writes on the first page of his novel that in the antebellum South, “the real negro, or clear black, does not amount to more than one in every four of the slave population” (81). Brown makes it clear that the economy of race, like that of wildcat currency, defines value based upon “social contract”—the agreement that an article is circulable—and the legal guarantee of legitimating powers such as the governments of slave states. After all, it took legal fictions such as the law of hypodescent to ensure that phenotypically white quadroons such as Clotel could be classified as black, and that blacks could be classified as economic articles. These points accord with Paul Gilmore's reading of the novel, in which he argues that racial authenticity exists only as a commodifying mask, and that for blacks to appear genuine "involves masquerade, essentially putting on blackface" (749). Pompey quite literally does so as he prepares slaves for the market, as did both black and white performers in minstrel shows and on abolitionist platforms. The story of the Shinplasters, then, performs a valuable function in prefacing the opening pages of *Clotel*, showing similarities between the social and legal fictions of race that undergirded slavery and those of the money for which persons could be exchanged in the slave economy.

I have discussed the connections between money, writing, and race in Brown's work at some length because they are crucial to understanding the way Hopkins engages with him in *Hagar's Daughter*. They will help to clear up—as much as is possible with a writer like Brown—the confusion about how Hopkins incorporates his writing into her novel. The two critics who have written at greatest length about Hopkins' appropriations are Lois Brown and Holly Jackson. Lois Brown claims that the passages come from the 1847 autobiography, the original 1853 version of *Clotel*, and Josephine Brown's 1856 *Biography of an American Bondman*; Jackson focuses exclusively on the 1853 *Clotel*. According to Lois Brown's reading, these borrowings constitute an homage to William Wells Brown as an important literary forebear, but she finds more significance in allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the poetry of Tennyson. She does not comment on the inclusion of the Long Bridge scene. Jackson, in contrast, skips over the earlier borrowings and focuses exclusively on this scene. She reads Hopkins' appropriation of the iconic Long Bridge scene as "an instance of intertextual suturing" that "foreground[s] the failure of Reconstruction to facilitate a bridge into freedom for African Americans. Her repetition constructs a tragic loop, creating for readers the sense of déjà vu that

Hopkins and her contemporaries describe as central to black experience at the turn of the twentieth century" (133). Jackson's description of "the sense of déjà vu" accords with Hopkins' depiction of the spirit of slavery as a "serpent that was scorched, not killed." But Jackson overplays her hand when she describes the essential strategy of Hopkins' appropriation as "textual atavism" that basically arrests national progress in 1853. Indeed, while political change may have been minimal, to erase half a century of history would be to ignore the political, juridical, social, and artistic achievements of African Americans which Hopkins documented in her series on "Famous Men" and then "Famous Women of the Negro Race" in the *CAM*.[28] She asserts in her entry on Frederick Douglass that to note the ills of society is necessary to effect change, not merely to point out how it has not occurred rapidly enough: "Progress follows upon the heels of discontent. Discontent is abroad and people open their eyes to the wickedness going on about them" (*Daughter* 29). Her jeremiad may sound largely pessimistic, but the very political activism that Carby cites as the motive force behind her writing makes evident her belief in change.

Another problem with Jackson's reading of the Long Bridge scene is that she identifies the wrong text as antecedent. The Long Bridge scene in *Hagar's Daughter* does not take its language directly from the 1853 *Clotel*, but rather from the 1867 *Clotelle*. When discussing differences between *Hagar's Daughter* and *Clotel*, Jackson points to the twenty-year temporal leap following Hagar's apparent suicide-infanticide as characteristic of Hopkins' "disruptive narrative mode" that opposes "linear, progressive national history" (146). But just such a temporal shift occurs in the 1867 *Clotelle*. In that novel, it is not Clotelle, but her mother Isabella who drowns after jumping from the Long Bridge. The next chapter jumps forward in time as the

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[28] Hopkins, paraphrasing onetime *CAM* supporter W. H. Dupree, suggested one of the main reasons for the founding of the magazine was to "give the world some idea of the progress we have made in the generation that has passed since the abolition of slavery" (*Daughter* 227).

"curtain rises seven years after the death of Isabella" (52) with Clotelle's prospective white lover Henry Miller now a Congressman, linking the love plot and political commentary in the novel in a fashion closely mimicked in *Hagar's Daughter*. Jackson's mistake is understandable for the same reason that I find Lois Brown's list of source texts to be less than authoritative: Brown's seemingly endless recirculation of narrative incident makes it difficult to pinpoint which source Hopkins draws upon. For instance, when she appropriates the Long Bridge scene, we could plausibly identify Seth M. Gates' article or any of the four versions of *Clotel(le)* as the source. In the same fashion, the story of the Shinplasters and numerous other incidents proliferate throughout Brown's writings and cannot therefore be identified in any one authoritative source. Indeed, even attention to small details in the language of the plagiarized passages leads to more confusion than clarity. In the Long Bridge scene, for example, Hagar runs toward "the forests of Arlington Heights" (74). In *Clotel* it is "Arlington Place" and in *Clotelle* "Arlington Heights." Later, Hagar sinks beneath "the waters of the Potomac" (75), again agreeing with *Clotelle*; in the 1853 novel it is the "waves of the Potomac." My perhaps tiresome textual sleuthing would seem to suggest a definitive source in the later version of the novel. And yet, looking closely at an earlier passage in which St. Clair Enson wagers his slave Isaac in a poker game, the case becomes less clear. "Then you bet the whole of this boy, do you?" (27) asks St. Clair's opponent, Johnson. In *Clotelle*, only half the slave is wagered, and yet in the 1853 novel the bet is for the full slave, and Johnson's line appears with only the smallest of alterations ("the boy" for "this boy"). I do not claim, as it seems folly to do so, to offer a definitive genealogy of all the borrowings from Brown in *Hagar's Daughter*, but it seems clear that Hopkins was aware of Brown's strategy of literary recirculation and deliberately pulled language from a number of his writings.

That Hopkins would take language from different versions of *Clotel(le)* is significant. First, without underestimating the sense of "déjà vu" that comprises a powerful aspect of the political critique of *Hagar's Daughter*, these diverse borrowings suggest that Hopkins was thinking about not just stasis, but change. As M. Giulia Fabi writes, "the significance of *Clotel* in the making of African American fiction changes over time: In its first version, it accomplishes the transition from autobiographical to fictional authorship; by the last, it emerges as an antecedent of the literary strategies and concerns of the post-reconstruction period" (639). *Clotel(le)* was in turn a landmark abolitionist novel written for a British audience, a serialized novel in a black newspaper, a dime novel distributed to Union soldiers during the Civil War, and finally a story that looked forward to the future of African Americans after emancipation. It is not insignificant that the subtitle "the President's Daughter," which highlights the political critique of the novel, is ultimately supplanted by "the Colored Heroine," with its emphasis on heroic black character. To that point, Robert Levine writes that in the 1867 *Clotelle* "Brown portrays black patriotism and sacrifice during the Civil War in order to develop black pride, assert claims for black citizenship, and mobilize white support for Reconstruction" (316). Changes in the story told in the novel, as well as its intended audience and moment of consumption, change its rhetorical significance, so crucial for a political novel. Brown did not repeat the Long Bridge scene over and over merely to arrest his readers in the crisis of slavery, a point made clear by the substitution of the mother Isabella for Clotelle in later editions of the novel. Clotelle becomes the daughter of the suicide upon the Long Bridge—just as Hagar's daughter does in Hopkins' novel.

To understand what Hopkins gets from *Clotel(le)*, one must look at all of her major textual borrowings. As far as I can tell, three passages in *Hagar's Daughter* draw directly upon language from Brown's writing (all citations come from the Schomburg Library's *The Magazine Novels)*: pp. 8-11, which introduce the slave trader Walker, describe the slave prison to which he remands his captives in Charleston, and narrate Pompey's preparation of the slaves for the market and their subsequent inspections and sales; pp. 26-28, which relate St. Clair's gambling of his body servant Isaac in a steamboat poker match, and pp. 73-75, which narrate the Long Bridge scene. The first two passages concern the circulation of slaves, and especially their interchangeability with money. Walker's dealings in the slave market of Charleston illustrate how black bodies are counterfeited and forced through violent coercion to act out performances of race that create economic value. The slave pen where he holds his captives, in a description taken verbatim from Brown, contains "iron collars, hobbles, handcuffs, thumbscrews, cowhides, chains, gags and yokes" (9). Itemizing these instruments of torture before narrating the slave auction, Hopkins introduces the first black characters in her novel under explicit threat of violence. The slaves are prepared for market by Walker's servant Pompey, a character taken from *Clotel(le)* whom Paul Gilmore has shown to be a thinly fictionalized version of Brown himself, who was similarly forced to prepare slaves for sale by blacking grey hairs, greasing skin, and otherwise making them look younger, stronger, and more valuable. As Gilmore writes, what Pompey's preparations of the slaves "indicate is the constructedness of the black body as a commodity form. Slaves are not simply what they appear to be on the auction block; rather, they must be coerced into performing their roles as valued (because of their youth, demeanor, and strength) objects" (749). In short, Walker's slaves are coerced by the threat of violence into performing a construction of blackness that creates commodified value—that makes them salable for high prices on the auction block. It seems significant that the slaves Aaron, Sam, and Big Jane are the first black characters the reader encounters in Hopkins' novel, as their presence immediately makes it clear that in the slave economy race is not an essential quality, but a social construct created through the coerced performances of blacks and the agreed-upon legal fictions of their white captors. This alignment of personality with performance and fungibility, rather than essential worth or character, is one of the most important ideas that Hopkins coopts from Brown's writing.

The next scene that draws heavily from Brown's writing further underscores the connection between black bodies and money. Rather than being sold for cash, as are Sam and Big Jane, St. Clair Enson's body servant Isaac Johnson is used *as* cash in a poker match. While not essentially different in kind from the preceding slave sale, in that Isaac performs his value, especially in a winkingly deferential exchange with the new master whom he intends forthwith to abandon, the scene provides an iconic image that makes a shorthand of the equivalence between black bodies and money in that sale. When St. Clair hits a run of bad luck in a poker match, in desperation he bets Isaac, who climbs onto the poker table, to be matched by "a large roll of bills" that the opposing bettor, Johnson, takes from his pocket (26). St. Clair loses the hand and leaves "Isaac…standing upon the table with the money at his feet" (27). In a novel that is motivated by a plot to defraud a multimillionaire, and in which most of the principle actors work at the Treasury, this is one of the only appearances of actual cash in the text, and it is not arbitrary that it coincides with a black body. Isaac's performance of blackness makes him a constructed economic article in a different way than the slaves at market, in that no face grease or explicit threat of violence is needed to make him appear "noways vicious," as Johnson hopes him to be. Instead, it is Isaac's own performance and the guarantee of St. Clair that makes Johnson confident in the slave's value. Thinking back to William Wells Brown's prefatory narrative to *Clotel*, it is not hard to see the equivalence between Johnson's confidence in the value of Isaac and his confidence in his roll of bills. Both are backed not only by their appearances as valuable commodities, but also by legal guarantees, social fictions, and confidence. By appropriating Brown's writing as well as his ideas about race, money, and value, Hopkins begins to develop the investigation that will run through the whole of *Hagar's Daughter*.

Finally, the Long Bridge scene, as the most iconic of her plagiarisms from *Clotel(le)*, is also the most immediately visible of them, designed perhaps to alert readers to her intertextual strategy. It also highlights the fact that *Hagar's Daughter*, like the black (and female) bodies, cash, wills, bills of sale, and other valuables found in its plot, is an item in circulation, not only in the pages of the *CAM*, but in the tradition of African American literature. The significance of its self-reflexive identification as an economic article of contestable value will become clear later in this chapter.

If we think about race and writing (especially those special types of writing known as money and laws) in *Hagar's Daughter*, then we are presented with a novel of passing in which "passing" signifies in a number of ways. The definition of racial passing articulated by Justin Edwards in his study of passing and the gothic finds the roots of the term in a type of writing. Drawing upon the work of Juda Bennet, he explains that

> the etymology of the term *passing* comes from "the 'pass' given to slaves so that they might travel without being taken for runaways." Indeed, the pass was a slip of paper—a kind of passport—that allowed free movement by confirming the slave's identity through ownership… [Ellen Craft's] body serves as a text that is hardly sufficient for deciphering race or legal status. Although William does not explicitly connect the written pass and the

> visible pass of color, he hints at the merger of bodies and texts, just as he relishes in the ambiguities of face and race. (43)

So racial passing is not merely analogous to counterfeiting, but historically and etymologically grounded in that very practice. To counterfeit a pass was to be able *to* pass, in this example that illustrates how fictions of racial identity are created or revised through writing. When the body of a slave was not a legible text—when a person displayed phenotypically ambiguous racial traits—then writing became not just an arbiter of race, but *the* arbiter of it. While critics have expressed discomfort with Hopkins' seeming colorism in *Hagar's Daughter*, which focuses upon phenotypically white African American characters, excepting those delegated largely to subsidiary roles, I think her strategy is to foreground the fictions of race that become most legible when the people whose race they arbitrate are least so themselves.

But the novel deals with more than just racial passing. It is a novel of inheritance, or passing along familial property, in which the first major conflict concerns who will inherit the Enson estate in Maryland. Indeed, legal machinations over this problem precipitate the plot when St. Clair brings Walker home to expose Hagar as a slave and remove her daughter as a possible heiress. Hagar's parents, the Sergeants, have apparently been passing Hagar off as their daughter despite their inability to have children. To keep Ellis from fleeing the country with his bride and child, St. Clair and Walker procure a corpse and, affixing identifying papers, money, and an heirloom watch to it, pass it off as Ellis. After the Civil War, and an involvement with the Lincoln assassination, St. Clair passes as General Benson, while Walker does so as Major Madison. It is not only Hagar who passes in the post-bellum section of the novel when she remakes herself as Estelle Marks after surviving her plunge into the Potomac: while she may be unique (and I use the word "may" deliberately) in her racial passing, all except the domestic characters (Henny Sargeant, her daughter Marthy, and Isaac Johnson) from the antebellum narrative pass under assumed names and identities after the war. Hagar's daughter Jewel "passes" racially as well, quite unconscious of the fact, as Senator Bowen passes her off as his own daughter, just as the Sergeants had with Hagar. And the conspirators attempt to defraud the Bowens of the Senator's millions after his death by passing off a forged will as the genuine article. In addition to these forms of passing, Mikko Tuhkanen suggests another valence of the term as it refers to bills of a different kind than the contested currencies discussed previously in this chapter: "One passes bills not only on the streets but also in Congress" (336). Tuhkanen suggests that the double meaning of passing banknotes and passing laws "is emblematic of a national economy in which the law itself is counterfeit." I agree with this insight insofar as *Hagar's Daughter* is unquestionably concerned with critiquing the laws that created both chattel slavery and Jim Crow, but I also think Tuhkanen makes an error in claiming the law is "counterfeit." What separates a counterfeit bill from legal tender is not a physical difference, but a legal one: it is the declaration of Congress, and that declaration alone, that imbues a greenback dollar with value. Hence, a law cannot itself be counterfeit unless there is some higher arbitrator of authenticity, such as natural law, and it is just that sort of essentialist thinking that Hopkins argues against in her novel. The problem is not that Congress passes counterfeit laws, but unjust ones that are very real.

It is noteworthy that the decision to pass, both in terms of race, name, and title, is almost always financially motived in *Hagar's Daughter*. In her essay "Whiteness as Property,"[29] Cheryl I. Hines explains that "the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset," one that "whites sought to protect and that those who passed sought to attain—by fraud if necessary" (1713). In this way, passing is not just a racial fraud, but a financial one as well, as a person fraudulently attains the valuable property of whiteness and all of the exclusive privileges it entails. But the unquestionably "white" characters in Hopkins' novel also pass under identities that are not just ends in themselves, but tools for obtaining financial gains. St. Clair flees abroad after the Lincoln assassination but is able to acquire a high position in the Treasury as the false General Benson. A fake military title also imbues Major Madison, erstwhile Walker, with a credible front by which he is able to lure investors into his Arrow-Head Mines, themselves a swindle described as a "faro bank" (247). Aurelia Madison passes as white for her own gain, but Walker encourages the deception because she is more valuable to him as his "white" daughter who can attract wealthy men to his gambling parlor. In this novel of passing, then, the essential connection is not between deception and race, but rather between deception and wealth. The false will (a legal document that does not just identify people, but defines their identities, as in the "heir" or "heiress"), the false name, title, social position, and racial identification are all deceptions perpetrated for financial gain. And the piece of writing that gives racial passing its name—the slave's pass that gave him mobility—becomes just one of a variety of false or potentially falsifiable documents that circulate through the novel. To follow these connections further, it is necessary to look at how Hopkins imagines race in *Hagar's Daughter*, especially as related to character, and then how the value of character is created and assessed in the novel.

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[29] Tourgée used the concept of whiteness as property as part of his argument in the *Plessy* case (and also earlier in his novel *Pactolus Prime*), and Hopkins would very likely have been aware of the idea as a result.

One common reading of the status of race in Hopkins' novel, perhaps most clearly articulated by Augusta Rohrbach, is that race is defined by biology. As she writes, "Hopkins begins with the biological notion that racial identity is an inherited trait; one's past, as a way to confirm racial origin, cannot be dispensed with" (485). I think this reading mistakes the ideas of the characters in the novel for those of its author. Certainly, not only whites like Cuthbert Sumner express an understanding of race as an ineluctable biological reality, but so do supposedly black characters like Hagar and Jewel. It is Hagar herself who first articulates a biological understanding of race when her supposed African ancestry is revealed to her by Walker. Agonizing over the discovery, she wonders:

> 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)

While these thoughts speak directly to Rohrbach's reading of the status of race in the novel, it is important to note that it is not any biological discovery that leads to Hagar's revelation as black. Rather, it is a document: a bill of sale produced by Walker proving that Hagar is a slave belonging to him. Hagar's thoughts, reported via free indirect discourse, are her own personal fantasies that result from her upbringing in which she has been trained according to the ideas of white supremacy, including the notion that race is an essential biological characteristic and that to be black is to be less developed—biologically and culturally—than are whites. Indeed, it is telling that Cuthbert Sumner has almost identical thoughts after discovering Hagar's race at the end of the novel: he mentally conjures an image of "the grinning, toothless black hag that was her foreparent" (271). Hagar and Sumner think similarly about race because they were educated in the same elite private schools and trained in the customs of their social class. Far from showing that Hopkins holds these ideas herself, the extreme prejudice of Hagar's and Sumner's thoughts, which present monstrous images of racial difference, highlight the dangers of specious race science.

Of course, it is easier to confuse biological and social constructions of race than one might imagine. Hagar's fantasies of degraded African ancestry arise from the revelation of a bill of sale, a legal document. A move of this type is typical of attempts to fix racial difference in supposedly objective scientific classifications. Cheryl I. Hines points out that "blood" was an unreliable racial determinant. She explains that

> The acceptance of the fiction that the racial ancestry could be determined with the degree of precision called for by the relevant standards or definitions rested on false assumptions that racial categories of prior ancestors had been accurately reported, that those reporting in the past shared the definitions currently in use, and that racial purity actually existed in the United States. (1740)

In other words, there was (and is) no scientifically valid way to determine biological race, and instead such determinations were made based upon the existence of legal documents and other such evidence. People were "biologically" black if their forebears could be proved to have been so, but that classification ultimately rested upon legal rather than scientific determinants, as well as such abstract qualities as reputation, which defined race, and especially whiteness, well into the twentieth century.[30] One of Hopkins' major criticisms of racial essentialism lies here, in the way that seemingly essential biological definitions of race ultimately rely upon circumstantial evidence that is legally or socially arbitrated.

But if biology doesn't determine racial difference in *Hagar's Daughter*, then what does? Claire Pamplin astutely observes that "Hagar's race…is located not in her skin color, not in her character, but in the record of a monetary transaction between a slave seller and a slave buyer," that "racial status resides strictly and most reliably in the records of slavery" which are ultimately “inadequate signifiers of race” (169). It is the bill of sale that Walker produces which reassigns Hagar’s racial status from white (and hence wife, mother, subject, heiress) to black (and hence slave, object, property). Pamplin does not follow up this observation at length, but I will do so here because it seems key to understanding the central idea of *Hagar’s Daughter*, which is the critique of racial essentialism. Just as both racial and monetary value are created by social contract and legal fictions in the writings of William Wells Brown, so are they here. Hopkins goes to great lengths to show that the identity of not only Hagar, but almost every major character in the novel, is determined by legal documents, financial records, personal memos, letters, contracts, wills, and heirlooms. As William Craft played with “the merger of bodies and texts,” precisely so does Hopkins. I will briefly enumerate some of the more conspicuous examples. At the beginning of the novel, a letter from Ellis Enson alerts St. Clair of his marriage and the birth of his child; Walker recognizes his connection to Hagar. His bill of sale reassigns Hagar’s and her daughter’s race and legal status. “A large sum of money…papers, and his watch” (67) make a corpse appear to be that of Ellis Enson, although it is not. A lack of free papers consign Hagar and her daughter to St. Clair’s possession. Major Madison’s social cards circulate in Washington and establish his new identity. A forged will makes Benson and Madison receivers of the Bowen estate, rather than Hagar and Jewel. A note in Senator Bowen’s trunk, along with an heirloom locket, make Jewel black rather than white, and Hagar’s daughter rather than her stepdaughter. And in the penultimate image in the novel, a tombstone reveals to Sumner that Jewel has died.

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[30] For a discussion of the types of evidence used to make racial determinations in legal forums, see Ariela Gross' *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*.

I mention this lattermost instance because death is both the ultimate reassignment of identity (from existent to not), because its finality is so often deceptive in the novel, and because the particular image of the tombstone fits into a strange pattern of collapse between identifying object and identified subject that pervades *Hagar's Daughter*. While we are left with the ostensibly final death of Jewel at the end of the novel, it is worth pointing out that both she and her parents had supposedly died at the end of the antebellum section of the narrative, and that Hagar and Jewel are closely modeled on Clotel, Clotelle, and Isabella, the tragic mulattas (and their daughters) who alternatively do and do not die in various versions of William Wells Brown's novel—and who in either case are literarily resurrected for the next edition. Then, the image of the tombstone as "a fair, slender shaft of polished cream-white marble" (283) is a reiteration of Jewel's body, described in one scene, for instance, as "dazzling fair, with creamy roseate skin" (82) and in another as a "slender, white-robed figure" (116). This is not the only time when an identifying object is conflated with Jewel as subject. Earlier in the novel, as Sumner works at his desk in the Treasury, he picks up first, with mixed feelings, a "sheet of ivory paper" from Aurelia Madison, whose skin registers a corresponding hint of phenotypical blackness ("ivory"), and then with pleasure a "slim satiny envelope" from Jewel (101). In the subsequent scene when Aurelia meets with Jewel, the latter is wearing "a tea-gown that was a poem" (105). As pieces of writing and bodies blur into one another, Hopkins thematizes the slippage between socially identificatory markers and the private subjects they denote. She does so to show that value (in terms of race, social position, and status as heir) in the world of *Hagar's Daughter* does not derive from judgments of essential or innate qualities, but rather from identities that are encrusted upon the various actors in the plot by social and legal custom.

We see this occur with the various female characters of contested racial and social status: Hagar, Jewel, and Aurelia Madison, who are imbued with valuable identities due to their association with objects. The most ready example of such objectification is the naming of Jewel and Aurelia—or "golden"—that associates those two women with precious natural resources.

Elsewhere, Ellis sees Hagar as a "gem he had won" and characterizes the opulence of Enson Hall as "a fitting *setting*" (48, emphasis mine) for so lovely an object. When we first see Jewel in the post-bellum section of the novel, she is "a picture…nestled in luxurious ease among the costly robes, wrapped in rich furs, from which her delicate face shone out like a star upon the curious throng" (76). At a ball, Jewel in "pearls" is "the bright star of fortune to the gilded Washington youth" (112), while Aurelia attracts admiring attention in a "scarlet and gold" number complimented by "diamonds" and "precious stones" (115). Later, Jewel's "great grey eyes [glow] like diamonds" and her features are described as "delicately chiseled," suggesting the work of the artful hand of a jeweler (193). There are numerous such descriptions in the novel, but these should suffice to make my point. One obvious takeaway from this pattern is that Hopkins seems interested in more than just racial objectification; she illustrates as well how gender is created as a valuable commodity. The very objects that construct the personalities of Estelle, Jewel, and Aurelia also rob them of individuality, as Estelle and Aurelia's *jewels*, or Jewel's *star* ("Estelle") of a face attest. While clothes, jewelry, and other such markers ostensibly serve as signs of identity, they are interchangeable in an economy of gendered and racialized value that has no concern for any intrinsic or unique qualities of any of these women.

Hopkins explicitly dramatizes how social signifiers make and remake the received identities of her characters. Early in the post-bellum section of the novel, Jewel finds a package "in white paper," produced from Senator Bowen's luxurious cloak, which contains "a pearl necklace of wonderful beauty and value" for herself and a "diamond star" for Estelle (88). The details of this seemingly incidental scene become meaningful when it is reiterated with a difference toward the end of the novel. The second time, rather than from Bowen's costly cloak, a sign of his current wealth, it is from the "shabby receptacle" of a "little hair trunk" (275), a sign of his previous penury, that a package is produced. This one is “a brown parcel, tied with coarse string” whose “kinks and curls” Estelle smoothes out after carefully untying it. Within are Jewel’s baby clothes, an heirloom locket, and a scrap from a memorandum book, which taken together establish Jewel as Hagar’s biological daughter and hence a black former slave. The wrappers that contain these objects indicate the identities they will establish, the former containing the signifiers of whiteness and the latter the evidence of blackness as a matrilineal heirloom passed down by hypodescent. While the “brown parcel” with its “kinks and curls” does not reshape Jewel’s body to resemble it physically, its contents can rewrite her racial status precisely because it is not an intrinsic quality, but one constructed through signifying objects that range from written documents (here, a memo from Bowen rather than the bill of sale with which Walker established Hagar’s blackness earlier in the novel) to the pearls that had marked her body as wealthy, privileged, and white. Those pearls provide another link between these two scenes, for Bowen’s note reveals that he had pulled Jewel out of the Potomac while gathering oysters. Whether or not he chose the name “Jewel” rather than “Pearl” because the latter was already claimed by another prominent American novel of the family must remain a question unanswered in this chapter.

As I indicated before, of all the identifying objects that construct personality in *Hagar’s Daughter*, writings, including that special kind of writing called money, are the most potent. This fact is especially relevant in light of the fact that the motive force behind the main conspiracy in the novel is Zenas Bowen’s ten million dollar fortune. There is also a vaster phantom of money looming behind the plot in the presence of the Treasury Department, which controlled absolutely the greenback dollars that were circulated during and after the Civil War. This money, which defines the character (often false), social position, and prospects of the novel’s cast, is almost never seen as physically present paper bills, but instead appears via proxy writings that fall somewhere between "just" money and "just" writing, including the IOU (St. Clair writes one for $7000 to enlist Walker's help in exposing Hagar), the check, and the will. Writings of this sort add yet another layer of uncertainty to the cash whose backing was already protested as too precarious by those who advocated for a specie standard. As a result, the novel presents a world where writing that resembles money (that itself has no essential worth) becomes the ultimate arbiter of identity and value, despite its own highly ambiguous character. The most prominent example is the false will that Madison and Benson pass off so they may gain control of the Bowen estate and bilk Estelle and Jewel out of their rightful millions. Pursuing a flaw in that document, the detective Henson ultimately exposes different personal identities of all the characters involved in the drama. As chief of the Secret Service, it is Henson's job to pursue financial fraud, especially counterfeit currency; the false will falls directly into his line of work. The will delegates not only money, but also the personal identities that are implicated with and at least partially constructed through that money. Following the money, it seems, turns up all sorts of unexpected results as the reader realizes how tightly interwoven the fictions of money are with other fictions of identity.

Eugenia DeLamotte emphasizes the significance of the detective plot in *Hagar's Daughter*, which is led by Chief Henson and Venus Johnson, daughter of Marthy and personal attendant to Jewel Bowen. Henson is described as "a legal machine" to whom "tangible evidence was the only convincing argument" (223), and so he fixates on the will that Madison and Benson claim that Bowen drew up in New York just before suffering a mortal stroke, hoping to find a "flaw" (201, 222). He is convinced that "if he could obtain the slightest clue, he could unravel the whole plot without difficulty." This detective plot merits a few observations. First, it is this slavish devotion to tangible evidence that makes Henson such a successful detective, both in his Secret Service capacities and his role unraveling in the Bowen plot. The economies of *Hagar's Daughter*—monetary, racial, social—are all surface, as I have shown. Since neither money's value, racial identity, or social position are determined by inner or essential qualities, to scrutinize the surface is to sleuth these characteristics effectively. And yet, this very fact also means that Henson cannot transcend this system so far as to recognize and critique its flaws, a point that I will return to later in the chapter. Second, "tangible evidence" is a precarious category in the novel. Cuthbert Sumner is wrongly held for the murder of the Treasury stenographer Elise Bradford, and to his misfortune, the "evidence was circumstantial, but damaging in the extreme" against him (191). The question, then, is what constitutes the difference between tangible and circumstantial evidence? As we have previously seen, what appears to be one type of evidence can turn out to be another entirely. For instance, ancestry seems to be established biologically, and therefore be founded upon science, but in fact it is established through writing, particularly documents of commerce and the law. And third, by showing the enormous power of writings to determine identity, and by offering the flawed document as the proper subject for detective work, Hopkins uses the detective story to perform a metatextual function: to invite the reader to scrutinize *Hagar's Daughter* as just such a flawed document to see what might be revealed about the characters in its plot, and about how it understands the concepts of character or identity and their value.

August Rorhbach rightly points out that "Hopkins' serial fiction compels readers to account for details," as "[r]eaders must read closely or be lost hopelessly in the plot" (483). I wholeheartedly agree and believe that if anything scholarly readers, either from decorum or other motivations, have not read closely enough. What I mean by this is that critics have been reluctant to point out the flaws that proliferate in *Hagar's Daughter*. These come in numerous forms. Most obviously, there are the plot holes to which the novel explicitly calls attention, such as the unexplained identity of the corpse that is presented as Ellis at the beginning of the novel, and the hole that Isaac Johnson digs through the wall of St. Clair's cell at the end ("How Isaac had managed to cut his way through the solid masonry always remained a mystery to the authorities" (273) and to readers of the novel as well). Then there are inconsistencies in the plot. The narrator tells us that St. Clair returns for his father's funeral early in the novel, but later Henny Sargeant asserts that a visit from St. Clair caused the fatal burst blood vessel that led to the elder Enson's death. Henny supposedly recognizes General Benson as St. Clair when she intercedes for her daughter Marthy in trying to collect Isaac Johnson's wages and pay off their mortgage, but she has already been working under Benson in the Treasury for years. The faces of Estelle and Jewel Bowen are recognized when they enter the courtroom for Sumner's trial, but at the end of the trial when Estelle reveals that she is really Hagar, she tears a heavy veil away from her face. Even more strangely, characters are described in incompatible terms at different points in the novel. The slave trader Walker, in language taken directly from William Wells Brown, is "a repulsive-looking person, tall, lean and lank, with high cheek-bones and a face pitted with the small-pox, gray eyes, with red eyebrows and sandy whiskers" (8). But later, as Major Madison, he is "short, stout, more than fifty, with gray hair and ferret-like eyes, close-set, and a greenish-gray of particular ugliness" (95). Ellis Enson is "extremely good-looking" (a playful allusion to his later occupation as detective?) "slight, elegant, with wavy dark hair, and an air of distinction" (31), but as Chief Henson he is of "middle height, and rather broad, but not fleshy. His thick iron-gray hair covered his head fully and curled in masses over a broad forehead" (187). How could the "tall, lean and lank" Walker become "short, stout" Madison? And how could "slight"

Ellis Enson become "broad" twice-over, especially since he is explicitly said not to be fleshy, having gained his breadth through fat?

One answer to these questions and others raised by my above observations would be that Hopkins, writing her novel while editing a magazine at which she still did the majority of the office work (all for twelve dollars a week!), was simply stretched too thin and did less-than-perfect editorial duties when working with her own manuscript. But I'm not completely convinced by that explanation. As I have shown at some length, one of the major themes of *Hagar's Daughter* is the significance and unreliability of writings that both name and constitute identities. It is a novel about a conspiracy (or a *plot*, if you will) that relies upon just such suspect and flawed writings to achieve its ends, and it is a novel of detection in which even Hagar, who is not one of the central detectives, finds that "the desire to know pursued her so persistently that she was amazed" (275). In this fashion, the novel encourages a conspiratorial epistemology that invites close scrutiny for flaws, and then delivers them, implicating *Hagar's Daughter* in a series of flawed texts that arbitrate value and identity through imperfect signification. The fact that we cannot distinguish intentional flaws from unintended ones resulting from editorial inattention only serves to support my point. Indeed, is an intentional flaw a "legitimate" one or is an unintentional flaw an "authentic" one? Reading the novel in light of this dilemma reveals some unexpected results.

One such result is that in a novel about inheritance, upon close examination it becomes exceedingly difficult to determine who is legally an heir. This fact is underscored by the lack of well-established parentage. Due to the laws of slavery, Hagar, Jewel, Henny and Marthy Sergeant, and Isaac Johnson are all illegitimate, and St. Clair has a child out of wedlock with Elise Bradford. Senator Bowen's origins are completely obscure, as he is said to have "begun life as a mate on a Mississippi steamboat" (80), and Walker's birth also goes unmentioned. Aurelia's mother is unknown both to her and the reader, and it is only on Walker's (highly unreliable) word that we know him as her father. Even St. Clair's parentage is ambiguous. Henny recounts a superstitious tale about his birth, in which "ole Missee Enson" views a thunderstorm in which "de debbil jes' showed he face to her an' grinned" (63). At the same time, the plantation overseer is supposed to have witnessed the same vision and fled the plantation as a result. But the story is complicated by the presence of "Unc' Ned," a conjure man whom the overseer was to have whipped for invoking his master's displeasure. The story suggests that it is not a vision of the devil that scares the overseer from the plantation, but Uncle Ned's threat to reveal the overseer's identity as St. Clair's father if he raises a hand against him. This fact helps clarify the way that *Hagar's Daughter* criticizes legal injustices. If St. Clair is not a legitimate heir to the Enson estate, then it is not the law *as written* that unjustly delegates him receiver of that fortune. Instead, the law *as enforced* becomes a tool that anyone with plausible-enough fictions of identity can wield to appropriate wealth, power, and social status.

Perhaps the most surprising result of a conspiratorial reading of the novel that pays close attention to questionable or flawed pieces of writing is that Hagar may not be of African descent at all. There are few guarantees that the bill of sale Walker produces to prove his ownership of Hagar is legitimate, especially considering the forged will he produces later in the plot. It's noteworthy that he "recognizes" Hagar after hearing only a few details about her from St. Clair by way of Ellis' letter. Indeed, in the post-bellum section of the novel, he appears to go months without recognizing Hagar *in the flesh* despite frequent encounters. I think this discrepancy is deliberate. It calls attention to the tenuous nature of the original connection between Walker and

Hagar, and to the ways that writing mediates the reader's understanding of that connection both within the diegetic world of the novel and in the writing of the novel itself.

Hopkins plays upon the ambivalent status of Ellis Enson (who, like Cuthbert Sumner and Zenas Bowen, cannot be considered a protagonist due to his complicity in slavery and white supremacy) to introduce Hagar's legal status. Having heard that Isaac has run away from the master who won him in the riverboat gambling scene, Ellis insists that the man be repaid, as "Enson Hall is no party to fraudulent dealings" (52). However well-intended, this remark also establishes that while Ellis may be an honest participant within the system of slavery, he does not question whether it may be fraudulent in itself. Walker uses the moment to make a claim on his own stolen property—Hagar. He explains to Ellis that some years ago in St. Louis, the Sargeants "took a female child from me to bring up—*a nigger*—and they passed her off on the commoonity here as their own, and you have *married* her" (53). He furnishes a bill of sale as proof, leading to the following exchange:

> "Good God!" exclaimed Ellis as he fell back against the wainscoting, "then this paper, if it means anything, must mean my wife!"
>
> "I can't help who it means or what it means," replied Walker, "this yer's the bill of sale, an' there's an officer outside there in the cart to git me my nigger."
>
> "This paper proves nothing. You'll take no property from this house without proper authority," replied Ellis with ominous calm. (53)

One of the ironies of this exchange is that it is just the sort of unquestioning adherence to the logic of slavery that Ellis has exhibited in his decrial of St. Clair's gambit with Isaac that makes the paper meaningful, for "if it means anything," it should only do so under the laws of slavery. Read in 1901, the paper would not be meaningful in assigning Hagar slave status. However, it would still be meaningful in establishing the racial status of her descendants. The contradiction exposed here is how a document that becomes explicitly illegal after emancipation, when slavery is outlawed, still serves as legal evidence in determining questions of identity. But the paper obviously *is* meaningful to Ellis in establishing Hagar as a slave; even as he protests that it "proves nothing," he unconsciously shifts from assigning her status as subject ("my wife") in his first remarks, to object ("property") in his second.[31] He does so because, like Walker, he assumes the authority of the bill of sale. This document does, of course, have an intrinsic meaning that is arbitrated by antebellum slave laws. All Ellis can do is have it looked over by a lawyer, who pronounces it genuine. Hopkins presents the reader with another irony here in having Ellis appealing to an expert on slave law—"one of the ablest men of the Maryland bar" (55)—to seek justice for his enslaved wife.

The reader is left to decide if this evidence is convincing. At least one astute character, Aunt Henny, rejects the evidence and suggests Walker has practiced a form of conjuring. (Whether the creation of value through legitimate means such as printing money, or illegitimate ones such as forging, either or both constitute some kind of conjuring, is another question. The same goes for the act of literary creation.) There are good grounds for assuming her skeptical position. After all, Walker will forge Senator Bowen's will later in the novel, so the bill of sale in itself seems scant proof. Then, there is an ambiguous exchange between Walker and St. Clair. When the latter asks, "Is this thing true?" the former responds: "True as gospel. The only man who could prove the girl's birth is the one I took her from, and he's dead" (55). Walker's utter lack of piety is established early on during an exchange with a Reverend Pinchen at the Charleston slave market, making an ironic reading of his appeal to gospel truth more convincing than a sincere one. It is also unclear why, were the bill of sale genuine, he should emphasize the fact that his account of her origins can't be contradicted because of a dearth of living witnesses. In short, Walker's affirmation of the truth of his claim makes the reader *less* convinced of its veracity. The other evidence comes from a passage that articulates Hagar's thoughts via free indirect discourse:

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[31] Of course, Ellis already sees Hagar as his property to some degree as he objectifies her as his wife—as his description of her as a "gem" shows. But there is an unmistakable category shift revealed in these two sentences as her racial status comes into play and is almost instantaneously rewritten in Ellis' imagination.

> Vaguely, as in a dream, she recalled her stay in Rose Valley and the terror of her childish heart caused by the rough slave-trader. Could it be true, or was it but a hideous nightmare from which she would soon awake? Her mother a slave! She wondered the very thought did not strike her dead. (57)

Read closely, this passage again seems to dispel conviction rather than to establish it. There is no doubt that Hagar knew Walker in her earliest youth, but there is also no proof that his claims are true. It is only in her own desperate and speculative imaginings that Hagar *considers* the possibility that her mother may have been a slave. Her memories, after all, have no more specificity or substance than "a dream" or "a hideous nightmare," and so there is little evidence to support Walker's particular narrative. For all the reader knows, Hagar may be a Salome Mueller, fraudulently sold into slavery despite being legally both free and white. Taken together, neither Walker's assertion nor Hagar's memory substantiates her legal status as slave. And so the reader of *Hagar's Daughter*, like Ellis Enson, must base any determination of Hagar's race largely upon the evidence of the potentially fraudulent bill of sale.[32]

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[32] In the perfunctory way in which her race is reassigned from white to black, Hagar resembles Grace Montfort in Hopkins' previous novel, *Contending Forces*. Laura H. Korobkin points out that historically speaking, it should not have been so easy to reassign Montfort's race. She explains that "changing the racial status of an apparently white plantation mistress could not have been accomplished without notice and an adversarial hearing with testimony from both sides" (6-7), and argues that Hopkins deliberately presents an inaccurate representation of the proceedings to highlight the arbitrary nature of the color line in the "corrupt, violent slave economy" (4). Jeffery Clymer also notes the unusual ease with which Hagar's identity is rewritten and speculates that Hopkins intends to show that "the law's categories…are more than just objective legal states" (143).

Ultimately, one of the most crucial "flaws" of *Hagar's Daughter* is the novel's failure to establish a secure ground upon which the reader can determine Hagar's race. It is for this reason, rather than the influence of colorism, I think, that Hopkins chose to write a novel focusing on such phenotypically white characters who are labeled "black." Although failing to articulate a positive construction of black identity, the novel brilliantly undermines racial essentialism. And once we are forced to admit that value is fixed and arbitrated solely by social contract and legal fictions in the novel, we can begin to see the criticism of this circumstance more clearly. Because certainly the way gendered and racial identities are constructed and valued in *Hagar's Daughter* proves equally violent, coercive, and unjust in the post-bellum section of the novel as it does in those scenes set before the Civil War. On the one hand, it is in part her own essentialist thinking that drives Hagar to attempt suicide and infanticide, and later prevents her from achieving her goals of high social standing and positive political change in Washington. On the other hand, one of the tragedies of the novel lies in the way its servant-class black characters, especially Isaac, Henny, and Marthy, internalize the value judgments of their white supremacist masters, and later employers. Even the well-intentioned white characters such as Ellis Enson and Cuthbert Sumner are not merely marked as flawed by their racial prejudices; those prejudices prevent them from solving the mysteries of *Hagar's Daughter* in any satisfying manner.

Hagar's essentialist thinking becomes apparent from the first scene in which the reader sees her. She is depicted washing the Sergeant family's "heirlooms of colonial china and silver," and to her, these "treasures" deserve to be as carefully tended to as "the royal jewels of Victoria." The heirloom china and silver invokes an imaginative connection to the history of the Sargeant family, and the narrator relates that as Hagar cleaned them she "would dream of life before the Revolution, and in these dreams participate in the joys of the colonial dames" (33).

Ellis first sees Hagar as she cleans these treasures, marking one instance among many where a woman's valuable identity is constructed through her association with precious objects. Even more significantly, the scene illustrates Hagar's own understanding of the relationship between commodities and identity. The heirloom silver connecting her with the experiences of her supposed ancestors in colonial America is a mirror image of the bill of sale that connects her in her mind with the "naked black savages of the horrible African jungles." In both cases, Hagar unconsciously moves from reading the significance of an identificatory object to internalizing an essential judgment of her own self-worth through the fiction that biological ancestry functions as an objective determinant of identity. Indeed, it seems that the despair that drives her to jump from the Long Bridge is at least as much motivated by her own self-loathing caused by the race prejudice inculcated by her upbringing as it is by the fear of enslavement. And furthermore, the connection between silver and essential value will reappear in Hagar's thinking after the war, specifically when she recognizes Zenas Bowen's "*sterling* worth in business and morals" and insists "upon his entering the arena of politics" (81, emphasis mine). It may seem a small detail that Hagar chooses this adjective (although it is used identically on p. 199), but it is an evocative one. For of course, the *meaning* of silver in terms of value changed dramatically between 1860 and 1880. In 1860 silver bullion could be used to back currency, as the country operated on a bimetallist system. The metal was controversially demonetized by the Coinage Act of 1873 due to complicated circumstances related to international demand and discoveries of large silver mines in the West. That Act was later regarded as one of the causes of the Panic of 1873, which led to the largest and most sustained period of economic recession in the United States prior to the Great Depression.

There are a couple of important takeaways from this historical context. First, it dramatizes the inherent flaw in essentialist thinking about money: gold and silver only have inherent or “natural” value when people agree that they do, and that agreement results from economic laws, not natural ones. Silver lost value as a backer of currency in 1873 and regained it in 1878, both times due to legislation and economic expediency rather than any discoveries about its natural properties. Then, the economic recession that the demonetization of silver may have in part exacerbated proved disastrous for African Americans. Specifically, one of the victims of the Panic of ’73 was the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company, commonly referred to as the Freedman’s Bank. The ramifications of monetary policy, after all, are not only ideological, but often more pressingly they have large material consequences for participants in the economy such policy regulates.

In *Hagar’s Daughter*, Henny Sargeant has learned this lesson well and developed a skepticism toward investment and putting money into other, especially white, hands. When Isaac Johnson proposes to leave his wages with General Benson to invest in the Arrow-Head Mines, Henny responds: “I don’ trus’ no’ white man. ’Member all the money went up in the Freedman’s bank, don’ yer?” (177). Her fund of racial trust dries up simultaneously with the actual funds of freedmen lost in the failure of the Freedman’s Bank. Henny’s skepticism adds a second valence of meaning to the discussion when she later tells the story of how she guarded a huge sum of money that she came across during her janitorial duties at the Treasury. The story comes up during her testimony at the trial of Cuthbert Sumner, unjustly accused of murdering Elise Bradford, that serves as the novel’s climax. Henny recalls that upon discovering “a big pile o’ greenbacks—mus’ a bin ’bout a million dollars,” she “jes’ froze to ’em all night” because, as she explains to the jury, “money’s a mighty onsartin’ article, chillum” (253). The direct significance of her description of money as “onsartin” is clearly that it attracts thieves, and hence must be guarded, and in this sense the scene evokes the conspirators Benson and Madison chasing after the Bowen fortune. But in light of Henny’s earlier comments about the Freedman’s Bank, the “onsartinty” of money becomes more radical. Henny indirectly raises the question of what it means to be certain of having money in one’s possession. Money in one’s bank account can be wiped out by an economic crisis. Money in the hand can be forged, or in the case of pre-greenback paper currency, made defunct by legislative decree.[33] Even specie, that guarantor of value according to monetary essentialists, can lose its value, as did silver in 1873. Henny’s comments point to the way the novel depicts value as a quality that is always guaranteed relationally, and the grounds upon which those relationships are founded seem to be forever receding.

Henny is “rewarded” for her loyalty in guarding the greenbacks with a lifetime appointment to her janitorial duties at the Treasury and a salary of forty dollars per month.[34] One of the grimmer ironies of *Hagar’s Daughter* is that St. Clair Enson’s reward for conspiring to assassinate Lincoln is a high position in the Treasury, while Henny’s loyalty to a government that had enslaved her guarantees her continuing servitude. That she accepts and is grateful for this appointment is unsurprising, in that it allows her to send her grandson Oliver to school and to achieve financial stability despite the unreliability of her son-in-law, Isaac Johnson. But her acceptance, like Isaac’s continued acceptance of his role as body servant to St. Clair, even when his master’s interests are in conflict with those of Isaac’s own family, not to mention his race, also exemplifies the way that socially imposed value judgments are internalized in the novel. Kristina Brooks has shown how the “category of race *encompasses* difference” in *Hagar’s*

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[33] Or in the case of Confederate currency, money was made worthless by military defeat.

[34] Henny’s reward is perhaps meant to echo the “forty acres and a mule” hoped for by agrarian freedmen after the Civil War.

Daughter in that Hopkins' "African American characters are represented both as subjects and—in the case of the mammy, buck, and wench—as objects" (119). She speculates that the minstrelsy of these depictions may actually have appealed to black audiences at the time of publication. I also think the objectification of Henny, Isaac, and Marthy has further significance, in that these characters don't develop as personalities after slavery because they don't see themselves as having any value beyond their roles under slavery. When Marthy's daughter Venus wonders if Henny has spent the night at the Treasury due to fear of walking home alone late at night, Marthy responds: "Wha'd she be 'fraid of a po' black 'ooman with nuthin' to steal? 'Tain't a soul gwine tech her. She ain't young an' purty makin' a 'ticemen' fer people; men isn't chasin 'roun' street corners in Wash'nt'n after ugly ol' 'oomen's" (173). For Marthy, to be black, poor, and old is to be worthless: Henny can safely traverse the streets at night because there is nothing of value that can be got out of her. Of course, one could argue that Marthy expresses a healthy lack of concern for the opinion of others, and that one can feel self-worth in spite of a lack of corresponding social, economic, legal, or political value. But Henny makes clear later on that this is not the case, when she sadly responds to the news that Jewel Bowen is black by calling her "nuthin' but common nigger trash" (281). Henny's assessment of black worthlessness demonstrates that while racial characteristics (like the value of money) are not inherent, what we think of as private or internal identities, including racial and gendered ones, are shaped by socially constructed values of identity forced upon them.[35]

The potential exception to this process is Venus Johnson, daughter of Marthy and Isaac, who seems comfortable with her name (goddess of love and beauty) and who takes an active role in solving the mystery that exposes the conspirators Benson and Madison and returns the Enson estate to Ellis, Hagar, and Jewel. Venus receives less attention in the novel than Jewel, whom she serves as maid, as well as the other light-skinned female characters. And indeed, along with her brother Oliver, who has virtually no role in the novel but is said to be studying to become a teacher, this generation of African American characters, born after slavery and with no interest in passing as white, provides one of the scant grounds for optimism in *Hagar's Daughter*. But I question the logic that brands her hero of the text.[36] While she seems not to share the essentialist way of thinking that so harms Hagar, Henny, and the other black domestic characters, she still serves only a subsidiary role as an agent of Chief Henson, and his investigation ends on a note far from triumphant. I suggested earlier that Henson's obsession with tangible evidence makes him a successful detective but at the same time one incapable of seeing beyond that evidence. The first and best example of this point lies in the way that, as a slaveholder, he could have Hagar's bill of sale examined for flaws, but he could not see the flaws in a system of justice in which such a document could establish a person as property. The moment when Ellis Enson "mechanically" glances at Hagar's bill of sale (52) anticipates his development into a "man who had become a legal machine" in his capacity as head of the Secret Service (223). As a sort of human counterfeit detector, he is said to have "saved the government millions of dollars" (258), but his job is merely to separate legal currency from counterfeit, not to question the government that legitimates those greenback dollars by legislative decree. Indeed, the values of that government, including the way it imagines value—especially human value—are one of the main targets of criticism in *Hagar's Daughter*. As a mechanical tool of that government, Henson separates real currency from counterfeit, legal documents from forgeries, white from black, with unreflecting efficiency. It is no coincidence that both Enson brothers end up working for the same branch of the government; just as under slavery they appeared to be the "good" and "bad" master,[37] and hence colluded in upholding the system of slavery, later as agents of the federal government, whatever their perceived differences, they are two sides of the same coin.

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[35] This dramatization of the pernicious effects of double-consciousness follows a number of other examples in late-nineteenth-century American literature. For example, Brook Thomas points out the way that Tom in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* internalizes black inferiority once his "true" race is revealed (*Realism* 206), but he still sells his mother into slavery to pay off debts.

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[36] See, for example, Eugenia DeLamotte's "'Collusions of the Mystery': Ideology and the Gothic in *Hagar's Daughter*."

If my equation of Ellis and St. Clair seems like yet another demystifying move, that may be fitting as regards the understanding of *Hagar's Daughter* that this investigation of money, value, and writing suggests. It is a flawed document about the power of flawed documents, a partially plagiarized piece of literary currency, a novel of race passing in which the passer's "hidden" race may itself be the product of a passed note: a potentially forged bill of sale. Ultimately, Hopkins suggests that none of the guarantors of value—money, legal documents, jewelry, clothing, skin—offer that quality in essence. In *Hagar's Daughter*, all are imbued with value through social contract, legal decree, or confidence. The essentially self-reflexive nature of the novel, with its attack on both monetary and racial essentialism, makes it difficult to compare to the other magazine novels, especially *Of One Blood*, and to understand it thus is to see it as an interesting text in its own regard, rather than a failed precursor of the later texts, as some critics have labeled it.[38] The mutually constructive qualities of race, money, and writing that can be seen in the work of William Wells Brown—the stories of Shinplasters and "blacking up" slaves for the market, for example, authenticate the prefatory narrative to *Clotel* and lend credence to his depiction of Pompey—appear in unstable and surprising formations throughout *Hagar's Daughter*. Zenas Bowen is more right than he knows when he points out "how money can change the complexion of things" (87). Possessed of "the hair and skin of an Indian" with eyes that are "shrewd and steely gray" (80), and several times described as "sallow," Bowen, as at least one critic has noticed, appears more racially ambiguous than any of the supposed mulatta characters in the novel.[39] That Bowen can overcome his obscure origins and ambiguous features to become a powerful senator suggests that money can indeed change the "complexion" of a character. And yet, this formation by which material wealth creates whiteness is not so stable as it may appear. Bowen's double in the novel, Major Madison aka Walker, also finds his complexion changed as more and more money circulates through his gambling parlor and fraudulent Arrow-Head Mines. Noticing the cash grab of this parvenu Major, the more established society of Washington declares him "*shady*."

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[37] Hopkins' narrator describes the Enson estate as follows: "It was a happy household; the hurry and rush of warlike preparations had not reached its members, and the sting of slavery, with its demoralizing brutality, was unknown on these plantations so recently joined. Happiness was everywhere, from the master in his carriage to the slave singing in the fields at his humble task" (44). It is one of the oddest passages in the novel, and I can't help but read it as deeply ironic; for example, its citation of "the slave singing in the field" as proof of happiness belies the fact that Hopkins herself was an attentive reader of Frederick Douglass. In his 1845 *Narrative*, he famously asserts his astonishment that people in the North "could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrow of his heart" (24). This example is one among many in which the narrative voice of *Hagar's Daughter* colludes with the deceptions practiced by the actors in its story. Another more characteristic example can be seen in the way passing characters are always called by their assumed names. This deceptive narrative voice constitutes yet another of the deliberate "flaws" I have enumerated in this chapter.

[38] See especially Rohrbach.

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Pauline Hopkins works in *Hagar's Daughter* to explode the notion that race is an essential quality that can be proved with certainty through objective determinants such as biology. The flip side of this strategy is that the novel does not lend anything toward a positive construction of racial character or even definite understanding of what constitutes race as a category of identification. As such, it might seem difficult to put into conversation with the writings of Sutton Griggs, who was labeled by W. J. Moses as a practitioner of "literary Garveyism." And yet, that label derives from a somewhat naïve reading of Griggs' fiction. True, his first novel *Imperium in Imperio* features a secret society whose leader advocates a violent separation from the United States and the formation of an independent black nation in Texas. In the novel to be considered here, *The Hindered Hand*, a character proposes the violent takeover of the statehouse of a Southern capitol, likening himself to John Brown, whose blood was said to write the exclamation point that gave force to the rhetoric of more peaceful abolitionists. But it is not right to ascribe these positions to Griggs himself. Both novels feature a pair of black protagonists, one conservative and one radical: Belton Piedmont and Bernard Belgrave, and Ensal Ellwood and Earl Bluefield, respectively. In each plot, neither acts as a foil to the other, but rather their dual roles allow a dialogue covering a range of views about how to respond to Jim Crow and white supremacy. Griggs deliberately effaces any clear connection that might align him with these characters; in *Imperium in Imperio*, he appears in the text as an editor of the manuscript delivered by Imperium member Berl Trout, who has been executed for betraying the organization. This narrative conceit allows him several layers of remove from the statements of both Piedmont and Belgrave, as Griggs becomes, not the recorder of their speech, but merely a third-party editor of an already-completed manuscript.

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[39] Lois Brown.

This move, however, should alert the reader to a common literary forbear of both Griggs and Hopkins. In its play with and problematization of the line between factual and fictional discourse, its positioning of Griggs' fantastic narrative as an historical document of fact, even as that play enriches the bold political goals of the novel, *Imperium in Imperio* carries on in the tradition of William Wells Brown as described earlier in this chapter. And there are many more connections between the work of Hopkins and Griggs than this one. Both writers were responsible for groundbreaking work in African American publishing, Hopkins with the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company and Griggs with the Orion Press. Both were outspoken political novelists who wrote in untempered opposition against the treatment of African Americans during Jim Crow. And both believed that the formulas of popular fiction offered the best means of attracting, and even creating, a largely African American reading public which would be edified by those fictions and motivated to political participation in redressing social wrongs. Like Hopkins, Griggs frequently turned to the conventions and formulas of melodrama, detective fiction, romance, and the gothic in his sensational narratives of political intrigue, secret histories, violence, and revolt.

There is also the matter of strong similarities in plot between *Hagar's Daughter* and *The Hindered Hand*. The latter is even more episodic than Hopkins' serialized novel, and the overarching plot structure (to such a degree as it can be said to have one) resembles hers especially in the way it is held together by secret genealogical connections and defensive responses to the violent coercion of white supremacy. Several episodes go further in their resemblance. The climactic trial of *Hagar's Daughter* is rewritten more bluntly, and perhaps also more logically, as a bigamy trial hinging upon the racial status of the defendant. And the early set-piece of the Long Bridge scene is rewritten as a cold-blooded lynching of a young African American boy. This scene also enmeshes *The Hindered Hand* in the long series of rewritings of Clotel's leap into the Potomac in William Wells Brown's 1853 novel. That connection seems unsurprising, given the link between Griggs and Brown that I have already pointed out. It is not only in *Imperium in Imperio* that Griggs deploys narratological methods resembling those of Brown. In the period in which he actively wrote both novels and nonfictional political tracts about the problem of the color line (1899-1908), Griggs frequently blurred the line between factual and fictive discourse and deliberately problematized the question of narrative authenticity, his own status as witness or authority, and truth. Generally, he did not hesitate to incorporate political tracts within his novels—indeed, *The Hindered Hand* reads like a series of such tracts with just enough narrative incident to hold them together in the form of a fictional novel. But Griggs not only borrowed from his nonfiction to enrich the political arguments of his novels, he also borrowed from his novels to lend emotional force to his nonfiction. To take one prominent example which I will elaborate on later in the chapter, in his 1907 tract "The One Great Question," Griggs elicits pathos by recounting how he witnessed the death of a young boy at the hands of a lynch mob. The boy, Henry, is a character in *The Hindered Hand*, and Griggs' "account" in his nonfiction pamphlet is a quotation from that novel.

It may seem ironic that I am writing about a literary genealogy of texts that themselves thematize the complexity, even impossibility, of attempting to trace genealogies in any authoritative manner. Nevertheless, this repeated theme does highlight a clear connection between these novels. In *Clotel*, the horrors of slavery that drive the protagonist to her death are underwritten by laws endorsed by her ancestor, Thomas Jefferson, a supposed proponent of life and liberty. Brown ironically twins biological and ideological genealogies to expose the violent contradictions that exist between them. I have argued at some length that the family histories of *Hagar's Daughter* show the impossibility of genealogy as an essential determinant of character. In *The Hindered Hand*, Griggs also traces highly contorted family histories to make a point about the historical and cultural inheritance that is the law of Jim Crow. The family history of the Seabrights strongly resembles that of the Ensons in Hopkins' novel, and finally comes to light in a trial scene at the end of that novel. But by having the Seabright's disavowed daughter, Tiara Merlow, reveal that an ancestor was one of the Founding Fathers, Griggs also ties this scene directly to *Clotel(le)*. So even as these novels either deny the power of genealogy or dramatize its perils, the concept also links them inextricably in their own literary lineage.

There is also a sense in which both the worldview and the rhetorical strategies of Hopkins and Griggs link them to Brown. I mentioned earlier that Hopkins thought of herself as a sort of new abolitionist, fighting the spirit of slavery that had once again arisen in the South under the name of Jim Crow. It is easy to establish her personal connection with Brown as well as her admiration for black abolitionists such as him and Frederick Douglass, both of whom she wrote about in the *Colored American Magazine*. Establishing such a connection between the black abolitionists and Griggs is more difficult. The writer he mentions most frequently, as has been noted by critics such as Hanna Wallinger and Susan Gillman, is his contemporary and antagonist, Thomas Dixon, Jr. When citing a writer on the race question that he admires, Harriet Beecher Stowe comes up frequently, along with Albion Tourgée and William Lloyd Garrison. While Griggs and his fictional characters often discuss Douglass, more of that energy is directed toward criticism of his interracial marriage to Helen Pitts than toward praise of his accomplishments as writer, orator, and race leader. Of William Wells Brown he makes no mention, and the same is true of Pauline Hopkins. These omissions seem curious considering the frequency with which Griggs cites other authors, especially in his nonfiction. And yet, his connections to these two authors, even if they are occult, deeply inform his work. Taking his novels and tracts together, Griggs resembles a new abolitionist more than Hopkins does. His nonfictional pamphlets borrow strategies from Weld and the Grimkés as well as Brown and Stowe, frequently citing horrors reported in Southern newspapers and using gothic spectacles of violence to denounce lynch law and Jim Crow. Furthermore, he specifically argues for the existence of a kind of psychic inheritance that drives mob violence in the South, suggesting that he regarded unspoken and even actively repressed genealogies to be more powerful, not less, than publicly acknowledged ones.

To begin a discussion about reading horrors in Sutton Griggs' novels one must address a question: What does he consider to be the stakes of reading? Griggs' answer is telling when contextualized against that of Booker T. Washington, to whom he seems to be responding quite explicitly in *The Hindered Hand* and his 1911 tract *Wisdom's Call*. Washington expressed an optimistic account of his own reading practices in his memoir *Up From Slavery*. "As to my reading," he writes, "the most time I get for solid reading is when I am on the cars. Newspapers are to me a constant source of delight and recreation. The only trouble is that I read too many of them. Fiction I care little for. Frequently I have to almost force myself to read a novel that is on every one's lips" (263). Washington may be truthfully reporting his natural inclinations as to his choice of reading materials, but the passage is also strategic: it reinforces his self-depiction as a no-nonsense man of business. The novel forces social relations—it is "on every one's lips"—and therefore presents a dangerous alternative to the ostensibly neutral, factual newspaper. Furthermore, the image of Washington consuming the news while riding on the cars also reinforces his depiction of himself as a figure of progress. The train literalizes the connections—business, philanthropic, political—that Washington alludes to in *Up From Slavery*, as he travels to raise funds for the Tuskegee Institute and sees it visited in turn by dignitaries such as President McKinley. He creates an image of his networking success via his mobility on trains, writing, "I enjoy a ride of a long distance on the cars, when I am permitted to ride where I can be comfortable" (*Up* 264). The criticism of the Jim Crow practice known as "separate but equal" registers as a tactfully expressed subtext in the latter phrase, alluding to the times that Washington was *not* allowed to ride comfortably without explicitly describing those experiences. But the picture that Washington draws is fundamentally a positive one.

This picture raises several questions, the first being: Which newspapers could Washington have been reading that would prove to be such a "source of delight and recreation" during the era of what Ida B. Wells characterized as the "Red Record" of lynching? Washington valued the ability of the newspaper to "bring all classes of people together," for according to his view (anticipating Benedict Anderson), "People who read the same newspaper are bound to feel neighborly, even though they are thousands of miles apart" (*Education* 86). His view suggests that novels are frivolous, but also dangerous in their suggestion of the social. Sutton Griggs likens reading a novel to visiting someone in his home. In contrast, for Washington newspapers are constructive in their cultivation of "neighborly" feelings. This distinction reminds one of Washington's most famous image, which with a similar sensitivity to the modes of interaction acceptable to Southern whites proclaimed 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 for mutual progress" (*Up* 221-2). The clear, seemingly reasonable distinctions drawn by Washington—newspapers rather than novels, neighbors rather than houseguests, co-workers rather than social peers—accord with the logic of some proponents of Jim Crow separate-but-equal policies. For example, the journalist Henry W. Grady rebutted George Washington Cable's plea for the freedmen's equity in *The Century Magazine* with the essay "In Plain Black and White." As its title suggests, Grady believed that "Clear views, clear statement, and clear understanding," along with "the common sense and courage of the American people," would lead to an amicable solution to race problems in the South (910). Both Washington and Grady share a logic that asserts that separation is possible once "pure" or "clear" distinctions are identified and enforced. What Washington's image of the hand conceals is the assumption at the basis of formulations such as Grady's: "the clear and unmistakable domination of the white race in the South" (917). Between such vociferous articulations of white supremacy and the pushback from African American advocates like Wells, it is hard to imagine Washington's reading material to be an unalloyed source of delight.

Tess Chakkalakal describes a very different point of view made apparent by a survey of the ubiquitous reading acts within Griggs' novels. His fictional works are dense with texts-within-text; in *The Hindered Hand*, notes, letters, political pamphlets, speeches and newspaper articles are all interpolated into the narrative. Again and again, Griggs' more conservative protagonists seek the written argument that will awaken the nation to the plight of Southern blacks and bring about change (while their radical counterparts seek to effect such change through violence). So the reader of the novels often finds herself reading about a character reading. In this sense, Griggs' strategy resembles that of Hopkins in *Hagar's Daughter* in that the text calls attention to itself as such and prompts the reader to examine her own reading practices. But Griggs was aware, as Chakkalakal shows, of the limitations and difficulties imposed upon his contemporary African American readers. Specifically, she argues that in response to the hostility felt in public spaces under Jim Crow, "African Americans retreated to private spaces, such as the home and church, where they could be safe from acts of racial violence. And it was in these enclosed spaces that African Americans might experience the pleasure of reading" (149-50). But a lack of leisure time or an appropriate space for reading limited the ability of many African Americans to engage with long and difficult texts such as political novels. Griggs was consistent in his own identification of the home with a space for reading, even while many of his other views about the nature and function of literature changed over the course of his career. In his pamphlet "The Hindering Hand," appended to the third edition of *The Hindered Hand* (and expanded from a shorter dialogue within earlier versions of the novel), he writes of the African American reader of Thomas Dixon, Jr.:

> Now that the repressionists were invading the realm of literature to ply their trade, he saw how that the Negro was to be attacked in the quiet of the AMERICAN HOME, the final arbiter of so many of earth's most momentous questions, and he trembled at the havoc vile misrepresentations would play before truth could get a hearing. (207)

Because the reading of novels is an activity appropriate to the home, and the home is the fundamental unit of American politics, per this view, the ability to read and discuss literature that approaches questions of race relations fairly is of vital significance to the nation (notice how Griggs aligns family and nation in the "AMERICAN HOME"). But bringing the home into questions of politics creates a complication. Griggs thought that literature had the power to improve race relations by allowing whites to see into the home life of blacks, and vice versa. Writing in *Wisdom's Call* that the "absence of social contact" necessitated that "the races…discover some other way of understanding each other better," he asks:

> Cannot literature become this bond of union? Cannot white men and women picture the inner life of the white South, and through these books give the Negroes a sympathy and knowledge of whites? Cannot Negroes be developed to mirror the life of their race, and thus make it better understood by the whites? Cannot the millions of whites and Negroes be led to exchange visits in this way? (*Wisdom* 178)

By offering literature as a substitute for social contact, Griggs seems to articulate a Bookerite compromise in which race relations can exist in some spheres yet remain completely separate in others. But at the same time, the formulation of the "American home" blurs the line between the public and private spheres and the realms of politics and society. Furthermore, there is something paradoxical about the idea that reading about one another in their respective homes will improve relations between the two races, when the act of reading at home is a *result* of such relations. In other words, even if the content of a novel by a white author (including somebody like Thomas Dixon, Jr.) might give African Americans "a sympathy and knowledge of whites," wouldn't the knowledge of being violently coerced into reading the novel in the private space of the home undo any benefit offered? Griggs seems ambivalent about this point. There is a sense, underscored by both his representations in his novels and his own real-life political tracts, that he did harbor optimism about the power of writing, and literature in particular, to improve race relations. But he also dramatizes again and again the perils of reading and writing.

This ambivalence is most apparent in the way he depicts and discusses horrors in his novels and tracts, which brings us to the question: According to Griggs, in what ways do readings register, resist, or produce horrors? Like the abolitionists discussed in Chapter One, Griggs thought carefully about the rhetorical impact of depictions of horrors in his writing. Indeed, he explicitly compared himself to those abolitionist writers. In his 1921 pamphlet *Light on Racial Issues*, Griggs suggested that the fiery rhetoric of Garrison, Stowe, and Douglass was no longer the most effective approach to debates about the race question, as "The need of the hour is not a Balaam to curse, but an Esther to plead successfully the cause of millions" (37), that "the prime need is no longer a denouncer, but a persuader" (38). Once again, these statements sound very much in line with the position of Booker T. Washington, as well as Griggs' own more conservative characters in his novels. But they conflict with his own rhetorical strategies in many of his earlier pamphlets. He frequently excerpted horrors from the newspapers of Tennessee and South Carolina in those tracts, as well as in the first appendix to *The Hindered Hand*, creating an implicit argument against lynching that is both documentary and inflammatory in a manner similar to that of *American Slavery as it Is*. His political tracts are also rife with gothic tropes. *Wisdom's Call*, to take just one example, compares the black populace of the South to a "putrid body of a dead man" poisoning a reservoir, characterizes lynchings as "feasts of blood," likens the South to "a huge spot of blood," suggests "that red-handed murder walks our streets and promenades our highways," and speculates that if lynching is not soon addressed, the South will "behold the ugly fangs of the mob, grown sharp from gnawing the Negro, buried in the vitals of our civilization" (13, 22, 41, 49-50). Spectacular violence and the figure of the monster lend the tract an urgency powered by their affective program; such moments "curse" and "denounce" in just the fashion that Griggs would later disavow. In the most spectacular example of this strategy, Griggs turns the white supremacist gothic trope of the black beast on its head. He writes of black victims of the Southern criminal justice system:

> When the prison door opens and the wronged and brutalized felon steps forth, he is more an enemy to society than ever, and it is hardly to be wondered at that this State-made beast does beastly deeds that excite the horror of the entire social body. When the public turns out to dance around the victim as he writhes in the flames, and to fight for his ashes as souvenirs of the event, how little does it dream that a careful sociological investigation would more than likely trace the parentage of this degenerate to the social order, and could point to a huge nest on which the social order sits in unreasoning mood, hatching out others and yet others. (40-1)

Griggs connects the gothic tropes of the monster and the inheritance of the forefather's sins to suggest that the black beast is a product of a the monstrous social order of white supremacy. The lynch mob, rather than its victim, is depicted through the tropes of the savage, and the whole of Southern society becomes a vast Roc that births (see here and elsewhere the rampant implied genealogies of racial amalgamation in Griggs' writing) the figure of the black beast that it denounces. More broadly significant is the way that this passage imagines race as a quality that is socially produced rather than inherent. While the trope of the black beast, deployed by white supremacists like Dixon, suggested an absolute biological difference underscored by contemporary scientific racism, Griggs makes it clear that the very beastliness that sets the condemned black apart is produced by his treatment at the hands of the "social order." The prison and the lynch mob were two instruments of that social order, and in *The Hindered Hand* Griggs makes clear that another is writing.

The novel begins with a scene of reading on a train very different from that of Booker T. Washington in *Up From Slavery*. The scene dramatizes one of the most conspicuous technologies of racial separation under Jim Crow, the train car. An African American porter notices a blue-eyed woman looking at him in the car for white passengers. He sees that she has dropped a note for him on the floor, and after some initial hesitation picks it up and returns to the colored car, which is in fact only half of a car (the white smoking area and first-class colored compartment are separated by a divider), to read it. His hesitation is caused by "the well understood dictum of the white man of the South that the Negro man and the white woman are to be utterly oblivious of the existence of each other" (12). But overcoming his fear, he hastens to the farthest corner of the colored compartment, so that no white passenger might come up behind him and see the contents of the note. The porter's act of reading is fraught with peril, as to be caught in a perceived flirtation with a white woman could lead to violence or death. Unlike the reading acts that would allow blacks and whites to "exchange visits" in Griggs' optimistic formulation of literature, the note acts to segregate the writer and reader; the woman's demanding insistence that the note be read and the porter's reluctant acceptance play out the power dynamic of white domination, and the fears that force him to the far end of the colored car spatially exaggerate the physical barriers imposed by Jim Crow. And the precarious safety of that space, which is occupied by a white conductor and newsboy, as well as other occasional white passengers (in a sly critique of the supposed equal enforcement demanded in *Plessy v. Ferguson*) highlights the dangers African Americans faced when performing acts of reading outside the private space of the home.

The porter's perusal of the note resembles what Deidre Lynch has described as a gothic phenomenology of reading, only gone horribly awry. She reminds us that for readers, "the book as object, the thing of paper that one grasps in one's hands, will…cease to be a material reality, while the ideas this book 'contains' will begin 'to exist' and to be embodied in their turn," effecting an "uncanny" phenomenology that associates "the textual and the spectral" (30). While a reader of *The Castle of Otranto* might see the book-as-object subsumed by images of enormous helmets and spectral portraits, something analogous but different happens to the porter in Griggs' novel. As he considers the note, it is subsumed by images of another sort in his imagination:

> He raised the window by which he sat and his eye wandered out into the darkness amid the sombre trees that went speeding along, and there arose to haunt him mental visions of a sea of angry white faces closing around some one dark face, perhaps guilty and perhaps innocent; and as he thought thereon he shuddered. (13)

This phenomenon recurs in a later passage in the novel when the woman, now identified as Eunice Vorhees (nee Seabright), sets off on her honeymoon and encounters the same porter. As he reads the note she passes him in this scene, the narrator relates, "There came to his mind instance after instance in which white women had given innocent Negro men great trouble" (82). In both cases the power of context outstrips that of content, as the danger engendered by the note proves more significant to the porter than the message it contains. Rather than removing the porter from the physical world and into the imaginary, the messages seem to embed him more deeply within his own vulnerable body. Upon reading the first note given to him, he "looked out of the window at the same sombre trees and into the gloom of their shadows, and he put his hand in his collar as though it was already too tight" (16). But at the same time that this perilous act of reading emphasizes the porter's feelings of embodiment, it also erases his identity: he mentally replies to the note signed by "the girl that looked at you" with his own "signature" as "The boy who wasn't there" (16). Like reading, the act of writing could be incriminating, especially if it suggested a social liaison that violated the codes of Jim Crow. Again, the exchange between the girl and the porter reproduces the power dynamic of white supremacy. She can write and name herself, while he can sign his name only as an erasure at the end of a non-existent note.

One of the ironies of these exchanges is that the girl is later exposed as an African American, partially due to evidence provided by the porter. This fact underscores Griggs' point about the way that writing creates racial identities in *The Hindered Hand*. It is not only the writing designating a "white" or "colored" car on the train that inscribes racial difference, but also the ability to command, to assume the role of the supremacist. That Eunice passes notes directing the African American porter to do her bidding constitutes part of the performance that allows her to pass as white. In her second note, she reminds the porter that "any white woman can have a Negro's life taken at a word. Beware!" (83). By commanding him and threatening his life, she creates a performance of white womanhood that, along with phenotypical traits such as blue eyes, allows her to succeed in assuming her identity.

That identity is exposed near the end of the novel when Eunice is put on trial for bigamy. After jilting her first husband, the powerful white politician H. G. Volrees, she falls in love with a light-skinned mulatto named Earl Bluefield. They elope to Mississippi, where they pass as wealthy white planters. Upon discovering her location and assumed identity, the previously much-harassed porter informs Volrees, who has her arrested and extradited to Almaville on charges of bigamy. At the trial, testimony from her sister, Tiara Merlow, reveals that Eunice is the daughter of two parents with traces of African ancestry, who had both passed as white until the birth of their third child, Tiara, who displayed a "reversion to type" in her dark skin. Realizing that to be exonerated of the charge of bigamy would mean that she and her son would legally become black (interracial marriages were legally invalid), Eunice begs for a conviction, and is crushed when the jury comes back with a verdict of "not guilty." It is in the aftermath of this trial that we see the other peril of reading for African American characters in Griggs' novel.

In a direct contradiction of Booker T. Washington's depiction, Griggs suggests that newspapers chronicled the horrors of and posed a threat to African Americans in the South during the era of lynching. One of the most commented-upon scenes in *The Hindered Hand* is the torture and immolation of two black characters, Bud and Foresta Crump, who kill a white man in self-defense. That scene culminates with a newspaperman taking a photograph of the mutilated victims and their torturers before the match is thrown. The story becomes sensational front-page news, as the lynching, which takes place in Mississippi, quickly becomes known in Almaville. An exchange follows between the two protagonists of the novel (beginning with Earl Bluefield):

> "Have you read the morning paper?"
>
> "No," replied Ensal.
>
> "Read," said Earl, taking a paper from his pocket and handing it to Ensal.

> “My God! This cannot be true!” exclaimed Ensal in tones of horror, as he read the detailed account of the Maulville burning. He arose and strode to and fro across the room.
>
> “Never in all my wide range of reading have I ever come across a more reprehensible occurrence,” muttered he. (139)

Their conversation highlights the way that white supremacists succeeded, through spectacles of violence such as lynching, in horrifying and terrorizing African Americans so as to deprive them of rights, such as the political right to vote. I suggested in the previous chapter that the reduction of black lives to mere figures of rhetoric was part of the strategy of white supremacist terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, and Griggs dramatizes the power of that strategy in his own novel. But he is interested in more than just the ability of the white press to perpetuate racial domination through reporting acts of horrific violence. The press also enforces the directives of the court, as Eunice learns when she is ruled to be black. He depicts a judge and jury sympathetic to Eunice’s plight of being labeled a “Negro” after an upper-class white upbringing; the judge even “shed[s] a few tears” as “many another person in the audience wept” (239). But word of the trial’s outcome is quickly disseminated by the local paper, whose readers include a streetcar conductor who pushes Eunice from the step of the trolley, a hotelier who throws her possessions into the alley in a heap, a railroad employee who deny her a berth in the sleeper car, and a passenger who kick her out of the seating area for whites where the reader first encountered her at the beginning of the novel.

One can read the central conflict of *The Hindered Hand* existing not between characters, but between pieces of writing. The literal and figurative centerpiece of the book is Ensal Ellwood’s long tract arguing for a national solution, including participation of the federal government, to the problems of Jim Crow and lynch law. If we include oral rhetoric with the written, then H. Clay Maul's courtroom speech, as well as that of Tiara Merlow, also make similar appeals for justice in the South. The problem is that proponents of white supremacy have more firepower in the press and the publishing house. Ellwood's unpublished tract is no match for *The Leopard's Spots*, which appears in the novel upon his desk. Similarly, the African American characters have no answer for the ubiquitous Southern Democratic press that incites discrimination and glorifies racially-motivated violence. Perhaps without the same precision of control evident in *Hagar's Daughter*, Griggs' novel also fits in nicely with the series of fictitious race tracts it contains, as it too stood no chance against Dixon's bestseller, which reached an audience of a different order of magnitude. Indeed, outside a recent and still quite small body of scholarly writing, Griggs' novel is still so little read that he might well have signed it "The author who wasn't there."

The self-reflexivity suggested by the fact that *The Hindered Hand* can be read as another example of the political tracts it contains allows us to consider how Griggs considered his own position as novelist and pamphleteer. The full title of his novel is suggestive. The first obvious question faced by the reader is that of whose hand is hindered. Griggs evokes the most famous simile of the Jim Crow era, the hand that suggests mutual economic progress but social separation in Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise. In this context, Griggs' title must be read as a direct challenge to accommodationism in the suggestion that progress is hindered rather than aided by such an arrangement. But Griggs also more fully showed his hand when he entitled his supplemental essay on Thomas Dixon, Jr. "The Hindering Hand." If the hindering hand is Dixon's, white, racist, and intent upon harming African Americans through "vile misrepresentations," then the hindered hand must be that of Griggs himself. The subtitle, "the

Reign of the Repressionist," underscores the difficulties that Griggs faced in writing his novel. Those difficulties arose from the lack of forums for black voices that is dramatized in the novel, and indeed, the difficulties and dangers that generally plagued the black writer just as they did the black reader.

In a sense *The Hindered Hand* can be read as a commentary upon such difficulties and dangers. Much has been written about Griggs' thoughts on nationalism, and despite some scholarly disagreement it is undeniable that Griggs was interested in how African Americans could be united through literature, legislation, armed resistance, or nation formation. Long after he had ceased to write novels, in the 1920s he published a pamphlet about what he called the science of "collective efficiency," perhaps culminating his career of thinking about how to bring African Americans together, and it is important not to make the mistake of framing his career only in opposition to white supremacy. Frances Smith Foster reminds us that "African Americans did not create their literature solely in reaction to, or for the enlightenment of, those who were not African American," and indeed that "While self-defense is an important catalyst, the necessity of self-definition and self-direction also mothers invention" (719, 735). And yet the full title of Griggs' novel registers the frustrated sense that it will function "in reaction to" hostile whites ("the repressionist") because that hostility hinders the desired project of writing a positive, constructive novel of "self-definition" and "self-direction."

It is for this reason that an author drawn to the idea of "collective efficiency" spent so much of his career responding to the attacks of whites rather than building connections to writers of his own race. I mentioned before the curious fact that Griggs frequently cites writers such as Thomas Dixon, Jr., while rarely explicitly engaging with his African American contemporaries. I think that Griggs' awareness of the power of the "repressionist" regime against which he struggles explains this curious fact. Susan Gillman has it backwards when she enumerates the "occult" connections between Griggs and Dixon. Those connections are not obscure, and are explicitly drawn out by *The Hindered Hand* and its supplementary essay on Dixon. Rather, the occult connections in Griggs' novel are to his African American literary contemporaries.

The lynching of Henry Crump furnishes one prominent example of such connections. As I suggested earlier, the scene rewrites the Long Bridge scene of *Clotel(le)* and *Hagar's Daughter*. Having been handed down a long sentence at the brutal prison work farm, young Henry jumps from a window of the courthouse and, like numerous tragic mulattos before him, lights out across the square, down the street, and across the bridge by means of which he hopes to escape capture, only to be headed off at the far end by armed interceptors. Unlike his predecessors, Henry does not attempt suicide—he is driven into the river in a defensive stance, where he holds his position until he is shot to death by a member of the mob that has formed to watch his fate. That mob is described first as merely "people…crowded on the bridge"; it swells to "hundreds, perhaps a thousand or so, of people" as Henry enters the river; and after he is shot, "the thousands" upon the bridge wait to see if he will rise from the waters (60-1). The crowd upon the bridge swells to such a size because it is the crowd of all the Long Bridges that precede it, in the sense that Griggs clearly reproduces and builds upon what had become a mythic scene. The bridge is not just a metaphor of the connection between the past of slavery and the unreconstructed present of Jim Crow, but also one of a developing African American literature. The bridge (like black literacy itself) offers a narrow path forward that is fraught with peril on all sides. As the deaths of Clotel, Isabella, Hagar, and Henry Crump attest, one recurrent feature of that literature is the protest against the violence of white supremacy, a protest that is often articulated in gothic scenes of violence. The question that *The Hindered Hand*, and to some degree *Hagar's Daughter*, leaves us with is how to move beyond such scenes that effectively register the outrages of racially motivated violence, but also, perhaps, textually reproduce the representation of the African American in "the pained and minimally sensate existence of the slave" (Hartman 116-17).

Later in Griggs' novel, Earl Bluefield and Ensal Ellwood, his radical and conservative protagonists, meet upon the bridge. It is explicitly identified as a site of racial violence, as Griggs describes it as "the bridge from which hundreds had seen little Henry Crump driven to his death; where the majesty of the law hand been trampled under foot in the murder and mutilation of Dave Harper" (162). But in this scene, there is no spectacular violence, no lynching to draw the approving eyes of the South in the novel and the horrified gaze of the reader. Rather, having disagreed about the most effective strategy for progress in race relations—through militant violence or literary persuasion—the two men grapple with one another, "each man feeling that the welfare of millions depended upon the outcome" (164). This, one senses, is the struggle in which Griggs invests the most passion; it is the struggle in which he actively participated as a preacher, pamphleteer, and public intellectual for most of his life. The scene comments upon the strategies available to the African American writer as well. Huge crowds spectate the lynchings of Henry Crump and Dave Foster, but as Bluefield and Ellwood engage in a mythic struggle for the future of their people, not a soul is there to watch them.

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