

Gothic Sentimentalism in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Literature

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*"A book is a hand stretched forth in the dark passage of life to see if there is another hand to meet it."
(Harriet Beecher Stowe to George Eliot)*

"Critical" sympathies: reception and rejection

The literary scholarship of the past decades has produced a renaissance of interest in nineteenth-century American literature. The consistent and successful calling for a reconsideration of who, what, and how constitutes the American canon flanked by a dynamically rising critical discourse on women writers, popular genres, and cultural studies of the period have presented us with readings reflecting an excitingly heterogeneous and complex century quite apart from the previously sanctioned tunnel vision.

Initially, I was engaged in the study and teaching of the Gothic and nineteenth-century American women writers (most of them labeled "sentimental") in a somewhat parallel fashion, for years I treated the two as essentially different, if not exclusive, artistic creeds of literalizing one's experience of the world. Yet, ultimately, I started to perceive links where I previously saw walls. Some of these connections seem apparent: both the Gothic and sentimentalism have been contested fields in literary criticism and both have received a lot of bad rep. They have been associated with triviality, superficiality, and femininity—i. e., the "sub-literary"—their only value resting on their very valuelessness that made "major" writers and works shine even more dazzlingly.

Undoubtedly, the history of the critical reception of either the American Gothic or sentimentalism seems more like a roller coaster ride than a casual stroll in the garden. Critics obviously had a hard time defining the significance of one or the other for the American canon. For nineteenth-century critics and reviewers, Nina Baym argues, the designation “gothic” did not even seem to exist, probably because “the very idea of the gothic at this time seemed incompatible with the idea of the novel” (*Novels* 201). Baym’s observation that the age primarily saw the Gothic as a lyric genre and not a narrative one is significant because later critical efforts to construct the canon of ante- and postbellum America tended to focus on fiction and—with the exception of poets Emily Dickinson and, especially, Walt Whitman—listed only writers of fiction as “major” American authors. Theresa Goddu outlines other probable reasons for such neglect. For one, she argues, “[g]iven its historical belatedness, critics [were] particularly anxious to provide the American literary canon with a respectable foundation” (6). The Gothic’s early association with the popular, the feminine, and the excessive ruled out any chance of respectability, as Richard Chase’s choice of listing the gothic under the heading of melodrama reflects. Unlike its British counterpart, American gothic did not emerge as a distinctive genre dominating a specific time period and sporting a well-definable set of authors. Though it has been present in American literature from the beginnings as a conventional “constellation of grotesque images and symbols and the hyperbolic language of emotional torture and mental anguish” (Davidson 218) highlighting the evil underside of the New Republic, it was seen as only one of several forms that played a (minor) role in the development of the early American novel. Thus the gothic seemed to be flying under the radar until Fiedler’s monumental study which not only rehabilitated it but elevated it to the status of canon-maker: “Our fiction [...] is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, unrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in the land of light and affirmation” (29).

If the gothic was invisible, the sentimental glared only too brightly for later critics. Treated respectfully and matter-of-factly by nineteenth-century reviewers, the genre drove later critics to despair who could not deny its popularity and all-pervasiveness but found its “aesthetic value” suspect. Not that many critics devoted attention to the women’s literature of the period in the first place and those who did, often did it sneeringly. Critics seemed to be only too happy to finally deliver poetic justice to

writers they identified as major (who all happened to be male) for all the neglect, scorn, and impoverishment inflicted on them while the “female scribblers” alias “single-minded sentimentalists” (Fiedler 105) raked in the big bucks only to rush to the closest department store to spend it all on another silk shawl. Or so the story goes, embellished by Fred Lewis Pattee, Herbert Ross Brown, James D. Hart, Leslie Fiedler or Ann Douglas. Women had it easy: “publishers in the ‘fifties learned to welcome any woman who turned up at their offices with a novel in a bulky manuscript under her arm” (Hart 97).

Delivering condemning judgment on artistic unworthiness by poking fun at women writers’ appearance has been considered witty by some, as in Hart’s description of Susan Warner’s less-than-attractive countenance: “One look at her spare equine face distinguished by a pair of eyes set not quite evenly in her head, a thin determined mouth, a hair brushed tightly behind large ears proclaimed her a spinster by nature” (95). Others followed Hart to point out the fact that both Warner sisters had long, “giraffe” necks. It is arguable whether assessments like the above are funny or rude, but one cannot help wondering why no similar descriptions form a part of Hart’s critical evaluation of male authors’ works. In fact, he adopts the common critical stance by not even attempting to analyze Warner’s novels in any depth, instead substituting contemptuous comments on the woman for a critique of the artist. This wave of critical discourse (vaguely up to the 1970s, but with the exception of Helen Waite Papashvily’s *All the Happy Endings*) assumes that the uniform worthlessness of all sentimental literature is so apparent that it requires no further critical investigation. So it comes as no surprise that individual female authors of the era are habitually lumped together under the heading “women writers” or “sentimentalists” and treated as one homogeneous group. Consequently, even when such critics discuss one specific author, she is assumed to stand in for the rest of her sex, and the problems detected in her work are meant to characterize the uniform faults of texts produced by women. (In contrast, we never read sentences, like “male writers did this/think that” only what Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman thought or did). Fiedler, for example, comes to the sweeping conclusion that Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* “succeeded in projecting once and for all the American woman’s image of herself as the long-suffering martyr of love—the inevitable victim of male brutality and lust” (97). Jay B. Hubbell cannot but wonder “why so many of the more intelligent read the novels of Augusta Jane Evans and Mary Elizabeth

Braddon rather than the novels of George Meredith and Henry James” (79). Pattee’s answer to such musings represents the critical consensus: “[the] great mass of American readers, for the most part women, did not think at all” (307).¹ Embarrassingly enough for critics invested in retrospectively establishing a “respectable” canon of nineteenth-century American literature, it was the sentimental bestseller that first turned the tide of British literary dominance in American literary history. For better or worse, as Mrs. Oliphant complained, the “dreadful, perfect little girls who come over from the other side of the Atlantic to do good to the Britishers, like the heroines of [Susan Warner’s] *Queechy* and *The Wide Wide World*” (qtd. in Henry Nash Smith 50) ruled the day and colonized the British literary market.

It was not until the 1970s, partly due to general canon debates and a rising interest in cultural studies, that critics started to approach sentimentalism in less prejudicial ways.² Due to the work of critics, like

¹ This wave of critical evaluation in the twentieth century is represented by Fred Lewis Pattee’s *The Feminine Fifties* (1936), Herbert Ross Brown’s *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789–1860* (1940), James D. Hart’s *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (1961), Alexander Cowie’s “The Vogue of the Domestic Novel, 1950–1870,” Henry Nash Smith’s “The Scribbling Woman and the Cosmic Success Story.” They see sentimental novels as escapist and lacking artistic depth, their primary function being to divert readers’ attention (assumed to be women, for the most part) from the real troubles of American national life and instructing them to be complacent slaves to the patriarchal order. Starting with Helen Waite Papashvily’s *All the Happy Endings* (1956), a new trend emerges that denies that sentimental literature would be superficial and full of hurrah optimism. Just on the contrary, critics like Papashvily, Ann Douglas (*The Feminization of American Culture*, 1977) or Dee Garrison (“Immoral Fiction in the Late Victorian Library”) detect the subversive nature of sentimentalism that primarily plays itself out as the war of the sexes with sentimental novels serving as “manual of arms, [women’s] handbook of strategy” (Papashvily 24).

² Nina Baym’s *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–70* (1978) was groundbreaking for several reasons: it called for treating sentimental authors on their own terms, and by its method of close reading of actual texts, it demonstrated the variety of this body of literature. Numerous inspiring studies followed: Alfred Habegger’s *Gender, Fantasy and Realism in American Literature* (1982), Mary Kelley’s *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (1984), Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (1985), Cathy N. Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986), Susan K. Harris’s *19th-Century American Women’s Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (1990), Shirley Samuels, ed. *The Cult of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-*

Cathy N. Davidson, Nina Baym, Jane Tompkins, Paul Lauter, and others, who look at these writers afresh, we have come to see the variety of female characters, plots, and views inhabiting the sentimental tradition both synchronically and diachronically. Significantly, this era of critical discourse offers a wide variety of potential contexts, views, and opinions, often ones diametrically opposed to each other even when they study the same texts on similar grounds. Some are sympathetic to sentimentalism, some see it as the “middle-class regime of socialization through coercive love, [...] ‘disciplinary intimacy’” (Brodhead qtd. in Howard 64). But, in any case, the plurality of opinions, so much unlike the uniform condemnation characteristic of earlier criticism, underlines that sentimentalism is treated seriously and has ceased to be the call word for bad literature. As Joanne Dobson concludes: “sentimental literature can be ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Sentimental texts can be profound or simple, authentic or spurious, sincere or exploitative, strong or weak, radical or conservative” (268). Current studies have also done away with the simplistic sentimental/female –realistic/male dichotomy by calling attention to the ways male authors—from Charles Dickens through Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Nathaniel Hawthorne—have invested in sentimental discourse. Neither do we see now sentimental literature as a monolithic unit or a narrowly defined genre. Definitions have been numerous and varied but they generally treat sentimentalism as a form of ideology, “an emotional and philosophical ethos” (Dobson 266) that can materialize in a wide array of genres and formulas.

“A rose by any name”: definitions and discontent

So, how can we define the relationship between the gothic and the sentimental, two literary modes that ultimately emerge as central to the canon of the nineteenth-century? I believe the answer hinges on the definitions one chooses to work with and we have already cast a cursory glance at the maze of available designations. Major critics of the American gothic often see the gothic and sentimentalism as antithetical and define the gothic in light of that opposition: “While sentimental romance has its place in this genre [the gothic], it is never the locus of intense emotion; such emotion resides in those exchanges most imbued

Century America (1992) or Joyce W. Warren, ed. *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (1993), just to name a few major ones.

with mystery and terror for Western culture, the incestuous and the homoerotic" (Gross 52). Or, as Fiedler concludes, the Gothic "spurred on those serious American writers whom the example of the sentimental had only galled" (126). Critics, otherwise sympathetic to the genre, often resort to evasion when they substitute "dark" for "gothic," as David Reynolds does in his seminal *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988). He prefers to refer to gothic works as the literature of "Dark Adventure" and almost entirely expurgates the "literature of women's wrongs" of potential gothic connotations. In this context, "dark" generally connotes "profound" (as in "dark experiences of American life" or "dark vision of America") and serves as an evaluative criterion to fence off the gothic (as they define it) from the "sunny" sentimentalism of women writers. Fiedler, Hart, Pattee and others have primarily presented the case as the battle of the sexes: sentimental authors (read: female) in the red corner, major Gothic writers (read: male) in the blue. The stakes are especially high for Fiedler because in his pioneering book *Love and Death in the American Novel* he is out on a mission to redeem the Gothic not simply as a major literary form but, in fact, as *the* American genre representing the essence of America's vision of itself. In order to turn the tides on the suspect reputation of the Gothic, Fiedler argues for its presence as a driving force in the works of all major American authors (Hawthorne, Melville, and so on), successfully elevates some writers (e.g., Charles Brockden Brown), previously considered minor, to the major league of literary importance, and ends up constructing a linear male Gothic tradition within the American canon. According to the inherent logic of Fiedler's argument, women can be imagined to produce only sentimental works (meaning anti-Gothic, anti-intellectual, anti-realistic), consequently they have no respectable place in the canon. Assertions, such as, "our classic literature is a literature of horror for boys" (Fiedler 29) or that the gothic is "the embodiment of demonic-quest-romance, in which a lonely, self-divided hero embarks on an insane pursuit of the Absolute" (Thompson 2) highlight how the gothic hero exiled from society evolves as a perfect match for the image of the isolato long favored as the quintessential American hero.

Ironically enough the definition of sentimentalism as "private, excessive, undisciplined, self-centered emotionality" (Baym, *Woman's* xxix) uncannily recalls descriptions of the American gothic hailed for its excessive "turn inward, away from society and toward the psyche of the hidden blackness of the American soul" (Goddu 9). However, when

defined as a body of literature that “celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affective loss” (Dobson 266) through “public sympathy and benevolent fellow feeling” (Baym, *Woman’s* xxx), sentimentalism appears to be the direct opposite of the Gothic. Or is it? “Gothic” is no less a slippery a term than “sentimental” is and famously resents being pinned down in simple categories. The confident arguments of Fiedler, Donald A. Ringe and others delude us to see the gothic as a well-contained narrative form but, in fact, these critics tell us only half of the story (at best). The “unrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic” literature Fiedler identifies as *the gothic* (29) which is characterized by the fear of “insanity and the disintegration of the self” (Fiedler 129), pursues “the essential nature of evil” (Hart 92) and insists on “moral ambiguity ... the confusion of good and evil” (Hume 287) can only lead to “despair, pain and annihilation” (Thompson 2). Fiedler is nevertheless correct to observe that “the deeper implications [of such a narrative] are barely perceptible in the gently spooky fiction of Mrs. Radcliffe” (129). Indeed they are not but that does not make Radcliffe’s romances a bit less Gothic. Her Female Gothic springs from the same Ur-Gothic—Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*—but right from the beginning advances a counter-story that challenges the implications of the Walpolean narrative later adopted by Gregory Monk Lewis, William Beckford, Charles Maturin or Charles Brockden Brown.

Claire Kahane was among the first to call attention to the results of the severe amputation male critics have inflicted on the body of the Gothic canon. They often choose to focus on “male authors and male protagonists in order to elaborate the oedipal dynamics of a Gothic text, and affectively restrict if not exclude female desire even from texts written by women” (Kahane 335–36). On the basis of critical priorities previously outlined, it is no surprise that women writers were absent from the lists of critics theorizing about the American Gothic³. As Elaine

³ However, even critics otherwise interested in the Female Gothic were slow to move beyond the consideration of exclusively British authors. Ellen Moers, Kate Ferguson Ellis, Anne Williams and Eugenia DeLamotte primarily concern themselves with writers like Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Mary Shelley, the Brontës or Christina Rossetti and only occasionally mention American authors (Sylvia Plath, Djuna Barnes, Carson McCullers). No American women from the nineteenth-century feature on their lists. I suspect that the main reason for this is that, with the exception of Williams’s book, these critical works were written before the canon debates that re-evaluated

Showalter concludes: "American Gothic could not be written *by* women because it was a protest *against* women, a flight from the domestic and the feminine" (131). A similar attitude has been applied to the American canon in general. A Baym observes speaking of the American romance, in these stories "the encroaching, constricting, destroying society is represented with particular urgency in the figure of one or more women ("Melodramas" 72).

It is not only female authors who are erased from Fiedler's American Gothic universe but female characters as well: "Chief of the gothic symbols is, of course, the Maiden in flight—understood in the spirit of *The Monk* as representing the uprooted soul of the artist, the spirit of the man who has lost his moral home" (131). That is, a character may appear to be a woman but in fact serves only as a metaphor for MAN, the exiled isolato familiar from the American romance. The home (s)he is deprived of is of course no domestic space either but a moral one. Stating that "our classic literature is a literature of horror for boys" (29), Fiedler closes the homosocial circle of male writer-character-reader. However, I find it unlikely that the maiden-in-flight so central to female-authored gothic texts would be so gravely misinterpreted by generations of (female) readers whose close identification with the heroine is, by Fiedler's logic, mere delusion. Had they known all along they were indulging in the adventures of the estranged male artist! Fiedler feels obliged to deal with the phenomenon of the gothic heroine but since his concept allows no place for women's stories, he has to unsex her somehow—"Make [her] bearded like a man!" (Dickinson Fr 267)—reveal her sex as mere masquerade. What I find most problematic in Fiedler's approach, fast adopted by others, is that it denies the validity of different traditions within the Gothic canon in the same vein as F. O. Matthiessen and others refused to admit the sentimental, both camps striving to construct a homogeneous and restrictive canon of nineteenth-century American literature that acknowledges only one type of writing as authentic and "major."

The point becomes only too apparent if one look at some major studies of the American gothic. We have already seen Fiedler's ghettoizing approach and others were quick to follow. When critics like Eric Savoy are engaged in constructing an "American Gothic continuum"

sentimental literature and re-admitted previously disparaged authors like Southworth or Warner.

(180), they embrace the Fiedlerean concept of exclusions that admits neither the possibility of simultaneously existing Gothic traditions nor the possible crossbreeding of the Gothic and other major genres of the nineteenth-century, the sentimental novel included.⁴

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to define the boundaries between the Male and Female Gothic. Both formulas developed their own set of conventions in regard to plot, narrative technique, affective focus and the supernatural.⁵ Some simply assume that Male Gothic is written by men while Female Gothic by women. This approach, however, may prove to be overversimplifying because although the Male formula may be more common in works written by men just as women writers may far more often use the Female Gothic formula, there are, of course, significant exceptions. Charlotte Dacré's apocalyptic *Zofloya* that offers neither redemption nor happy ending for heroines (innocent or guilty) cannot

⁴ Rosemary Jackson lists Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, James and William Faulkner in her influential study, *Fantasy*. Ringe promises to study the "major" American Gothic writers of the nineteenth century and devotes chapters to Brown Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne while also discussing others less exclusively associated with the genre (Jean Crevecoeur, James Kirke Paulding, John Pendleton Kennedy, James Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, Robert Montgomery Bird, Washington Allston, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., John Neal). Irving Malin's essay on American Gothic images mentions Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, James, Faulkner, Irving, Ernest Hemingway (!), Mark Twain (but not Charlotte Perkins Gilman). Louis Gross proposes to study only two female authors, Esther Forbes and Anne Rice (but none from the nineteenth-century). Savoy's article bears the title "The Rise of the American Gothic" but instead of the comprehensive overview one would expect of potential traditions that all contributed to such a rise, we get the same list of names identified as *the* American Gothic authors: Brown, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and James although the last paragraph casts a cursory glance at Dickinson.

⁵ Briefly and somewhat oversimplifyingly, we could say that the Male Gothic favors the tragic plot (which ends with the overreaching hero's fall) vs. the Female Gothic preference for an affirmative happy ending; the first typically relies on either third person omniscient narrators or presents the action through multiple points of view, e.g., journal entries, while the first person/heroine narrator is more typical of Female Gothic works. Writers like Walpole, Lewis, and others indulge in supernatural phenomena that they treat as real and serious while, from Ann Radcliffe on, women usually choose to offer a rational explanation of myteries. Finally, horror (defined as petrifying, appalling physical fear) is the central emotion of Male Gothic texts while in Female Gothic versions heroines are more affected by intense terror, a fearful but stimulating sentiment which urges the expansion of mental faculties as a basic tool of the heroine's survival.

deny the influence of Lewis's *The Monk*, and Mary Wilkins Freeman's or Edith Wharton's ghost stories sporting unrationalized supernatural events fall under the Male Gothic designation. Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, on the other hand, poses as a hybrid of the two gothic formulas. In my understanding, the Male and Female Gothic traditions function less as distinctive sets of narrative and thematic conventions and more as different approaches to negotiating reality, foregrounding and confronting fears, anxieties as well as hopes regarding a variety of fields: human relationships, questions of life and death, sense of evil or social injustice. And it is exactly the focus on the evils affecting women's lives where Female Gothic and sentimentalism converge.

My primary concern is not to establish a rival female American Gothic tradition although I assume a continuing dialogue between women writers who gravitated towards a similar (though by no means identical) vision of women's situation in American culture and drew substantially on Gothic paraphernalia to express their concerns. I will pursue to show that "American Gothic" is far from being a monolithic tradition; that women *did* substantially contribute to this tradition which, like Fiedler, I also see as central to American literature. However, my contention is that sentimentalism and Gothic are not at all antithetical; rather, they are intricately linked to each other; and that female writers of sentimental works and/or gothic texts *did* take a stand in cultural dialogue and produced works that, far from being escapist, did indeed engage in exploring contemporary social reality. I wish to define both the Gothic and sentimentalism more broadly than a genre easily categorized by a set of narrative conventions (the laundry list approach). Although my argument centers on Gothic and sentimental works written at a certain period of time and place (nineteenth-century America), I believe that the vigorous survival of both genres well beyond their original appearance and heyday calls attention to their adaptability. In fact, I see Gothic and sentimental texts as expressive of a complex aesthetic worldview, an ideology representing diverse cultural assumptions about the Self and its relation to others or the world at large.⁶

⁶ Trying to find the correct designation has been problematic for critics, especially in regard to Gothic literature. Is the Gothic (or the sentimental, for that matter) a "genre," a "tradition," or a "mode"? None of these terms seem to have satisfied critics who felt that no matter what we call it, there always seemed to be significant exclusions. Thus I prefer using the seemingly vague terms "text" and "work" wherever possible.

The psychologization of the Gothic critics so often privilege was not necessarily a revolutionary, primarily nineteenth-century or exclusively American phenomenon but a general result of the diversification of the Gothic. In her discussion of the development of the British Gothic in the nineteenth-century, Alison Milbank persuasively argues that “the turn to the psychological [...] often hailed by as an advance, whereby the unwieldy Gothic machinery of the previous century gives way to a more modern and sophisticated conception of a purely internal drama [...] is an inherently conservative turn that avoids the radical implications of the full-length Gothic novel at the time and returns the setting to a safely distant continental arena” (151) or, we could add, to the safely distant historical time of the colonial past. This reasoning does not devalue the American Gothic tradition represented by Washington Irving, or Nathaniel Hawthorne, yet highlights the fact that critical categories contain no inherent value. It is not evident that a Gothic text exploring psychological drama would be superior to one dealing with social surfaces, that a representation of “a national way of reconstructing history” (Savoy “Rise” 176) or the Puritan origins of the American self would be superior to dealing with the horror of contemporary domestic relations.

Cathy Davidson acknowledges the validity of widely different versions of the Gothic in the early American novel and distinguishes two dominant strains: one dealing with individual psychology, the other concentrating on “the psychology of social relations” but both, in their own ways, interested in the “inherent limitations of individual consciousness, and the consequent need for some control of individual freedom, [...] the equally inherent weaknesses of existing systems, and [...] the need for social reform” (220). Davidson’s observations open up the canon to Female Gothic texts which then appear as relevant as those of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville⁷.

However, sometimes it is impossible to operate with such restricted choices so I will also use the term “genre” or “tradition.” Whatever I may call it though, I mean to understand the Gothic or the sentimental in the expansive sense outlined above.

⁷ Davidson’s approach represents a more liberal definition of the American Gothic canon that includes writers of both sexes. She identifies two major traditions in regard to the early American novel. One is a combination of the early sentimental novel and the Gothic inspired by Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis. Susanna Rowson’s *Rachel and Reuben* (1789), S.S.K.B. Wood’s *Amelia; or, the Influence of Virtue* (1802) and Isaac Mitchell’s *The Asylum* (1811) are representative examples of this category. The other

Few critics have observed the inherent similarities between sentimentalism and the Gothic. Papashvily early identifies the latent Gothic qualities of sentimental literature as essential to the genre's popularity. Speaking of E.D.E.N Southworth's bestsellers, she argues that it was, to a large extent, her ability "to combine the shock and suspense of the old Gothic novel with the pathos, sentiment and humor Dickens and his imitators had made fashionable" (114) that catapulted Southworth to fame. Papashvily also claims that sentimentalism "is always a cloak to hide the face of horror, and wherever we perceive sentimentality we may know that beneath it lies some unbearable truth we did not dare to meet facet o face" (195). That is, she understands sentimentalism as essentially uncanny. I agree with Mary Kelley that the "fiction of the sentimentalists is, finally, expressive of a dark vision of nineteenth-century America, and not [...] of the redemptive, idyllic, holy land" often associated with them ("Sentimentalists" 446). The idea that "the sentimental and the gothic are interdependent, not essentially different" (Goddu 96) is fundamental to my argument. Once we acknowledge the hauntedness of sentimental texts by a very Gothic awareness of impending evil, we may be less convinced that "[p]opular fiction was designed to soothe the sensibilities of its readers by fulfilling expectations and expressing only received ideas" (Henry Nash Smith 50).

Even critics who do not treat the two genres in tandem reveal significant connections between Female Gothic and sentimental texts. Baym, for one, identifies woman's fiction as a distinctive genre in sentimental fiction (and not a synonym of it) which puts forward the story of "a young woman who has lost the emotional and financial support of her legal guardians—indeed who is often subject to their abuse and neglect—but who nevertheless goes on to win her own way in the world

line Davidson observes is the combination of the reformist novel and the Gothic created under the inspiration of Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and Elizabeth Inchbald: Brown's *Wieland* (1789), "Adelio's" *A Journey to Philadelphia; or, Memoirs of Charles Coleman Saunders* (1804), Caroline Warren's *The Gamesters* (1805) or Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812). There have been other critics as well to rely on a more encompassing concept of the Gothic in America: Allan Lloyd-Smith includes Louisa May Alcott, Emma Dawson, Dickinson, Gilman, and Stowe *American Gothic Fiction*; Lawrence Buell discusses Elizabeth Stoddard as equal to Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe (*New England Literary Culture*). Charles L. Crow's *American Gothic: American Anthology 1787-1916* includes works by Alice Cary, Alcott, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Dickinson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Freeman, Kate Chopin, and Gilman.

[...] find[ing] within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome [hardships]]” (*Woman’s* ix, 22). Moers’s summary of the Ur-female gothic plot introduced by Radcliffe’s romances “in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously victim and courageous heroine” (91) identifies the same trials & triumph plot as Baym’s woman’s novels. Kahane adds further details: “Within an imprisoning structure, a protagonist, typically a young woman whose mother has died, is compelled to seek out the center of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness” (334). Although the presence of the sexual element (associated with the gothic) or the repression of it (associated with the sentimental) seems to introduce a point of divergence, I argue that this is only seemingly so since the sexual advances of the villain in female gothic romances turn out to veil his mercenary obsessions only, his appetite wet for the heroine’s fortune rather than her body (quite differently from the male gothic whose pornographic qualities have long been acknowledged). Similarly, the foregone social and psychological abuse suffered by the sentimental heroine only downplays but does not deny her sexual vulnerability. Although both the female gothic and sentimentalism deploy devices to defamiliarize contemporary social reality—such as placing the story abroad, in an earlier age or in the figure of the child heroine—these only serve as “objective correlatives for the desires and fears, frustrations and anxieties of women under patriarchy” (Griesinger 386). Although Emily Griesinger’s remark is made about the female gothic, its implications hold true for sentimentalism as well.

In my view, it is the Radcliffean female gothic romance and not the early sentimental novel that served as the most powerful antecedent of nineteenth-century sentimentalism in America. Heroines of the eighteenth-century seduction novel are in many respects the opposites of the suffering but victorious heroines of later sentimentalism. I agree with Baym who warns against lumping together the “novel of sensibility” and the “sentimental novel” and identifying the latter (as, for example, Fiedler does) as the direct descendant of the first. In fact, the Richardsonian heroine who is overwhelmed by her own feelings, lacks the common sense and fortitude to prevent her sexual fall, and sacrifices her familial and communal bonds for the obsessive authority of the seducer was resented by both early female gothic writers and nineteenth-century

sentimentalists. In varying degree, depending on the individual author, both camps wish to display heroines who are ready to defy their oppressors, even if their options are often severely limited, and successfully preserve the integrity of their selfhood. Their stories are not “a form of sexual feudalism,” as Rachel Blau DuPlessis maintains in regard to the female gothic, or the valorization of “the masochistic powerlessness of the generic female confronted with the no-frills, cruel-but-tender male” (45). DuPlessis’s pattern may describe one particular kind of female gothic plot, the modern popular gothic romance, but fails to capture the essence of either the Radcliffean female gothic line or the feminist gothic of Mary Wollstonecraft and her followers. Furthermore, the significance of the female gothic for nineteenth-century sentimentalism lies not only in the direct passing on of narrative patterns but, I believe, gothic sensibility enhances all major forms of sentimental literature. It is the female gothic’s notorious investigation of the dangers specifically affecting women in patriarchal society (in their roles of daughter, wife, and mother, single or married) that lurks at the heart of all sentimental texts, it is only in intensity that this presence varies. While Southworth’s exuberant and excessive “high-wrought fiction” (to apply Baym’s term) flaunts its gothic affinities, Susan Warner’s Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide Wide World*, though her story is stripped of obvious Gothic paraphernalia, is no less a gothic heroine striving to fend off assault and relying on her belief in moral integrity (called propriety or sensibility by Radcliffe) to achieve a happy ending.

One cannot ignore that both the Gothic and sentimentalism have been seen as emphatically affective genres. Though the kinds of emotions associated with the two are different—fear for the Gothic and sympathy for the sentimental—the mechanism is similar: both genres work not only to express strong emotions but, more importantly, to transmit these emotions to readers so intensively that they end up sucked in by the fictional world, no longer able to maintain their outsider status in relation to the story. This kind of readerly engagement, bordering on enslavement, addiction, obsession, has been foregrounded (and condemned) as the most distinctive feature of both. Good and bad may have been said about the “lachrymose” stories of sentimental orphans and the terror of heroines trapped in foreboding castles but the power of such stories is undeniable, sometimes much to the frustration of critics. Why is it, they have asked, that “cheap,” “sub-literary” works have come to play such a powerful role in our imagination that readers would often turn to them not only to

escape reality (as was previously maintained) but, even worse (some would say), as an epistemological tool to understand reality better.

Recent scholarship on the Enlightenment roots of nineteenth-century sentimentalism has prompted critics to argue that sentiment and sympathy be seen not only as types of emotions but, more complexly, as notions of morality. June Howard points out that philosophers like “Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau derive benevolence and, ultimately, morality in general from human faculties that dispose us to sympathize with others. For these thinkers, emotions, whether they are innate or produced by Lockean psychology, assume a central place in moral thought—they both lead to a manifest virtue” (70). It is sympathy, evoked by the power of sentiment that makes possible the transformation of abstract thought into an emotional experience that feels physically real. As Adam Smith explains regarding the power of sympathy: we come to “conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him” (qtd. in Howard 71). The habitual opposition of feeling to reason, heart to intellect that permeates much critical discourse in the twentieth century has been challenged by literary critics, philosophers, and cultural anthropologists alike who see the boundaries between feeling and thought more fluid: “feeling is forever given shape through thought and ... thought is laden with emotional meaning. [W]hat distinguishes thought and affect, differentiating a ‘cold’ cognition from ‘hot,’ is fundamentally a sense of the engagement of the actor’s self. Emotions are thoughts somehow ‘felt’ in flushes, pulses, ‘movements’ of our lives, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin. They are *embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that ‘I’m involved’” (Rosaldo qtd. in Howard 66). It is in this vein that Emily Dickinson underlines the primacy of feeling in a letter to her favorite Norcross cousins: “genius is the ignition of affection—not intellect, as is supposed,—the exaltation of devotion, and in proportion to our capacity for that, is our experience of genius” (L691 mid-April 1881).

Both the Female Gothic and nineteenth-century American sentimentalism challenge “the *gender* of American individualism [as well as] the concept of individualism” (Warren 4) that canon makers often rely on. These texts proudly concern themselves with the female experience under patriarchy and focus on a heroine in flight though not *from* society but *back* to it who, unlike the male isolato, privileges interpersonal relationships and amply utilizes them to her benefit. The genius of the

female “scribblers” lies in their ability to walk their readers through the *rites of passage* and dramas of womanhood in a deceptively simple manner, offering abundant food for thought *and* feeling, the two being inseparable in their mind.

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